

Soil Health Industry Platform (SHIP)
Introduction and Benefits for Businesses

1. Overview

The [Soil Health Industry Platform \(SHIP\)](#) is a collaborative initiative led by the Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) that aims to discuss, harness, align and amplify the efforts of major food and drink businesses (production, retail and manufacture) to improve soil health and address soil damage throughout the UK supply chain.

It also looks to support businesses as they develop their own soil-specific policies and initiatives by advising them about the rapidly evolving research, government and technology landscape. It focuses on the most immediate environmental, policy and economic pressures on these businesses – supply chain fairness, long term productivity and resilience, nature markets and the place of soil (carbon removals) within nature and climate change reporting requirements.

To that end, the SHIP functions both as a convenor and consultant, bringing participating businesses, alongside relevant stakeholders, to share insights on areas of mutual interest and where collective action is most impactful, as well as advising individual businesses on areas of sector-specific concern where targeted insights and input are required.

2. Background

The creation of the SHIP was prompted by the recommendations of the December 2021 [Soils in the UK Supply Chain](#) report, funded by the WWF and Tesco Partnership, and the outcomes of a workshop in October 2021 at which representatives of participating businesses discussed the report's findings, including the report's [five recommendations and 15 actions](#).

The Platform officially launched March 2022. Members currently include: Arla, Kellogg's, Morrisons, Nestlé, Nomad Foods, PepsiCo, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, G's Fresh and Yeo Valley.

To ensure joined up action, the Platform engages with the work of other organisations in this space, including WWF, NIAB, Environment Agency, AHDB, NFU, WRAP, IGD, BRC and the Food and Drink Council Resilience Roundtable – feeding in the soils element to their workstreams on climate resilience and sustainable farming.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the Platform are as follows:

- To identify and understand the tools and processes whereby food and drink businesses (individually and collectively) impact upon soil health and agree and pursue actions/projects that will make a clear, tangible and measurable difference to delivering regenerative farming, Net Zero and biodiversity targets and outcomes.
- To support businesses in designing and implementing soil management practices across supplying farms where they have direct or indirect control, helping them understand the emerging policy, technology and research landscape and identify how soil management can contribute to meeting climate change and nature commitments.

- To adopt a shared public commitment on soil health built around specific actions, agreed outcomes, metrics and progress indicators – and a delivery roadmap. This will demonstrate leadership and alignment, galvanise the rest of the industry and showcase clear intent to high, universal standards to farmers and stakeholders and support for achieving them.
- To promote and share best practice with regards to the development, measurement and reporting of relevant initiatives between participating businesses that can be converted into universal practice.
- To ensure business efforts and initiatives align with and where appropriate exceed emerging (devolved) policy developments (education, incentivisation, regulation) that impact upon soil health.
- To connect with, ensure consistency with and amplify the efforts of established initiatives (i.e. LEAF, AHDB, WRAP) that have important leverage over specific aspects of soil management.

4. Three Pillars

The Platform consists of three pillars:

1. **Knowledge Exchange:** Group meetings and briefings provide an opportunity to learn about recent, relevant business, policy and stakeholder developments, timely issues and individual business initiatives. Where appropriate/valuable third-party speakers are invited to attend and present to the group.
2. **Public Commitment:** SHIP members sign up to the following commitment: *“By participating in the Soil Health Industry Platform (SHIP) we commit to knowledge exchange, identification and sharing of best practice and the adoption of proportionate and impactful actions that will contribute to the goal of sustainably managed soils in the UK by 2030”.*
3. **Actions:** The SHIP agenda is organised according to a menu of six categories which reflects the different levers participating businesses have to influence soil health, and which underpins the public commitment:



The SHIP's [2023 report](#) summarising the Platform's work and 2024 priorities is available online. The priorities for 2025 are currently under review.

5. Benefits for participants

SHIP membership provides participating organisations with the following benefits:

- The advisor/consultant function gives participating organisation access to ongoing advice and answers to ad-hoc soil-relevant information requests. The SSA is well connected into many aspects of the soils arena and can provide a reliable source of knowledge and expertise on critical elements: Defra's Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), soil carbon and nature markets, debates around regenerative etc.

- Up-to-date knowledge and understanding of relevant policy, business and stakeholder initiatives relating to soil health both ad-hoc and via the policy and initiative briefings.
- The opportunity to learn from industry peers about how best to make the case for business investment in regenerative farming etc in a pre-competitive space. The Platform enables the pooling of research and insights between all the participating businesses.
- Helping businesses embed soil in their climate, nature and regenerative agriculture targets (both individually and collectively), communicate their efforts to internal, farmer and stakeholder audiences and facilitate industry collaboration and alignment around soil health.
- Understanding of the emerging science base connecting soil carbon with Net Zero targets.
- The opportunity to engage with relevant stakeholder organisations either via group meetings or one on ones, set up by the SSA.

Participation in the SHIP also signals a clear and tangible support for the SSA and its broader objectives – specifically *to restore UK soils to health within one generation*, and its wider work with policy makers, academia, NGOs and other corporates.

It also reflects the awareness, more acute in the face of extreme weather, that while soils provide vital ecosystem services and are an indispensable asset to food and drink businesses, there is clear evidence that they are under threat. In terms of long-term benefits, the initiative aims to secure soils' ability to support long-term food security.

6. Membership and Responsibilities

- The SSA is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Platform, including:
 - Secretariat for the Platform,
 - Workshop organisation, minutes, speaker invitation engagement etc.,
 - Research and drafting of supporting materials and proposals for action,
 - Stakeholder engagement,
 - Communications (media, website etc.),
 - Budgeting.
- Membership of the Platform is open to all businesses with a significant impact on UK farming practices who are willing to make a tangible contribution to Platform objectives. Members share the Platform costs between them (see below).
- All meetings/workshops take place virtually (unless participants see the merit in a face-to-face meeting), and under Chatham house rules. Meeting summaries and annual reports are published on the [SSA website](#).
- Individuals representing third party organisations that have a significant impact on/knowledge of soil management will be invited to join the Platform with observer status. These have included LEAF, WRAP, Environment Agency, NIAB etc. Observers will not be required to contribute to the Platform budget.

7. Budget

- Based on the estimated costs of running the Platform (meeting organisation, research, drafting, stakeholder engagement etc), membership costs are £3,000 (+VAT) for participating businesses annually. Observer organisations are not asked to contribute.
- Individual projects/actions are budgeted separately and might be driven/funded by all Platform members or a 'coalition of the willing' who see particular value in a specific outcome.
- The membership fee reflects the fact many of these activities (research, stakeholder engagement) will overlap with those undertaken by the SSA under the terms of their existing funder agreements.
- The SSA is largely funded (50%+) by a grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, on the understanding that that figure will be matched by contributions from other organisations, including corporates.