



## 7 WINS FOR AGROFORESTRY BUSINESS CASES



Organic, regenerative perennial farms need strong business cases to be of value to the biodiversity of an area and the local healthy food supply. Here are **7 wins** for an organic agroforestry farm to build its business case AND be valuable for biodiversity and healthy communities.

### 1. Healthy soil

It all starts with ecosystem restoration and improving the immune systems of trees and perennial plants. To create living soil it's important to stop compaction (give the soil life space to breathe). If you work with tractors, make clear paths and stick to them. No tilling. And 3 elements: micro-organisms, fungi (mycorrhiza) and decomposing organic matter.

### 2. How to create living soil in an olive farm in Greece?

In the olive farms of Greece we visited so far, we saw different kinds of soil. In general, we can say:

- Compost (every organic farm needs composting with local organic materials)
- Inoculated biochar (housing for the microorganisms)
- Local crushed volcanic rock (for minerals)

### 3. Extra income streams – intermediate products

Ecological intensification. Intermediate products are the products that can be created by turning a waste stream into an income stream before giving the organic matter back to the soil again. One such product is oyster mushrooms on olive clippings. [Meraki People](#) creates this production process in Greece, [Ekofungi](#) does it on other local waste streams in Serbia, and [Rotterzwam](#) does it on coffee waste in cities.

### 4. Extra income streams – companion planting

Ecological intensification. Agroforestry is a great way to combine different layers of crops on a limited piece of land. It's important to combine plants that do not compete with each other in root



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systems and that like to be together. In permaculture, lots of guilds (clusters) are described. If you are not sure which companion plants can be found for olive trees, go to a place where wild olives grow and observe the plants that grow naturally. Choose your companion plants not only on ecological viability but also on market value and local culture.

For instance, a loquat tree has up to 20 uses and values in Japan. In Greece, it's an unused and underappreciated tree. You can either start a promotion campaign for the loquat tree or you can choose other crops. For instance herbs that do well for teas and cuisine.

Ecological intensification doesn't have to be only food products. Also phytomining of [hyper accumulating plants](#) is an option. E.g. companion plants that accumulate metals can be harvested and taken out with a pyrolysis process (biolab again) while the farmer is making biochar anyway.

### 5. Higher margins

Some olives (it seems to be the ones from wild olive trees) have high phenolic content. There is an official health claim in the EU (432/2012) that makes it possible to create high margin virgin olive oil. If you want to go this road, testing for phenolic content is essential. The Greek company [Aristoleo](#) developed an inexpensive testing kit that can combine the business case of community biolabs. One expertise center in communities for all testing.

If the farmer wants to contribute to health in her area as well, she can sell/export e.g. 50% for very high margins (we heard prices of up to 75 euro per bottle) and sell the rest affordably to the local shops. Branding as healthy region will attract health tourists AND ensure health increase of local people.

### 6. Branding or products and region

Branding is always a good way to get higher margins. But for farmers, it's difficult branding bulk products that have no distinguishing characteristics. Therefore, it is important to brand the farm AND brand the region. And arrange for clusters of farmers together with product producers (olive oil makers) and restaurants. The highest margins are always easiest realized at the companies closest to the consumer in the supply chain. Upmarket restaurants are easier to do branding for than olive farmers. Although they do have a good business case with the wild olive farming and high phenolic content.

### 7. Grafting of trees



One farmer we met, grafted his very old olive trees with branches of another kind of olive tree.

He asked us if he could also do that in his other farms with wild olive branches. Use the (now badly performing) olive trees as soil species and graft branches of his own wild olive trees on top of it.

We think it is possible. But it needs testing. The success factor of grafting is the health of both species. In case of this old olive tree (picture) it worked well because the tree is so strongly rooted.





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In the farm he showed us, where the younger olive trees are, the soil is compacted and it seems like the nitrogen-rich fertilizer and the chemical spray are a big factor in the trees not performing well in harvest. Grafting would need other measures as well, we think. Work on the health of the soil (see tip 1 and 2) and you have a much better chance of the grafts being successful and productive.

### Bonus Tip – Life Energy

In Korinthos, we saw the best olive farm so far. Gerania Farm. The farmer is a tai chi master who built the farm in 35 years. This farm is full of life energy! The pruning of the trees is done in a way that the knot is low, the branches are open on the inside. Wind can go through them to prevent pests. The branches are bendable so they can hold many olives looking like raindrops.



His olives get better prices from the right markets who appreciate chi. Life energy. This can be tested and certified in a lab and branded with the [biodynamic Demeter](#) certification. It can also be tested with methods like [Bovis measurements](#) and sold to markets who understand the Bovis scale and appreciate life energy in food.

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