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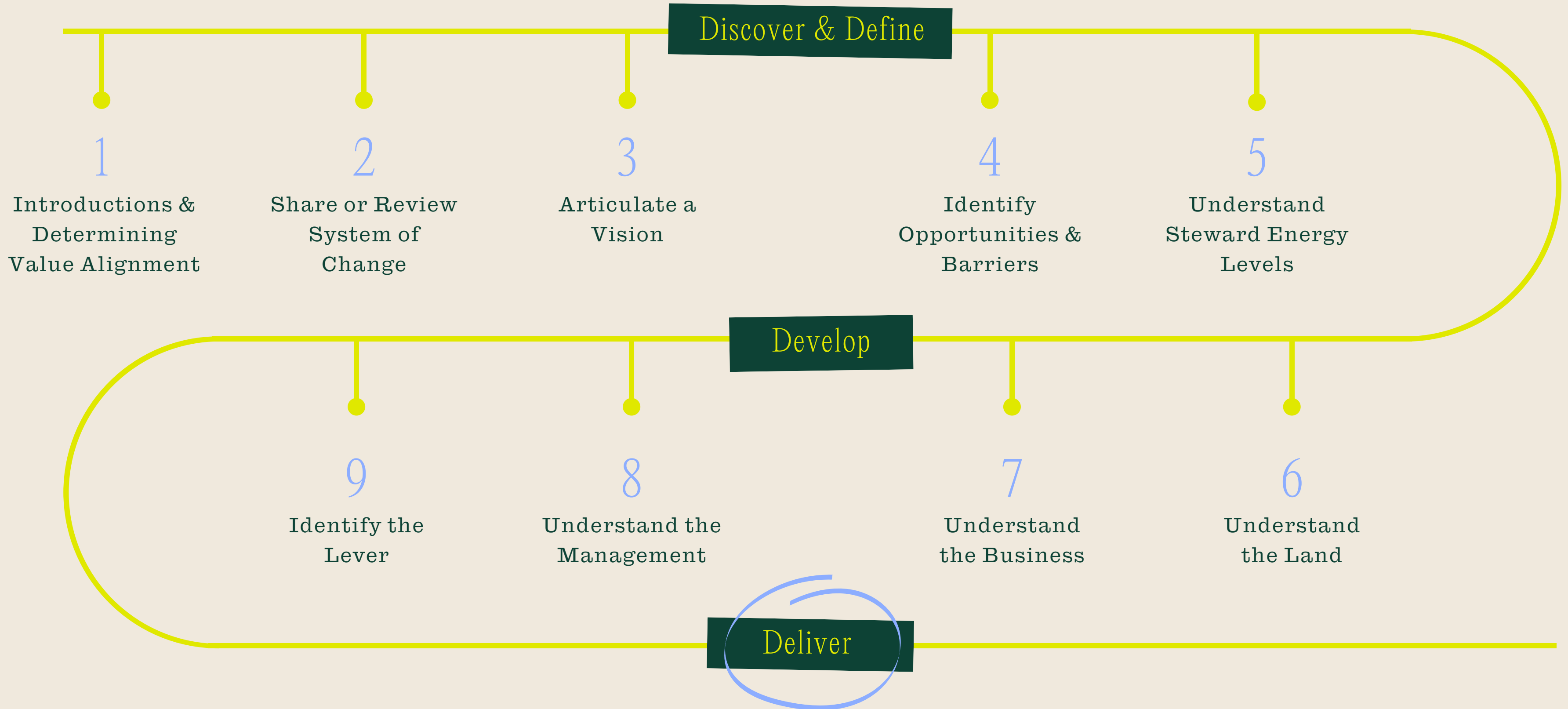


LEARNINGS FROM THE FIELD

Vertically Integrated Crop and Livestock Business

Regenerative Stewardship Curriculum: Deliver

REGENERATIVE STEWARD COURSE PLAN



Overview

OPERATION

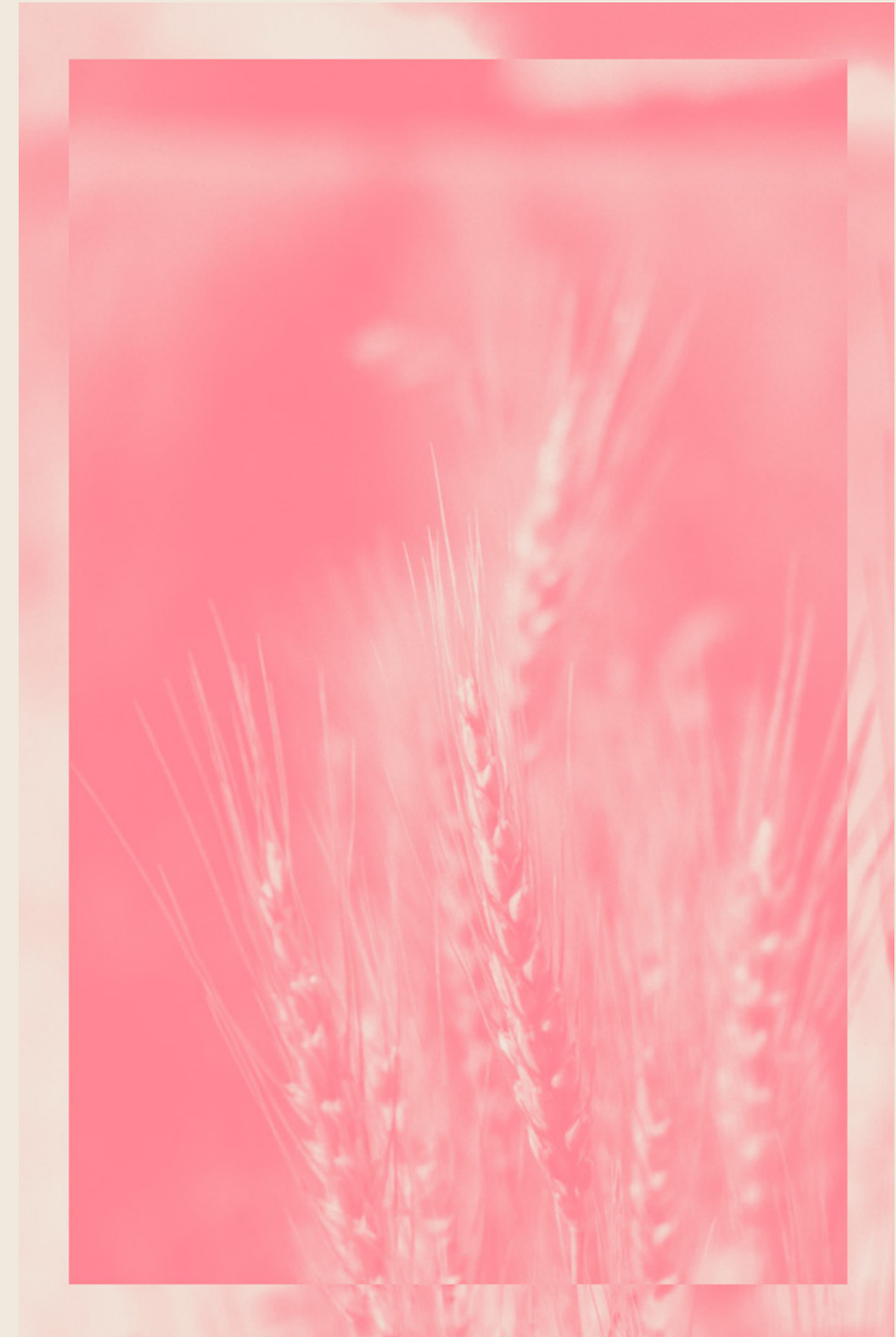
Vertically integrated crop and livestock business.

HOW WE ENGAGED

Round table discussions, Zoom calls, mobile communication, on-site visits.

TOOLS USED

Resource Assessment
Soil Health Management Map



Lessons Learned

REGENERATION BEYOND THE SOIL

In regenerative agriculture today, soil health dominates the narrative. But as we've learned more about what regenerative agriculture is, we've learned that soil health management can only be improved if the steward understands the quality of life that they are working towards and the ways in which their business can operate to generate holistic ecological health.

One of the main purposes of our planning efforts is to identify a resource concern—whether it is caused by management or lack of infrastructure—then allocate resources or adjust management accordingly to correct the issue. In a case where the management will need to adjust, pointing out the obvious isn't always helpful. We need to listen to "the why" behind such issues before we can come up with "the how" and a solution.



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Lessons Learned

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COVER CROPPING AND TEMPERATURE REGULATION

In this scenario, the farmer was trialing a fall cover crop to last over winter. He had planned to terminate the cover crop with herbicide, then plant corn into the residue. In an adjacent plot, he was managing the land in a conventional manner, using a fallow rotation after harvest, spraying herbicide, and then planting his corn into bare soil.

The following spring saw above average precipitation and the cover crop thrived. This allowed the cover crop field to build soil by improving the habitat for the soil microbes. The cover crop also kept the soil temperature regulated. However, the same soil was slow to warm up to the temperature needed for germination of the following cash crop, a warm season corn. Cooler temperatures remained through the spring, which the farmer believed stunted their corn's growth. The corn following the cover crop was never able to fully catch up with the conventionally managed corn. Yield was not measured, but there was a visible difference in the height of the crop. This experiment led the farmer to decide that they only wanted to manage cover crops that had a high chance of winter kill, so that the soil moisture and temperature could be regulated.



Lessons Learned

DESIGN TRIALS AROUND FARMER PRIORITIES

Understanding what questions we want to answer before we try something is critical. If we go into a trial with only one question to answer and then we simply answer it, we may miss opportunities to grow in our understanding of ecological farming. There will always be unexpected outcomes from anything we try for the first time, but sometimes the best learning can happen when we are open to seeing things that we didn't expect.

A key learning from our engagement with this farmer was that using a Soil Health Card to illustrate what a cover crop is doing to improve the soil will not always resonate. Sometimes, the variables that matter most to the steward are not the same variables that regenerative planners prioritize. This steward cared most about yield, germination, and the size of their crop. Thus, trials should be designed to incorporate the things that most drive their decisions, including yield economics, soil health, ease of management, and anything else that they dictate.



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The End

Continue exploring field examples from the third phase of our **Regenerative Stewardship Curriculum**, Deliver, [here](#).