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"Nature is my tacit partner": professional partnership in decision-making between Finnish regenerative farmers and nature

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Abstract
A growing body of research highlights the need for a socio-ecologically sustainable approach to all human activities, particularly those related to agri-food systems. This study aims to enhance our understanding of the relationship between humans and nature in the context of Regenerative Agriculture (RA) and Regenerative Farmers (RFs) and contribute to our knowledge of the transformational adaptation to social and environmental changes and processes among those who practice RA as their livelihood. This study employs a regenerative approach from a planetary perspective based on relational systems thinking. Using qualitative methodology, it explores the perceptions and experiences of 86 Finnish RFs regarding their decision-making processes and interactions with nature. The results indicate that nature plays a vital role in the decision-making of RFs, as they engage in a cooperative relationship characterized by observation and intuition. The primary contribution of this research is the development of the *Regenerative Professional Partnership* (RPP) framework, which encompasses three components: the connection and relationship between RFs and nature, the agency and roles of RFs and nature, and the interaction between RFs and nature. This holistic approach to decision-making has the potential to transform farming practices by making them more socio-economically sustainable.

Keywords Farmer-nature relationships · Regenerative decision-making · Regenerative agriculture · Intuition · Agency · Planetary approaches

Introduction

As part of this study, which aims to illuminate the hidden interactions in farmer-nature relationships, a group of Finnish *Regenerative Farmers'* (RF) were asked to discuss *intuition* and the role of nature in their decision-making. The question about the true essence of nature, *what nature is*, created a sudden silence. After a little while, one of the RFs said: "Everything. Nature is everything". And the others agreed. They had just never thought about it consciously before.

This conversation provides an informative starting point for this work by illustrating the paradoxical situation in farmers' decision-making: while their work and livelihood are absolutely dependent on nature, nature usually remains excluded from deliberation (Vidal and Alves 2024). This transdisciplinary paper illuminates the hidden dimensions of nature-farmer relationships and the interactions in RFs' professional decision-making.

Regenerative agriculture: a transformational planetary approach to farming

Agriculture is imperative to keep our societies alive. In Western cultures – which are powerful in the agri-food system – the human/nature dichotomy is a dominant stance, and nature is perceived as a human's property, resource, and commodity (Alves et al. 2023). In general, this disregarding creates destructive *degenerative* dynamics, which

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manifest as a continuous crossing of the planetary boundaries (Camrass 2020; Fischer et al. 2024; Richardson et al. 2023). Harmful impacts of agriculture are for example soil degradation, the pollution of air and water bodies, and biodiversity loss (Baste and Watson 2022; Folke et al. 2011; Richardson et al. 2023). Shifting these dynamics to *regenerative* is imperative for our future (Camrass 2020).

Due to the emphasis on humans' power over nature, little attention has been paid to the possible other forms of human-nature relationship(s) in agricultural discourses. These forms are inherent in many Indigenous cultures and among ancestral farmers and local people in general; living as an intrinsic part of Earth, following the rhythms and cycles of nature, sharing the same breath and water with other animals and plants (Huambachano 2021; Sands et al. 2023; Whyte and Cuomo 2016). Quite recently, however, the interest in human-nature relationships has increased in Western contexts in general (Abbott 2021; Barrett 2013; Barrett et al. 2016; Clark 2023; Van Dooren et al. 2016; Wijngaarden 2023), and in the agricultural context (Alarcon and Marty 2024; Chapman and Deplazes-Zemp 2024; Sands et al. 2023; Seymour and Connelly 2023). Especially *Regenerative Agriculture* (RA) has been suggested as an alternative approach to agriculture that offers multiple socio-ecological benefits and transformational potential (Burns 2020; Gordon et al. 2022, 2023; Gosnell et al. 2019; Seymour and Connelly 2023). For this paper, RA provides a fruitful context for investigating nature-human relationships during environmental and social change.

RA is an interesting combination of modern and Indigenous approaches to agriculture. RA provides vigorous resilience in volatile climate conditions, enhanced soil health and carbon sequestration, increased biodiversity, more robust profitability, and overall well-being at the farm ecosystem (Burns 2021; Giller et al. 2021; Gosnell 2022; LaCanne and Lundgren 2018; Lal 2020). Seymour and Connelly (2023) describe implementing RA as *being a regenerative farmer*. This indicates that RA is RFs' *way of existing* and *expressing themselves* in their living world. Accordingly, instead of just instrumental values (nature benefits humans) or intrinsic values (nature has inherent moral value), RA emphasizes *Relational Values* (RV), which "emerge from specific human-nature relationships or meaningful relationships between people that happen in nature" (Gordon et al. 2025, p. 2297). These values are for example respect, love, care, and responsibility in relation to nature, and they draw from Indigenous approaches, reflecting custodial identities such as stewardship towards Earth (Chan et al. 2016; Gordon et al. 2025; Seymour and Connelly 2023). However, the research literature of RA typically addresses its biophysical dimensions while RVs and human-nature relationships remain marginal (Gordon et al. 2025; Sands et al. 2023). In this paper, we follow Sands et al. (2023, 1712) definition of RA:

> A way of farming comprised of entangled values and practices, and founded in Indigenous principles of loving-caring for the Earth. This approach to farming values 1) reciprocity, 2) respect, 3) collective (human and non-human) wellbeing, 4) knowledge co-creation, and 5) (re)localization, and it is often practiced through some combination of 1) minimizing soil disturbance, 2) maintaining vegetative soil cover, 3) maximizing diversity, 4) integrating livestock, and 5) minimizing synthetic agrichemicals.

While RA adheres to RVs, they are dynamic and overlap with instrumental and intrinsic values (Gordon et al. 2025; Pape et al. 2025). Even though RA is at its core a state of mind, being an RF is a profession and implementing RA is a livelihood. This causes tension between productivity and RVs, thus, regaining the balance between the social, ecological, and economical aspects is one of the main holistic aims of RA (Beacham et al. 2023; Gordon et al. 2023). Yet, scrutinizing regenerative farming as a profession and acknowledging the ambivalence between RVs and the demand of productivity seems to be less common in research. Concerning this research need, RA provides an interesting context to explore farmer-nature relationships and interactions in farmers' professional decision-making and to contribute to sustainability sciences.

RA represents an extended agricultural systemic thinking that not only sees nature as a resource for production but also strives to acknowledge both humans and nature as active agents (Buckton et al. 2023; Fischer et al. 2024; McWherter and Sherren 2025). This research operationalizes systems thinking (which we understand as a synonym to relational interpretation) with a planetary approach. This is a perspective that enables the thriving of humankind together with the Earth's biosphere and the planetary systems, and encourages actions that foster integrity among humans, society, and nature (Salonen et al. 2023). The experience of *planetary inclusion* represents a holistic and systemic awareness of one's connection with the world. It is rooted in relational ontology, which aligns with the fact that every individual is both a local and a global actor, part of a generational chain, and an integral part of nature (Salonen et al. 2024), and that we always exist in relation to other individuals—humans and non-humans (Rose 2017).

Salonen et al. (2024) identify three dimensions of being human in the modern world:

a) The spatial dimension refers to an individual's presence and engagement within local, regional, and global contexts.
b) The temporal dimension connects the past, present, and future.
c) The ethical dimension encompasses our responsibilities toward social realities today, as well as our obligations to social-ecological systems, non-human entities, and future generations (Salonen et al. 2023, 2024).

These dimensions seem to be present in RA, which has transformational potential in changing worldviews and mindscapes (Gordon et al. 2023; Gosnell 2022; Massy 2013). RA has been described as a farmer-led social movement (Burns 2020) that promotes holistic transformation within the personal sphere, a transition recognized as vital for sustainable change (Folke et al. 2011; O'Brien and Sygna 2013; Wamsler et al. 2021). Due to the transformational potential of the regenerative mindscape, scrutinizing regenerative farming as a profession and implementing RFs' relationships with nature on a planetary perspective responds to the need for a transdisciplinary understanding of farmers' inner dimensions in RA (Gordon et al. 2022; Gosnell et al. 2019; Gosnell and Gordon 2025; Wamsler et al. 2021).

Farmer-nature relationships in regenerative agriculture: decision-making and interaction

In agriculture, generally, the farmer-nature relationship and interaction culminate in the farmers' decision-making, in other words, which values guide the farmers' decisions. With the emergence of modern agriculture (beginning from the 1940's), farmers' traditional and inner knowledge was replaced with advice from external authorities, which drew from the industrial viewpoint (Morgan and Murdoch 2000). This inevitably disconnected farmers from nature and transformed their decision-making from internal to external (ibid.). Intuition is at least partially *tacit knowing* (Polanyi 1966). This tacit knowing was the basic element in our ancestral farmers' decision-making (Morgan and Murdoch 2000).

Farmers utilize both formal and informal monitoring and knowledge in their decision-making, while preferring informal ones, such as intuition (Smith et al. 2025; Nuthall and Old 2018). In general, intuition is described as a quick and effective way of making decisions, and it is an acknowledged part of successful experts' decision-making in various domains (Dane and Pratt 2007). It is also suggested to be involved in the making of better socio-ecological decisions (Barrett 2013) and in human-nature interactions (Von Diest 2021). Intuition has recently been researched also in the context of RFs, who perceived that intuition guides them to better decisions and conveys information from nature (Sädeharju 2025).

RFs have a tendency to create reciprocal relationships with nature, which reflects RVs as well as a planetary approach, by considering responsibility towards nature and the future generations (Gordon et al. 2025; Seymour and Connelly 2023). Farmer-nature relationships can evolve to mutual, responsible, and interactive partnerships through deliberate actions and observation (Chapman and Deplazes-Zemp 2024). This evolving occurs through interaction involving multidiverse combinations of sensing, emotions, observing, intuiting, and acting (Alarcon and Marty 2024; Huambachano 2021). Overall, observing and monitoring play a significant role in practical farming decisions (Smith et al. 2025).

A well-known relationship is the ranchers' interaction with animals, good *stockmanship*, which includes expert animal handling skills, understanding their behavior, as well as immediately seeing and sensing what happens in the herd (Grandin 2019; Lima et al. 2018). Yet, farmers' interaction with plants is less acknowledged. Nevertheless, a growing group of scholars suggest that instead of being senseless biomass, trees and plants are agential, purposive, innovative, and deliberative, and able to control their own existence (Abbott 2021; Abram 1996; Grimwood and Höckert 2023). Some research approaches also consider rocks, mountains, waterbodies, natural phenomena such as weather, stars and their constellations as agential (Huambachano et al. 2021 ; MacManaway 2021). This kind of thinking is related to *animism,* which Rose (2017, p. 495) describes as "mindful connectivities and the agency of life systems, living individuals, and the living planet". Similarly as the planetary approach, animism draws on relative ontology (Gordon et al. 2023; Rose 2017; Salonen et al. 2024).

While there is relatively little research on intuition in farmers' decision-making, farmers' intuitive communication with nature and its role in their decision-making has gained even less interest in agricultural research (Von Diest 2021). However, some research evidence exists regarding this farmer-nature interaction and communication. Gordon et al. (2023) mention *subtle energies* rising as one discourse among RFs regarding RA. This discourse is related to the invisible and non-material dimensions in farming systems, such as interaction with nature (MacManaway 2021; Massy 2021). Also, for example, in Krzywoszynska (2019) and Sädeharju (2025), some farmers were reported as having had experiences of 'hearing' nature talking; shouting, whispering, calling, or telling things to them. This is in line with findings from many Indigenous people, who experience having conversations with, for example, rivers, which have their 'own language' (Strang 2023; Wooltorton et al. 2022). In Gordon et al. (2023), some farmers mention *quantum*

agriculture, which draws from biodynamics. Also, Wright et al. (2017) and Papalia et al. (2023) have touched upon this topic. The latter argued that farmers use interspecies telepathic/meditative abilities together with their experience and cognitive abilities when making decisions. However, the research literature is lacking a holistic picture of these related phenomena in RFs decision-making. RA has a transformational potential as an alternative approach to agriculture, emphasizing RVs and deep holism (Gordon et al. 2022, 2025; Sands et al. 2023). Therefore, taking a deeper dive into farmer-nature relationships, as well as illuminating and verbalizing RFs' ways to interact with nature in their practical decision-making could open novel pathways to understanding what it means from a professional perspective to *have a mindscape of an RF*, and *to be an RF.*

Research questions and definitions of terms used

We see *being an RF* through a professional lens, and implementing RA as a RFs continuing learning process and journey (Gosnell et al. 2019; Beacham et al. 2023). This perspective allows us to investigate the elements that foster the relationships between farmers and nature in professional decision-making related to RA, aiming to balance the tensions between productivity and RVs. The research enhances the understanding of human-nature relationships, particularly concerning RFs, and contributes to sustainability science, especially to the research on transformational adaptation to environmental change among farmers who embrace RA within a systems thinking framework, informed by a planetary approach.

We employ a qualitative methodology to explore the perceptions and experiences of 86 Finnish RFs regarding their decision-making processes, which engage nature. Our inquiry is guided by the following questions:

1. *What characteristics define the relationship between RFs and nature?*
2. *How do the agency and roles of RFs and nature manifest within their relationship?*
3. *How do RFs and nature interact and communicate?*

The term *nature* was used by our participants and therefore it was chosen to represent the unity that forms the living world, encompassing both human and non-human entities. Meanwhile, we use the concept of *human-nature* to highlight the unique influence that humans have on Earth. *Partnership* is an evolved human-nature relationship with mutual reciprocity and respect. We define the farmers participating in this study as *regenerative* since at the beginning of the data collection, they had conducted field experiments over four years as participants of the Carbon Action. This project investigated how RA practices increase carbon sequestration and biodiversity on farmlands in Finland.

Methods and analysis

This paper adopts a qualitative approach by utilizing Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz 2006) as a loose method framework, and strengthening it with the Gioia Method (GM), the roots of which are in grounded theory, but it provides a more structured style in coding (Gioia et al. 2013). Unlike the other grounded theory approaches, the classic (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and evolved (Strauss and Corbin 1990), CGT emphasizes the researcher's active role during the whole research process (Charmaz 2006). It also provides tools to explore participants' experiences in their social reality, co-create the knowledge together with the participants, and explore the deeper meanings of language in order to verbalize elusive inner phenomena, such as intuition and connection with nature (Charmaz 2017a).

Participants

Participants (later RFs) are Finnish farmers ($N=86$), who participated in Carbon Action (CA) research project lead by Finnish Meteorological Institute and Baltic Sea Action Group in 2018–2024. They were selected for the research through purposive sampling (Campbell et al. 2020). CA project studied how farmers could enhance carbon sequestration with RA at their own farms through field experiments (Mattila et al. 2022). CA explicitly aimed to find solutions to mitigate the planetary-scale crisis of climate change. Due to their intentional participation in such a project, we can assume that the RFs consider planetary thinking in their decision-making at least to some extent.

The RFs' gender distribution was as follows: women 19%, men 81%, (3rd option no answers). The RFs were younger (Mean 47 years, Median 45 years) than Finnish farmers on average (54 years) (Luonnonvarakeskus LUKE 2024), and their farming experience varied between 1 and 42 years (Mean 18 years). These farmers were highly educated, since 75% had higher education (in Finland, 42% of the population have higher education) (Statistics Finland STAT 2024). Their farms were located all over the country. The size of the farmlands varied between 2-600 ha, being on average 115 ha (including owned and rented lands). In Finland, farms, in general, have on average 53 ha of farmland (Luonnonvarakeskus LUKE 2024). Five farms had no forest, but the rest had a forest area of on average 80 ha, varying between 4 and 700 ha. In the case of 55% of the farms, the production practice was organic or in transition (in Finland in general 10%). Plant production was the main production

sector at 71% of the farms and animal production (meat, milk, eggs) at 29%. However, 52% of the farms had some kinds of animals (cows, pigs, poultry, horses, sheep, bees, and a variation of other domestic animals).

Data collection

The data consists of interviews, an extensive online survey with many kinds of questions, and group discussions that were conducted both remotely and in person. Due to the complexity of the researched phenomenon, we conducted multiple data collections in order to complement our understanding of it. The timetable and methods for data collection, the questions asked in the survey and interviews (and selected for detailed analysis for this study), and the number of RFs that participated in each stage of data collection, is described in Online Resource 1.

In the first online survey, intuition was framed through the concept of *tacit knowing* (Polanyi 1966) and as *decision-making system 1 in a dual-model process* (Kahneman and Anderson 2003). In the following interviews, the participants were already more familiar with the concepts and the research topic, and there was no reason to provide any background information to them.

Iterative analysis

The analysis was iterative, and the framework was developed along with simultaneous analysis and data gathering (Charmaz 2017a). The data collection and analysis were conducted by the first author alone due to confidentiality aspects. Due to the inductive analysis and to avoid a hypothesis bias (Gioia et al. 2013), we deliberatively abstained from familiarizing ourselves with the research literature in the early stages of the data collection and analysis. The inductive analysis became abductive when literature was added to complement the analysis and strengthen the authors' interpretations of the participants' experiences and verbalizations (Charmaz 2017a). Continuous comparison by comparing the data to data, codes to codes, and codes to data was used (Charmaz 2006). The analysis then continued by comparing themes, categories, and codes to the research literature (Gioia et al. 2013). Analytic memos were used throughout the analysis, which is important to ensure the quality of research (Charmaz and Thornberg 2021).

All the interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. First, all data was coded thematically line by line according to Charmaz (2006), and then analyzed according to Gioia et al. (2013). Here, a 3-step analysis process formed the foundation to the data structure: 1) detailed coding, which generated a myriad of categories and terms following the participants' expressions, 2) more theoretical categories, which combined together the views of the participants and researcher views, as well as described the concepts more theoretically, and 3) an aggregating category, which utilized the 2nd step categories and percolated themes and categories further into dimensions. Figure 1 illuminates the analysis process of this study.

After the 3-step coding, cycling between the data, literature, coding, and memos continued in order to find similarities and differences between them, and trying to understand the meanings of these perceptions, until the theory was saturated (Charmaz 2017b; Gioia et al. 2013). When developing the framework, the last phase of analysis was inviting eight of the participants to give their thoughts on the results. In this group discussion, the participants found the results relatable and credible, and no need for refining them emerged.

Positionality

The first author has extensive experience working in Finnish non-governmental environmental organizations and collaborating with various farmers, including participants from CA. Additionally, the first author resides on a regenerative farm as the spouse of one of the participant farmers. Being part of the RA community and sharing their relational ontology allowed us to authentically understand the participants' lived experiences. This enabled us to recognize subtle and often hidden nuances in their verbal expressions. However, it may be challenging to contextualize relational thinking more broadly from this perspective. Therefore, the research team engaged in critical discussions to challenge each other's approaches, aiming to mitigate the bias often present in qualitative research.

Ethics and limitations

This kind of research requires a researcher to gain 'methodological self-consciousness' (Charmaz 2017c) and therefore rigorously reflect on their hidden beliefs and possible preconceptions (Charmaz and Thornberg 2021). CGT enables one to explore the hidden meanings of language (Charmaz 2006). However, as commonly acknowledged in this kind of research (Charmaz 2014), linguistic issues between native language and coding as well as translating to English were present also in this study. Furthermore, since the researched phenomena eludes verbalization, on some occasions, the RFs described their expressions with words, which do not exist even in Finnish or were hardly interpretable. Therefore, the translation used in this paper is the closest we could manage. To ensure the reliability, we had help from some English-speaking professionals.

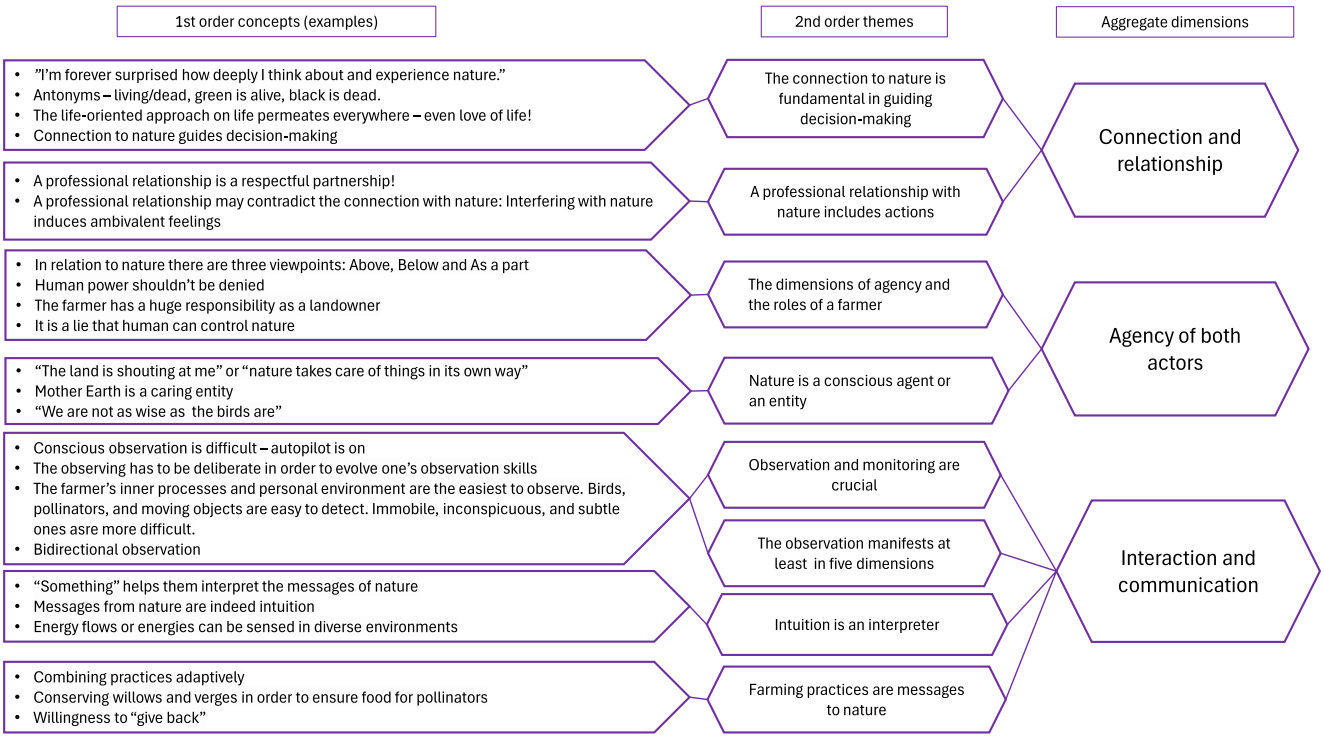

Fig. 1 The 3-step coding formed in analysis, after Gioia et al. (2013)

To ensure confidentiality, the data collection and analysis was conducted by the first author only. Therefore, anonymized quotations from participants (using pseudonyms) were used abundantly.

Results

The results show how *Regenerative Farmers* (RF) cooperate with their farm ecosystems and engage nature in their decision-making, while earning their living from it. This *evolved relationship* between RFs and nature adopts a holistic, regenerative, and planetary approach to farming and acknowledges the mutual agency of both actors in decision-making. This relationship forms a *Regenerative Professional Partnership* (RPP) between RFs and nature. The RPP framework illuminates the fundament of RFs' decision-making, particularly through the lens of the ethical dimension of planetary inclusion. However, spatial and temporal dimensions were also present in the data, especially when future and present generations were considered from the perspective of planetary scale crisis. This framework conceptualizes the hidden participation of nature in RFs' decision-making process.

RPP consists of three parts:

1. *RFs' connection and relationship with nature.*
2. *The agency and roles of farmers and nature.*
3. *The interaction and communication between RFs and nature.*

According to the RFs, the RPP enables a continuous regenerative process, which considers ecological, economical, and social aspects:

> Biodiversity has increased …. Pollinators have increased, we have started to save willow bushes that don't cause any harm from the practical point of view, so in the spring we may see how they are full of bumblebees. Starlings, which were missing, have increased along with grazing. Swallows have increased. It is something that benefits Earth, and if it benefits Earth, then it will probably also benefit one's own wallet in the long run. (RF11)

The following sections present the elements of the RPP framework.

Connection and relationship

Connection with nature

RFs have a deep connection with nature, which creates the foundation of their values and a vision, therefore guiding their decision-making. Characteristic for this deep connection is a *life-centered* orientation in life, even a *love for life*.

This materializes as a continuous willingness to regenerate, renew, conserve, and enhance life and growth, and, on the other hand, to avoid destroying and killing. Furthermore, RFs perceive nature as the most important *aspect* in farming, and the connection with nature as the most central *tool* in farming:"If you think of a farmer's toolkit, there is no doubt that the connection with nature is the most important tool" (RF01).

The RFs spoke of having *a need* to live surrounded by nature and to see it from the window, as well as work with it. Sometimes the intensity of the connection with nature amazed them: "I'm forever surprised how deeply I think about and experience nature" (RF20). Thus, since the connection was so powerful, the human activities that have caused damage or been disrespectful towards nature, caused sorrow. Organic farmers expressed direct aversion to chemicals, using the word *toxins,* while conventional farmers spoke about *spreading* or *using plant protection products*. However, the RFs tended to be polite and loyal to their colleagues, and they emphasized everyone's right to make their own decisions regarding chemicals.

Nevertheless, an enthusiasm for sustaining life in the farm ecosystem penetrated the stories of all RFs, regardless of their production practice or sector. Especially earthworms, birds, and pollinators were often mentioned. Even conventional farmers aimed to minimize chemical inputs in order to protect these species. This materialized as choosing the specific times for spraying, spraying only herbicides, and selecting crop plants according to this:

> I haven't sown spring rape in years. I will only sow spring oil seeds under duress because they have to be sprayed for flea beetles. I don't want to destroy any creatures in the field by spraying and I haven't even sprayed for aphids in the spring. I don't know what the chemicals do to the micro-organisms in the soil, but I assume they destroy the organisms in the same way they destroy the aphids and the flea beetles. (RF15)

This reducing or abjuring of chemicals is in line with the frequently mentioned antonyms, *living* and *dead,* as reminders of a tacit sensing of whether a particular environment feels 'alive' or 'dead'. These environments could be farmlands, forests, water-ecosystems, or gardens. Typically, examples of living/dead were given relating to soil or forest (old forest feels alive or energetic, while clearcut forest feels dead or destroyed). The living and healthy soil was seen as the basis of all life and a precondition for farming in the future, even as "the hope of the future" (RF22), while dead soil was seen as unprofitable and as an end of 'everything'. Many of the RFs described that they could experience the energy that living soil and plants have, while the dead environment was described as empty and muted: "When you walk on the multispecies grass, the earth feels energizing and living. When you go on a monoculture cropland, it feels dead." (RF82).

The RFs emphasized a connection with *living nature*, which was described as *lively, green, full of diversity of species*, and *energetic,* and it was perceived as *protective* and giving the *sense of being safe* and *sheltered*. On the other hand, the areas which were described as dead, such as built environment in the towns and cities, as well as clearcut areas or arable lands with monoculture, were experienced as *unsafe*. The experience of being connected to nature was described in abstract terms, such as *freedom, peace, serenity, comfort, purity, spaciousness, harmony,* and *presence*. The RFs felt that, in nature, they are completely accepted and, thereby, they can freely be themselves.

Relationship with nature

Since farmers' livelihood intertwines with nature, they tend to have at least two kinds of relationships with it (Chapman and Deplazes-Zemp 2024). Also in this study, RFs' leisure-time relationship and professional relationship with nature could be seen as different from each other.

The RFs' connection with nature also shapes their relationship with it. Moreover, the quality (deep, life-oriented) of the connection is significant when a farmer-nature relationship evolves into a partnership. As RF11 stated,"Nature is my tacit partner". Some RFs described having a *friendship* with nature, for example with specific trees or animals: "There were horses and chickens and pigs at home, lots of animals to spend time with. Not only tending them and ordering them around but acting together and being friends, even." (RF20). However, RFs must take a professional stance towards nature in order to produce food and make practical decisions. On the one hand, this relationship intertwines with RFs' livelihood, and on the other with their values. This evokes ambivalence, since RFs connection with nature and the professional part of their relationship with it might contradict each other. This ambivalence was particularly evident in two themes: among all RFs, as *the interfering with nature* in order to practice farming, and among conventional farmers, as the *use of chemicals*. The following quote is from RF who seems to have reached a fundamental turning point, illuminating this ambivalence:

> You [interviewer] have talked about it, and many others have, but it really hit home in the webinar when the lecturer said that regenerative farming is about maintaining life, about not always trying to kill. And I've heard it but for some reason it only just now got under my skin when I realized that that's what I think but I act differently. (RF04a)

In some cases, this ambivalence has led the RFs to a regenerative transition, as it was seen as "*an escape from the farming against one's own values*" (RF08). Through this transition, the RFs have been able to balance and harmonize their connection and professional relationship with nature, and thereby create a RPP with it.

Contradictions in interpreting implicit and explicit expressions

Most of the RFs expressed enthusiasm for participating in this kind of research, in spite of their difficulties verbalizing inner phenomena (intuition, emotions, connection/communicating with nature), but some perceived them as a taboo. However, expressing these experiences in a confidential environment felt safe to them. The following quote illuminates the situation:

> Well, this is one of those things that many might not approve of … well … I can talk to you about this [laughs]. I laughed with my godchildren in the forest that 'your godparent is a real tree hugger'. But if you think of hugging trees, there's this feeling of grounding and connection with nature. I recommend it to everyone. (RF03)

While the ambivalent feelings relating to the RFs' connection and relationship with nature were consciously recognized, many cases revealed an unconscious contradiction between implicit and explicit expressions. For example, while almost all RFs expressed having had an experience of being a part of nature, some RFs perceived themselves as being separate from nature due to 'being a human being':

> You're bound to be a bit separate from nature as humankind, but you should respect nature as far as possible. You're used to acting on nature's terms, but I do see myself somewhat separate because we [humans] have so much technology, economy, and other things, which also penetrates to this stage. (RF83)

Interestingly, the emotional experience of being an intrinsic part of nature could be noticed in how they spoke during the interviews, however: "When you are surrounded by nature you become sort of intertwined in that core with nature" (RF17). This same contradiction was also seen in many cases, for example when talking about observing nature (see Sect. 3.3.2)

The agency of farmers and nature

The dimensions of agency and the role of farmers

Three dimensions of agency and roles were found in the RFs' narratives. These roles illuminate how farmers in general operate in relation to nature. These roles shape their behavior and decision-making. The following discussion established the dimensions of agency and roles of farmers presented in Fig. 2.

> Interviewer: How do you relate to the surrounding world, to nature?
>
> RF82: I would say that there are three ways of looking at it. First of all, I'm part of the whole, we are one. Trees are biomass and so am I.
>
> Secondly, I see myself as dependent on nature, which makes me subordinate to it. In a way I'm below nature.
>
> Thirdly, I feel that because I have intellect and creativity, I am above nature as a sort of creator-person. I don't think we should deny human the power and ability to influence nature, because it exists.

In the dimension of *Farmer Above,* power and action are present. The farmers' actions can have either positive or negative impacts on nature. Since farmers always shape the processes of nature, purely neutral impacts were seen as impossible. Farmers who operate solely in this dimension are termed as *dominating exploiters,* since their decisions and actions are based on an understanding of nature as a resource for humans, and a belief of having control over it. The goal is to maximize the yield, regardless of the cost to nature. No interaction with nature takes place because the farmers ignore its agency. While farmers in general may operate in this dimension due to custom or habit, among the participating RFs, only two could be seen as being inclined towards this dimension, and none operated solely in this dimension. Furthermore, this kind of approach was seen as unpleasant, and controlling nature was perceived as impossible per se:

> There's no such power that would allow me to control every willow's growth, place, manner, style and speed on these hundreds of hectares. It's fundamentally a lie that we can control nature because we can't.
>
> And if your actions are fundamentally based on a lie, there's no chance of success. Because nature is always

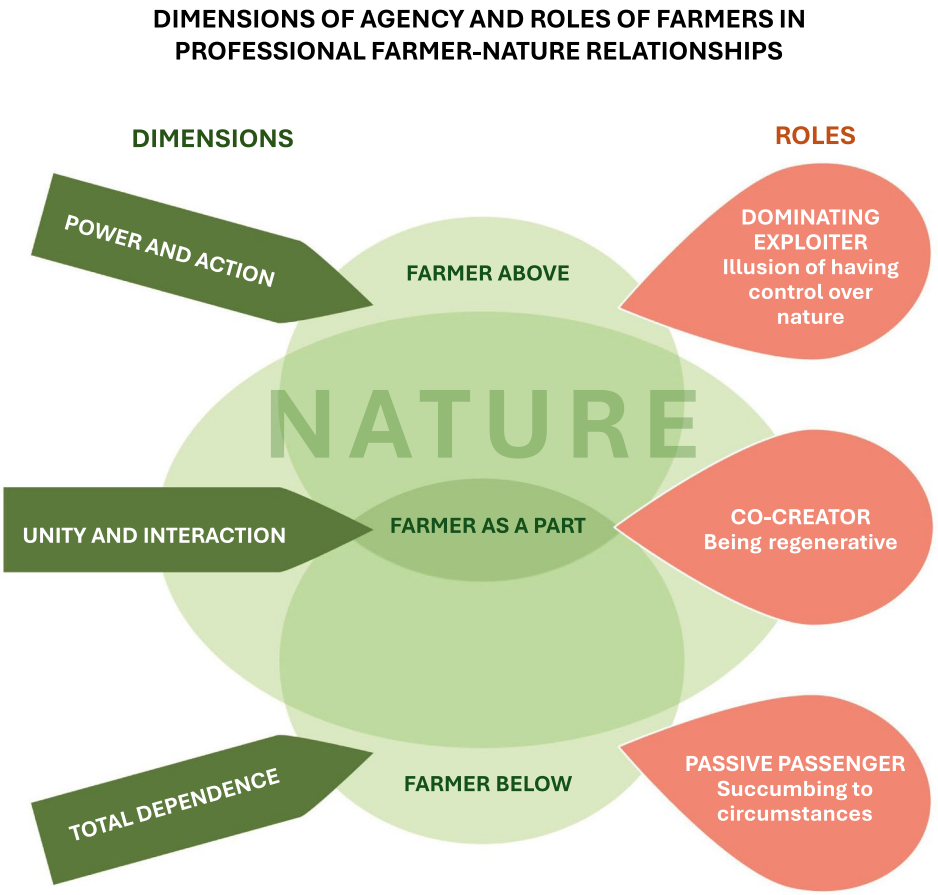

Fig. 2 The dimensions of agency and the roles of farmers in the regenerative professional partnership

> so much bigger than I can ever be. There could be a storm that fells all the trees. There could be a disease that kills all my animals.
>
> I can't control it, but I can think … like nature. (RF82)

The dimension of *Farmer Below* represents the farmers' complete dependence on nature from both experiential and concrete aspects: "Weather has a concrete impact on your financial results" (RF05). Farmers who operate solely in this dimension are termed *passive passengers,* since they have an experience of being 'at the mercy of nature'. This experience of powerlessness colors the agency of the farmers and it extends to other external factors, such as policy guidance and public discourses. Interaction with nature is prevented, since farmers ignore the messages and signals of nature and continue ineffective farming practices with lack of prospects. The decision-making is guided by external authorities and circumstances. No participating farmers operated only in this dimension – at least not anymore – but they could recognize this kind of agency framed with despair in their colleagues or in their own agency before having stepped onto the regenerative pathway:

> I've felt powerless and thought that I can't do anything meaningful. I think that is to do with the challenges with scale and probably also with my own ignorance, but also with the public talk about the futility of one person's actions [in relation to climate change]. Then it's easy to live in the lie that maybe I don't have to be the most responsible. (RF22)

Farmer as a Part is a dimension of unity and interaction. It is formed as a synthesis of the other two overlapping dimensions but it is more than the sum of its parts. Farmers operating in this dimension understand their position as an intrinsic part of nature; not only being the same biomass as all creatures on Earth, but simultaneously totally dependent on nature and also having the power to control their lands. These farmers are termed as *co-creators,* since they pursue to create a lively and thriving farm ecosystem together with nature in a regenerative partnership. Thus, this is the dimension of regenerative farming and decision-making. This co-creating requires farmers to relinquish the illusion of controlling nature. It also enables mutual agency in farmer-nature relationships as well as bidirectional communication. Operating in this dimension was seen to produce mutual benefits:

> When there is wellbeing on a farm on several levels, you can sense it but you can't measure it as such. It is an overall atmosphere formed through human connection to their work, and nature, and the environment, and that they also understand that wholeness. I think this is a big part of regenerative agriculture; supporting natural processes and finding harmony with nature. When the farm and nature work together, it benefits both. (RF19)

All RFs aimed to function as co-creators in their own personal way. This means a holistic approach to farming and continuously seeking harmony and balance in their situational-adaptive decision-making. Operating in this dimension becomes a natural state as the RFs continue on their individual regenerative pathways and, thus, their role as co-creator strengthens.

Description of the agency of nature

The question about the true essence of nature, *what nature is*, proved to be challenging to answer, despite the cruciality of nature for farmers. Yet, only two participants were unable to give at least some kind of description of nature. Most typically, the RFs described nature in abstract, holistic, or systemic terms, such as *everything, universe*, *creation, cosmos, crucial for living, all the living things on Earth, a living system, nested system,* and *a big machinery*. Some of the descriptions were concrete, such as *a farm*, or *the environment where one is living*. The RFs also described nature as a kind of *entity*, which nurtures and takes care of its creatures. These terms were *Mother Earth* (in Finnish: *Äiti Maa, Maaemo*) or *Mother Nature* (In Finnish: *Luontoäiti*). Many saw Indigenous peoples' and ancestor farmers' view of nature as sensible, as the next conversation illuminates:

> RF03: Maybe Mother Earth or a sort of Native American thinking is the closest because I feel it is the universe … after all, we're all part of it, nature and humans.
>
> RF09: Yeah, it's not for nothing that Indigenous people talk of Mother Earth. I think that nature is a kind of an entity. It somehow takes us under its wings or in its hands … and it's a sort of a bubble. That forms the conditions in there. And then if you think of harmony, the atmosphere is gentle and accepting in there.

Nature was perceived to be wise, even *an embodiment of wisdom.* Nature was seen as *a living unity,* the pieces and parts of which function as a whole, through its own consciousness. The RFs thought that nature does communicate with humans if only people agree to notice the signals and understand its messages. If humans refuse to respect nature and co-operate with it, the outcome will be unsatisfactory and nature "laughs around the corner" (RF02). Many RFs speculated that humans in general are too busy to notice these signals or even oppose the idea that nature has the ability to communicate with humans:

> I think that nature has its own consciousness. And it sends us impulses that are much stronger than we like to admit … But we are reluctant to receive messages from nature. Because if the growth stops and trees dry out [in forcefully managed forests], we're like "what should we do, this is awful, we can't do anything" [acting surprised]. Even though nature begins to regenerate straight away if we give it a change. (RF82)

The RFs described the actions of nature, which resemble conscious acts. When asked if humans can solve the polycrises on our planet, many RFs stated laconically that if humans are unable to do it, *nature will solve the problems in its own way*. Trusting nature's ability to solve problems and 'put things in their place' seemed to create serenity and ease in volatile times. Other examples were descriptions of interactive behavior, such as the impression that *nature* or the *land is waiting* for the RFs' actions, or *trying to get their attention* by *calling, whispering,* or *shouting at them*, or just *communicating* by *speaking, chatting* or *telling them things.* Some RFs perceived that different types of habitats have different kinds of languages. To understand these languages, one has to be familiar with each particular habitat:

> RF13b: There are field people and forest people. I'm not a forest person. I don't feel anything in the forest. But when you're on the side of a field where there is forest then you can see the wind blowing and leaves rustling and the direction of the wind and …
>
> Interviewer: Do you mean that when you don't feel anything, you can't interpret [the forest]?
>
> RF13b: Yeah, I can't interpret.
>
> Interviewer: But sure you feel something there too?
>
> RF13b: Yeah, but I don't understand what I feel … I don't understand that language.
>
> Interviewer: I see. The language of the forest is different from the language of the field?

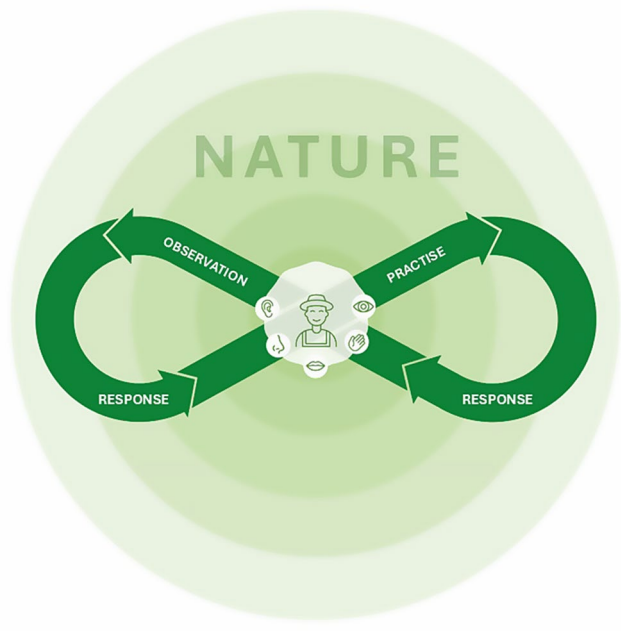

Fig. 3 Three elements of nature-RF communication: practice, observation, response

> RF13b: Yessss, it's completely different. Someone who spends a lot of time hunting probably understands it.

Thus, learning these languages requires spending time in particular environments and could be enhanced by intentional observation.

Interaction and communication

The elements of interaction

The interaction between RFs and nature is a combination of different elements of communication. Nature sends nonverbal but observable signals and impulses. RFs receive these via sensory perceptions, which are shown in the layered dimensions of Fig. 3 (see also Fig. 4). The RFs observe these received messages, mirror them to their internal measurement scale, their embodied feelings and thoughts, and interpret them via intuition, and send nonverbal signals to nature through farming practices and intentions. Nature observes and again responds. This dynamic interaction is a multidirectional loop in which functions vary in time, frequency, and quality simultaneously in multiple dimensions.

Observation in interaction

Observation and monitoring are at the core when RFs receive signals from nature to support their decision-making. However, nature also observes the human activity in its own way. In this paper, instead of presenting observations from the perspective of nature or the complex and dynamic processes of humans observing and monitoring, the focus is on RFs' *experiences and understanding* of observing nature as well as their personal environment and inner world as part of their decision-making.

In general, the RFs were sensitive to major and moderate changes in nature which occur fast, while slow and minor changes were more difficult to recognize. Examples of easily noticed changes were the increase in biodiversity as a whole, the arrival of new individual plant species, or an increase in the number of bird or insect species. However, noticing these changes requires deliberate observation, which also helps strengthen the RFs connection with nature:

> Noticing requires active observation, which we farmers often ignore. We're in a rush out there in the field and can't be bothered to step out of the tractor. And I think that for me it's exactly the active, conscious observing of nature that has strengthened my

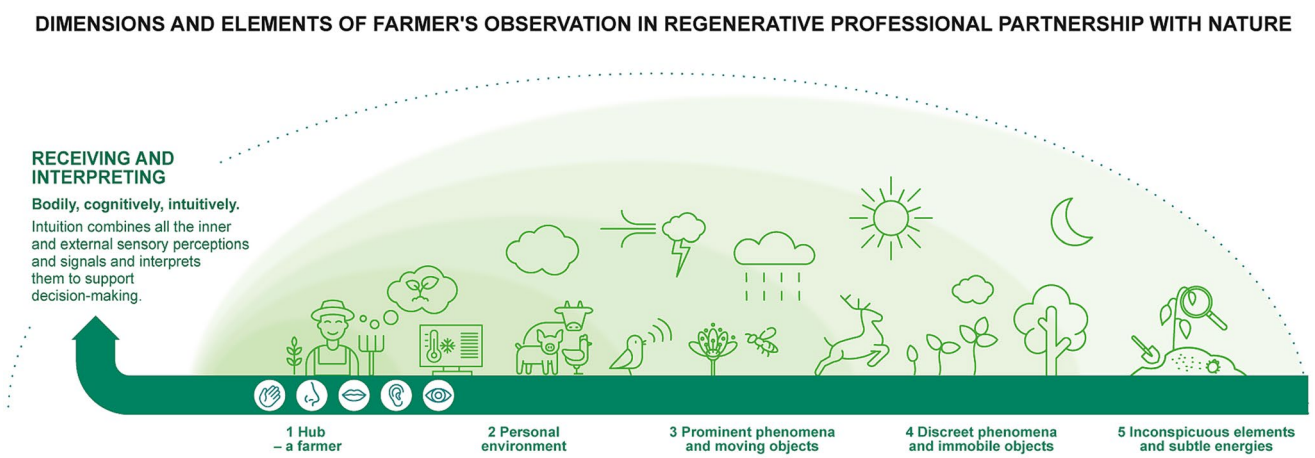

Fig. 4 The five dimensions of observing

> relationship with it … When you've been in your own field digging up and counting earthworms, you think of the worms every time you drive the tractor across the field. I think "ah, there were worms here and here there weren't" and then I start to think what will happen to the worms when I drive across. (RF22)

However, being conscious of one's own observations is difficult. Some RFs considered themselves to be attentive observers, while many believed that they were quite inattentive. Nevertheless, during the interviews, all RFs described themselves as making highly diverse observations of nature. The RFs were quite skilled but automatic observers and, thereby, this ability eluded their conscious verbalization. Enhancing one's observation skills seems to demand shifting from autopilot to a deliberative observation of individual species, habitats, and ecosystems. However, over time, observation becomes automatic again, turning into *evolved observation*, which includes a combination of simultaneous observations of multiple elements and singular perceptions. The RFs termed these evolved observers as having the *eye* of a *hunter*, *farmer* or *rancher or good stockmanship*.

We can organize observation seems to organize into five dimensions by following the strength of perception or the accessibility to it. These dimensions illustrate the primacy of perception: from the most easily noticeable to the most challenging elements to detect (Fig. 4). The verbalized elements and dimensions in Fig. 4 can be found in Online Resource 2. This 2D picture and the verbal expression of dimensions are the closest elucidation, which was possible to generate, and yet, incomplete due to the dynamic and systemic essence of the phenomenon. These dimensions are non-solid and boundless, overlapping, embedded in each other. They are present at the same time and vary adaptively in temporality and accessibility, depending on the current situation and the observer.

Typically, the RFs observed elements from the dimensions closer to the hub in order to make interpretations about the elements from the dimensions further away. The following quote illuminates how RF66 makes an interpretation about the forthcoming weather (Dimension 5) based on the behavior of a fly (Dimensions 2/3):

> I had a fly friend in the car in the summer and as the weather was very changeable I transported the fly from one type of weather to the next, and whenever it was about to rain, my fly was very restless and bothered my driving [laughs] and when I got to a place where the weather was dry, the fly was much calmer.

Another example was to create a connection with the land (Dimension 4/5) via one's own cattle (Dimension 2):

> We do sense the [energies and life of] soil through the animal. It probably becomes a sort of trinity. Me, the earth and the cow are all one, which is true. The cow and I have a connection, the earth and I have a connection, the cow and the earth have a connection. It creates a much more systemic network of sensations. (RF82)

Most elements of observing could be reached with the five basic senses. One element which was repeatedly mentioned, however, remained poorly explained and described. It was perceived as crucial for holistic observation and getting 'a full picture', and it was described most commonly as *Something* (in Finnish: *joku*). The RFs also used the words *atmosphere*, *sensation, energy, entity*, or *feeling* to describe it. Reaching the sense of Something was impossible by only watching pictures or videos or receiving an explanation about a place. RFs thought that Something could be sensed only by physically existing at a certain place. They preferred to make decisions by using their own senses and"just being there" (RF02).

Further, Something was also present in the decision-making situations which were unfamiliar to RFs: "But then if we think of buying animals and they are not familiar, then the decision is based on a feeling or something else [undefined]" (RF07). 'Something' was often linked to intuitive knowing.

Intuition and subtle energies in interaction

The question of whether the RF-nature communication is bidirectional and whether nature can be asked for advice divided the participants' opinions into three perspectives: 1) *Nature just gives them signals*, and it is impossible to ask for advice, 2) communication is *bidirectional in all cases*, 3) communication is *bidirectional, but only with animals.* The question about how nature sends its signals to RFs proved to be challenging to answer. RF11 suggested it was *sensation*, and RF13b continued:

> Nature is an interlocutor. But it doesn't literally speak, it surrounds me all the time. I don't know how it says it, but it tells. I don't know, if you can ask from it … it's present all the time … how should I put this … yes, it does tell you, but it doesn't speak. It kind of makes you sense[1] [the message].

However, the lack of *a common language* induces challenges. Due to this, intuition has an essential role in RF-nature interaction:

[1] To express this, the RF13a created a novel word "aistittaa" which could also be translated as sensitize, sensualize.

> Yes, communication with nature should be intuitive because we don't share a common language and I, at least, am not very good at reading nature's messages yet, so you need a sort of … Maybe you could call intuition a kind of an interpreter between humans and nature? (RF04a)

In the case of RPP, intuition was perceived to come from nature or provide information about it. Intuition was perceived to be intertwined both with individual human consciousness and with the consciousness of nature. Thus, the RFs felt that the information induced by intuition is more coherent and accurate than some random impulses:

> I definitely think that it is nature's mechanism, or the messages are the fuel for intuition. That nature creates the intuition that arrives. It's not random that 'I feel like working today', it is because nature tells me that now is a good time and that creates the intuition to act. (RF83)

While intuition was recognized as an interpreter of the information, some RFs dared to ponder how the information is conveyed in a concrete way. One possible way to *transmit information* from nature to RFs was some kind of *energies* or *energy flows,* which some RFs described they could feel or sense. "Yeah, could it be that these energies are the conveyor of the information, or something like that?" (RF04a). These energies were linked to wisdom and the consciousness of nature.

> This energy of Earth and the connection with nature which exists, it is a very powerful energy. And then there is cosmic energy which comes somewhere from the universe. Humans are interlinks between these, and then there is a connection to that consciousness, wherefrom for example intuition picks things for us. (RF01)

Many described these energies as *electromagnetic, electric, sine waves, pulling* or *pushing forces*, *buzzing*, or *teeming.* The RFs felt that the more diverse the forest or farmlands were, the more powerful the energies were, especially in the old forests:

> I've been to a highly protected forest once where you couldn't even step off the path and it felt like the forest was one big energy field up to your knees. The forest felt like a sentient force field. It felt like there was an invisible swarm of wasps which is charged with energy all the time. (RF82)

These energies belong in Dimension 5 (see Fig. 4), since they are difficult to observe, recognize, verify, or measure. This intangibleness presumably caused confusion to many; even though they experienced these energies as real, talking about them was perceived as peculiar. Many of the RFs hesitated to speak about energies, but dared to illuminate their understanding of the phenomenon:

> Freely flowing energy … the older I get the more I believe in this, in how energy moves … and different energy fields between things and at times in the universe. And in that we are not individual beings, we are all part of something bigger. (RF03)

Thus, while speaking about these experienced energies caused ambivalent feelings to many RFs, they seemed to be sensed clearly, and they had a significant role in communication with nature.

Farming practices in interaction

In practice, RFs communicated with nature through farming practices that are customized in a situational-adaptive manner by combining the principles of RA. Popular farming practices were minimum tillage, diversifying crop rotation, cover-crops, minimizing chemicals, water and nutrient management, and reducing and avoiding soil compaction. One approach to communication was to support the soil health and microbiome and, thereby, enhance the growing conditions for the plants, or "At least you shouldn't mess up the potential for growth with your own actions" (RF05). Highly popular practices were adding flowering plants to seed mixtures (grasslands, cover crops, biodiversity plots or ribbons), and conserving the headlands, verges, and willows to offer food for pollinators.

> The transition to organic farming has brought a diversity of species in the field, which then brings a diversity of insects, as well. But I've also chosen cover crops that provide food for pollinators.

> You think differently about cutting the verges than before in that they provide habitats. The same with alder and willow on the edges of fields, you think of them as providing food and habitat now, whereas before you thought of them as a nuisance that slowly creeps into the fields and needs to be removed regularly. (RF14)

Many RFs thought that nature is abundantly generous. One remarkable method for RFs to interact with nature was *asking for [something]*, *taking only what is necessary*, and

giving back to nature. Furthermore, the thought of humans acting as exploiters was repulsive to the RFs:

> The idea that humans 'take crop yields' is problematic to me. Or that humans do it by force. I prefer to think that nature 'gives crop yields' and then humans agree to abide by nature's terms. (RF03)

This kind of thinking is rooted in the RFs' values and, thereby, embedded in their behavior. Thus, instead of being a formal or ceremonial activity, it was an automatic and practical everyday habit and a mindscape that embodied their gratitude towards Earth and honoring nature.

The most important thing in farm management was to make regenerative decisions with a holistic approach, seek balance and harmony, and develop a professional partnership with nature. The RFs believed that a transformational change into regenerative agriculture was the only way to farm in the future, and that it would provide mutual benefits: enhanced resilience and biodiversity in the farm ecosystem, carbon sequestration, as well as profitability and social well-being.

Discussion

We offer the *Regenerative Professional Partnership* (RPP) as a framework within which *Regenerative Farmers'* (RF) decision-making can be understood more comprehensively. RPP integrates various pre-existing research themes as well as novel observations. It goes beyond a regular farmer-nature relationship, since it acknowledges the agency of both nature and RFs, and, thus, embodies regenerative dynamics (Buckton et al. 2023; Fischer et al. 2024). RPP reflects the relational framing of *Regenerative Agriculture* (RA), which emphasizes *Relational Values* (RV) (Gordon et al. 2025) and, thereby, draws from relational ontology intertwining and permeating all the elements of RPP. Thus, RPP combines the planetary approach (Salonen et al. 2023), the Indigenous origins of RA (Sands et al. 2023), and animism (Gordon et al. 2023). RFs have to seek a balance between two worlds: while having a deep connection with nature, farming is also their livelihood. This tension has been recognized elsewhere in the context of RA (Beacham et al. 2023; Gordon et al. 2022; Gordon et al. 2025; Pape et al. 2025) and it is present also in this study in the RFs' decision-making causing feelings of ambivalence. RPP provides a framework for RFs to harmonize this ambivalence in their professional decisions and farming practices, and to regain a balance between productivity and RVs in their role as co-creators. RPP brings to light how RFs pursue implementing their regenerative mindscape in practice and, thus, contributes to the understanding of the transformational aspects of RA.

The farmer-nature connection in the regenerative professional partnership: care and love

Pape et al. (2025) have studied the values of regenerative ranchers in the United States and find that even though these ranchers had RVs, instrumental values such as financial aspects were dominant. However, according to Gordon et al. (2025), RVs are overlapping with instrumental ones, and therefore the boundaries between diverse values are fuzzy. Further, Sädeharju (2025) has found that the entirety of RFs' decision-making includes a myriad of factors, the process of RFs' decision-making is complex, and the weight of different values and factors can vary dynamically depending on the time and situation. Thus, instead of focusing on some particular goal, RPP pursues to achieve short- and long-term net-positive social, ecological, cultural, and economic outcomes, which is characteristic to the regenerative approach (Camrass 2020). Due to this complexity, rather than emphasizing particular values, RPP creates a multidimensional framework for situational-adaptive decision-making, which embodies relationality (Seymour and Connelly 2023), planetary systemic thinking (McWherter and Sherren 2025; Salonen et al. 2023), and deep holism (Gordon et al. 2023).

Descriptions of *care,* which is one of the RVs, can be found from most of the research regarding RA. This kind of caring is present also in RPP, which is based on the RFs powerful and intimate connection with nature. This connection also reflects the ethical dimension of planetary inclusion (Salonen et al. 2024). In RPP, RFs pursue the enhancement of life and growth in their farm ecosystems and, on the other hand, seek to avoid destroying and killing. Moreover, the RFs caring for nature could be described rather as a *love of life*, which could be an expression of *planetary love* in the case of RFs' decision-making. This love seems to be a force that drives RFs forward on their regenerative journey and, like a compass, guides them along that pathway. These kinds of loving-caring human-nature relationships are common in many cultures that have relational value systems and draw from ancient wisdom (Sands et al. 2023).

Despite the strong emphasis on care, "love" is surprisingly seldom considered in RA literature. Presumably, Western scholars may consider love and loving as non-scientific concepts (Sands et al. 2023). However, love is at the core in RPP, as it seems to be a driver of regenerative action: love permeates RFs' connection with nature, and this connection creates a foundation for RPP, thereby guiding RFs' decision-making in their role of co-creators. Also, intuition, which is involved in RFs' decision-making and farmer-nature interactions, has a connection to love: in Sädeharju

(2025), RFs perceived one of the sources of intuition as *cosmic love*, and love was also one of the intuition-induced knowing-feelings. Since love is present in RPP and mentioned also in some quotations from RFs in other studies (Gordon et al. 2023; Gosnell 2022; Frankel-Goldwater et al. 2024; Seymour and Connelly 2023), as well as related to the Indigenous approach from which RA draws (Sands et al. 2023), we suggest that love lies at the core of *being a regenerative farmer* and expressing a regenerative mindscape through one's role as a co-creator. Due to the powerful leverage of the inner dimensions of regeneration in the sustainability transformations (Gosnell and Gordon 2025), the concept of care in human-nature relations should be expanded by recognizing love as a fundamentally relevant theme in research on RA and sustainability transformations.

The farmer-nature interaction

We argue that RPP enhances the understanding of the bidirectionality of the human-nature interaction and agency in RA by also contributing to the so far marginal discussion of *subtle energies* in RA (Gordon et al. 2022). Monitoring and observation have been found to be important in ranchers' and other farmers' decision-making (Alarcon and Marty 2024; Smith et al. 2025). Also in this study, farmer-nature interactions include mutual observation, and a novel typology of the five dimensions of observation was formed. The physical attributes of nature are easy to observe, but the RFs frequently mentioned also other elements, which were more difficult to detect and verbalize but significant for decision-making. These were described as the sensing of some kind of *energies*, or *energy flows,* and *Something*, which could be received only by being present in a particular environment, not via pictures/videos/descriptions of the situation in the field or other environment. Most likely Something is a combination of information gathered from all five dimensions of observation and the intuitive understanding received from nature.

While the inner dimensions of regeneration are acknowledged as crucial to socio-ecological transformations (Gosnell and Gordon 2025; Salonen et al. 2023), intuitive farmer-nature interactions have received little attention (Von Diest 2021). However, in RPP, the RFs perceived that intuition was as an *interpreter between themselves and nature*, and these sensed energies were suggested to be *conveyers of information*. Since intuition is connected to better decision-making (Barrett 2013; Sädeharju (2025), including the sensing of subtle energies and intuition to the monitoring and observation processes of farmers could have transformative effects on their decision-making and assist them further on their regenerative journeys.

The agency of co-creators

Embracing the role of a co-creator is transformational. Learning to maintain a regenerative process, which creates a green and flourishing environment as well as biodiversity, and is profitable and resilient at the same time, increases empowerment, enthusiasm, and biophilic emotions (Gosnell 2022). Furthermore, it seems to be 'addictive', while, inversely, killing living things causes aversion (see also Miller-Klugesherz and Sanderson 2023). RFs act in the role of co-creators at their own farms. Therefore, their farm ecosystems can be seen as *individual creations*, shaped via the RFs' decisions and embodying their *regenerative creativity*. Embracing the role of co-creators arguably occurs through transformative learning, fostering the farmers' imaginations as it molds their future visions and, thereby, further strengthens their transformational agency.

One way for the RFs to reduce the ambivalence stemming from the tensions between productivity and relationality was expressing their role as a co-creators through their intentions and practices. Instead of trained or technically performed practices, their activities were inherent and intentional, stemming from their deep connection to nature. Giving back to nature was one of these practices and it is documented among RFs also, for example, in Pape et al. (2025). These actions resemble Indigenous peoples' ways of honoring Mother Earth, interacting with it, and acknowledging its agency, which reinforces the idea of RA being rooted in Indigenous approaches (Sands et al. 2023). Further, the RFs perceived that nature has its own consciousness, acts intently, and 'speaks' to them using its own language. Also, in Chapman and Deplazes-Zemp (2024, p. 10), farmers perceived nature as "a knowledgeable and experienced teacher". This topic has been touched upon especially in the research of Indigenous cultures (Huambachano 2021) and such perceptions are found to resemble animism (MacManaway 2021; Rose 2017).

In our study, the RFs felt that co-operating with nature creates holistic well-being at their farms. However, talking about these RF-nature interactions seems to be a taboo – similarly as intuition (Sädeharju 2025) – and, thus, these subtle interactions have tended to remain concealed and dismissed in Western scholarship. However, we argue that as the results of this study were created in Northern Europe in a modern farming context, they provide legitimacy for understanding human-nature agency and interaction as genuinely bidirectional among all RFs, not only among those representing Indigenous cultures.

The results of this study show that RFs are a heterogenous group where all are on their own regenerative journeys (see also Beacham et al. 2023; Gordon et al. 2023; Gosnell et al. 2019). Shared attributes are a regenerative mindscape and

the enthusiasm to regenerate their farm ecosystems while producing food and enhancing profitability. We offer this enriched understanding of the regenerative human-nature relationship and RFs' inner dimensions as a contribution to transdisciplinary sustainability science.

Conclusion

In this research, we focused on the decision-making processes of *Regenerative Farmers* (RF) and their relationship with nature through the lens of professionalism, as being an RF is not just a passion but primarily a means of livelihood. By examining intuition in the context of *Regenerative Agriculture* (RA) and its connection to planetary inclusion (as discussed by Salonen et al. 2024), we uncovered new insights into the transformative learning and the changes accompanying the farmers' journeys to adopting a regenerative mindscape. This term refers to the holistic, interconnected worldview that guides RFs.

The importance of examining the professional RF-nature relationship arises from the transformative potential of RA. Gaining a deeper understanding of RF-nature relationships addresses the increasing demand for scientists and practitioners to acknowledge and engage with the inner dimensions of a regenerative mindscape as well as to acknowledge the significance of informal methods and diverse knowledge in farmers' decision-making that may fall outside traditional scientific paradigms (Gordon et al. 2022; Gosnell et al. 2019; Gosnell and Gordon 2025; Smith et al. 2025).

This study reveals further hidden elements of the regenerative dynamics by bringing to light the professional partnership between RFs and nature in relation to decision-making. The principles of planetary inclusion emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings. This challenges humans to expand their sense of responsibility to include both human and non-human entities, which is crucial in achieving a sustainable future. This study's main contribution is the *Regenerative Professional Partnership* (RPP) framework in the decision-making between RFs and nature, and how these elements materialize in RFs' everyday life as a) connection and relationships, b) agency and roles, c) interaction and communication.

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Data availability The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author.

Declarations

Research ethics The authors conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK standards.

Competing interest The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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