

Re: Soil Health in the 2019 election manifestos

November 2019

To whom it may concern,

2019 has been a watershed year for UK environment policy, and the parties' record and commitments on policies including biodiversity, plastic and air quality will be more decisive in determining voter intentions than for any previous election.

When compared with these topics, there is one critical environmental issue that continues to be overlooked in both public and political debate, however: that of soil health.

As you may know, it is now ten years since the Labour government introduced a commitment to achieve *Sustainably Managed Soils by 2030*. This commitment acknowledged soil's vital role in food productivity, biodiversity, flood risk management and carbon sequestration. The commitment was repeated by the Conservatives who included it as an indicator in the *25 Year Plan for the Environment*.

Since then, and despite encouraging words in recent Farming and Environment Bills, there is still no sign of the concrete policy commitments needed to turn this target into reality.

This election, and the period of post Brexit agri-environment policy-making that will follow, provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address this situation, and we are writing to all the major parties to ask them to re-affirm their commitment to the 2030 deadline in their upcoming manifestos, alongside references to the steps needed to achieve it. These should include the following:

- A clear Regulatory framework outlawing the most harmful soil-degrading practices, maintaining equivalence with European standards in a manner that is tailored to the unique circumstances of UK soils and peatlands
- A post-CAP farmer incentivisation scheme that rewards farmers who engage in soil management practices that deliver environmental outcomes
- Investment in enforcement and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the regulatory and guidance framework to deliver widespread soil understanding and behaviour change
- Soil health featuring in public awareness campaigns, as part of the nationwide school environmental curriculum and as a mandatory component of the training programmes for on-farm advisors
- An ambitious soil health monitoring programme for England to match those in Scotland and Wales to assess and understand changes in the health of our nation's soil over time

Such a commitment would send a clear message to all voters about the breadth and ambition of your environment policy but also to farmers, land managers and rural communities in general that you appreciate the importance of soil health and the need to support them in the maintenance of their most important asset.

Should you wish to discuss this in greater detail, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Ellen Fay and Matthew Orman

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