An agrifood system beyond growth: A systematic scoping review

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1. Background and rationale

Research on degrowth has grown substantially, yet its application to agriculture and agrifood systems remains fragmented and conceptually diverse. Agrifood systems, understood as the set of interconnected activities, actors, and institutions involved in food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, play a central role in socio-ecological transitions. They underpin livelihoods, employment, and a wide range of environmental and social outcomes at the global scale. While agriculture has long been recognized as a key driver of global environmental change, it is increasingly evident that sustainability challenges and transformation pathways cannot be adequately understood without considering agrifood systems as a whole. However, it is unclear how degrowth and post-growth perspectives conceptualize or operationalize transformations in agriculture or agrifood systems. This scoping review will systematically map and synthesize existing literature connecting degrowth and agrifood systems, identify recurring conceptual frameworks and paradigms, and highlight research gaps and potential future directions.

2. Objectives

To systematically identify and characterize scholarly works addressing degrowth, post-growth, or beyond-growth perspectives in relation to agrifood systems.

To identify agricultural paradigms or models (e.g., agroecology, food sovereignty, regenerative agriculture) that resonate with degrowth principles.

To analyse disciplinary, methodological, and conceptual trends across the literature.

To identify literature gaps and suggest ways forward for future research.

3. Research questions

Main question

How has degrowth/post-growth/beyond growth thinking been applied to agrifood systems?

Specific questions

How do these studies define degrowth/post-growth/beyond growth? (if they do so)

To what agricultural paradigms, models, or perspectives are they linked to (e.g., agroecology, regenerative agriculture, ecological intensification, conventional, organic, …)?

What types of analyses are conducted (empirical, theoretical, modelling, …)?

Scope and scale of the studies (product, food chain, agrifood system / farm, regional, national, global)?

Are economic, social, governance, or environmental sustainability dimensions integrated into their analysis? [if they do so, how]

What forms of agricultural/agrifood system transformation or "ways forward" do these studies propose?

How do these align with or operationalize degrowth policy proposals? [if they do so]

What are the obstacles/approaches identified for further research in degrowth/post-growth in agriculture and the agrifood system

What are the main research questions/gaps for future research?

4. Eligibility criteria

<u>Phase 1: Inclusion criteria for title and abstract screening</u>

1. Language: Scientific documents written in English, Spanish, Italian or Norwegian
2. Scope: Mentions agriculture/farming/agri-food systems/food chain (any stage).
3. Concept: Mentions degrowth/post-growth/beyond-growth in relation to agri-food systems.

<u>Phase 2: Exclusion criteria for full text screening</u>

1. **Wrong Language:**
    a. Full text not in English, Spanish, Italian or Norwegian
2. **Wrong Document Type:**
    a. A review or meta-analysis
    b. Grey literature, reports, dissertations, commentaries.
3. **Wrong Scope:**
    a. Not related to agriculture/farming/agri-food systems/food chain (any stage).
4. **Wrong Conceptual focus:**

a. No degrowth framing: Studies on economic growth or sustainability without any degrowth/postgrowth framing
b. Degrowth term used differently: Studies using degrowth concepts with a different meaning (e.g., degrowth of animal metabolism or body weight)

5. Information sources

Scopus

Web of Science Core Collection

6. Search strategy

Search day: 27/01/2026

Scopus:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ((("de growth" OR degrowth OR de-growth OR postgrowth OR post-growth OR "post growth" OR "beyond growth") AND (agri* OR agrarian OR farming OR "food system*" OR "food product*" OR agroeco* OR "agro-eco*")))

Results: 174 documents

Web of Science:

TC (("de growth" OR degrowth OR de-growth OR postgrowth OR post-growth OR "post growth" OR "beyond growth") AND (agri* OR agrarian OR farming OR "food system*" OR "food product*" OR agroeco* OR "agro-eco*"))

Results: 180 documents

7. Selection process

Export all records from Scopus and Web of Science and remove duplicates.

By two reviewers independently: Screen titles and abstracts according to eligibility criteria. Keep eligible items.

By two reviewers independently: Retrieve and assess full texts for inclusion according to eligibility criteria.

Record reasons for exclusion.

Document process in a PRISMA flow diagram.

8. Data charting process

Data will be extracted using a structured Excel template, including:

- Bibliographic information (authors, year, source)
- Country or region studied
- Type of study and methodology
- Scale and scope of analysis
- Agricultural paradigms referenced
- Sustainability dimensions addressed
- Key findings and implications

Coding will follow predefined categories (agricultural paradigms, sustainability pillars, degrowth policy proposals, etc.).

9. Data synthesis

Descriptive analysis: frequency and distribution of studies by year, country, discipline, type, and framework.

Thematic analysis: inductive synthesis of conceptual patterns linking degrowth to agricultural paradigms.

Gap identification: areas lacking empirical evidence or theoretical development.

10. Reporting

Results will be reported according to the PRISMA-ScR checklist (Tricco et al., 2018; Peters et al, 2020), including:

- PRISMA flow diagram.
- Descriptive tables and thematic summaries.
- Discussion of conceptual trends and research gaps.
- Limitations of the review.

The full data extraction table and search strategy will be provided as supplementary material.

References

Peters, M. D., Marnie, C., Tricco, A. C., Pollock, D., Munn, Z., Alexander, L., ... & Khalil, H. (2020). Updated methodological guidance for the conduct of scoping reviews. JBI evidence synthesis, 18(10), 2119-2126.

Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., ... & Straus, S. E. (2018). PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): checklist and explanation. Annals of internal medicine, 169(7), 467-473.