

SSA comment: Soils in the Agriculture Bill

16.1.20

The new Agriculture Bill, brought to parliament on 16th January, includes specific recognition of soils comprising the following:

“Soil quality – we know that soil is an essential natural asset and that its careful management can help to provide a whole range of public goods. We’ve made sure that soil is specifically named in the Bill, so we can provide financial assistance to farmers for protecting or improving its quality

For example, we can provide assistance for soil monitoring programmes and soil health research to support farmers with their decision-making and soil management.”

The Sustainable Soils Alliance has issued the following statement in response:

“Soil is unique as the only natural asset that contributes to all six of the environmental outcomes identified in the Agriculture Bill. This formal recognition that soil is both a public and private good represents a step-change in awareness and appreciation of its significance for our food, flood management, biodiversity and climate.

“We would, however, remind the government that the commitment for all soils to be sustainably managed by 2030 is now ten years old. For this to be achieved an ambitious strategy linking all the policy mechanisms – education, regulation, assessment and incentivisation - with clear milestones for delivery is urgently needed.

“We are grateful to our members and the wider community for their efforts over the last few years in advocating for soil’s widespread role and significance, and commit to further collaboration with them, Defra and other stakeholders to ensure the commitment to soil outlined in the Bill comes to fruition.”

Matthew Orman, Director, SSA

The Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) was launched in 2017 to address the current crisis in our soils. Its aim is to restore soils to health within one generation by galvanising the communities of scientists, innovators, policymakers and land managers already active in this area, harnessing their activities and providing them with a sense of common purpose. We ultimately want to see soil get the same focus, investment and attention that other natural capital ‘elements’, water and air, have received in recent years.

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