

Soil Health Industry Platform (SHIP)
Meeting Summary

On 2nd March 2022, the Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) hosted the launch of the **Soil Health Industry Platform (SHIP)** - a collaborative initiative that aims to discuss, harness, align and amplify the efforts of major food and drink businesses (retail and manufacture) to improve soil health and address soil damage throughout the UK supply chain.

Representatives from the following 15 businesses were present: Arla, Bakkavor, Co-op, G's Fresh, Kellogg's, Morrisons, M&S, Nestlé, Nomad Foods, PepsiCo, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Warburton's, Yeo Valley, Unilever as well a representative from WWF. Other businesses were unable to attend but have expressed an interest in finding out more and future participation.

The following is a summary of the critical observations and decisions made during the course of the meeting, organised according to the three key SHIP elements, **Knowledge Exchange**, **Specific Actions** and **Public Commitment**. The summary also reflects the survey that was distributed and completed by participants in the week leading up to the meeting.

1. Knowledge Exchange: *A run through of critical soil initiatives in 2022*

The SSA provided an overview of the main public and private soil initiatives in 2022, demonstrating what a critical year this will be for soil and the long-term impacts on the UK supply chain. A summary of this presentation is provided in a separate document.

2. Specific Actions: *How can the Supply Chain contribute to the improvement of soil health*

The meeting discussed some options of specific, collaborative action participating businesses might consider to deliver a tangible outcome for nationwide soil health, based on a series of recommendations provided by the SSA that arose from the [Soil in the UK Supply Chain](#) report.

1. Establish universal industry consensus on core farm soil metrics.
- Concerns were raised about the vast number of 'soil related' research initiatives currently underway – public, private and NGO - that are directly or indirectly promoting and/or examining different approaches to soil measurement and quantification.
- A snapshot of these initiatives was provided and discussed (Annex 1). It demonstrated how they have different methodologies, objectives and outcomes skewed to particular results (measurements/practise change) or focal point (e.g. Net Zero, overall soil health, regenerative agriculture). As a result, they make use of differing soil metrics as well as guidance, advice and sampling methodologies.
- Businesses are overwhelmed by the number and range of these schemes and are uncertain a) which to involve/invest in, b) what the implications are for their businesses, c) what kind of results will emerge over what timeframe c) how they will be rolled-out in farmer education and knowledge transfer, and d) how they might influence policy development.
- There was concern this might lead to farmer confusion, disincentivising behaviour change and a continued sense of a lack of leadership.

- It was agreed that, as a starting point, the SSA should carry out some baseline research/comparative analysis into these initiatives to better understand their:
 - Objectives, focal points and outcomes
 - Implications for metrics/guidance/practice change
 - Timeframes for delivery
 - Plans for roll-out (policy and education - toolkits etc.)
- It was agreed that this should be the initial, priority outcome for the SHIP initiative, a clear and tangible output that would add genuine value to both participating businesses and the overall sector. To that end, the SSA will put together a proposal to present to members of SHIP for discussion at the next meeting.

2. Raising the bar throughout the industry, including hard-to-reach suppliers.

- It was agreed that there are a number of critical supply-chain players that have a profound impact on soil health and farming practices but that aren't covered by the scope of SHIP – not major brands/vulnerable to consumer and shareholder scrutiny – but nevertheless need to somehow fall under the scope of the Platform.
- **As a starting point, and in consultation with SHIP participants, the SSA will map out some of these businesses - identifying target businesses/sectors that should be engaged. On this basis and at future meetings, the means and mechanisms for communicating with these businesses should be discussed.**

3. Creating a platform for sharing and rolling out best practice.

- There was consensus around the lack of knowledge sharing across the supply chain, leading to on-farm trials and research not resulting in the scaling up of best practices.
- **The SSA will continue to map current pilots and demonstration farms, in order to collate examples of best practice and help inform the industry of which practices and approaches to promote, ensuring such projects are scaled up.**

4. An industry led shared hub/repository for soils data.

- An industry shared hub/repository for soils data that would help build the evidence base for regenerative farming – and secure outside investment - continues to be of interest to participating businesses but was not discussed in detail at this meeting.
- **The SSA will provide regular updates on the work being carried out on shared data hubs on soil health, such as the work currently under development by NIAB and ABACO and proposed by the University of Leeds. The work pursued under action 1 will feed into this as many of the initiatives outlined have soil data measurement as a priority outcome.**

Other actions that have been raised in the past as possible priorities for the SHIP but were not discussed include:

- Understanding the supply chain's role in driving compliance with soil regulations and understanding soil damaging behaviours.
- The state of soils education and how the industry can help ensure adequate soils knowledge is being taught to the next generation of farmers and advisors.
- Businesses agreed that establishing a pan-industry (UK) definition of regenerative agriculture would not be helpful for the time being. However, this could potentially be explored in the future alongside labelling and raising consumer awareness.

3. **Public Commitment:** *How can the Supply Chain demonstrate collective/measurable commitment to delivering soil health*

- WWF voiced their support for the Platform and recognise there is a lot going on in this space and that some of the science and policy is still in development. They are supportive of this Platform being a useful way of sharing updates and information that can lead to greater alignment.
- However, WWF's position is that this platform needs to go beyond knowledge exchange. What they are keen to see come out of this group is a joint commitment among food and drink businesses, and a framework for action to accelerate efforts to improve soil health. This will be key to driving collaboration towards an overarching ambition.
- There should be flexibility for this framework to capture work on existing initiatives, but to see real change, there needs to be an overarching strategy and commitment to taking specific actions – to hold each other accountable and to make the most of the wealth of knowledge shared between businesses. This will also give the Platform the credibility to have a collective voice in any political advocacy going forward.
- A number of options for the format and content of a pan-industry soils commitment was provided by the SSA. Of these, there was consensus around the merits of one option in particular: a general statement of intent to address soil health, underpinned by a commitment to explore particular actions (e.g. those outlined above).
- **The SSA will continue to gather feedback and propose ideas for consideration at future meetings. It was suggested that in the future, this statement could sit under larger pan-industry commitments such as Courtauld 2030. The SSA is in regular contact with WRAP to inform them of progress made under SHIP.**

Next Steps

1. Businesses will inform the SSA whether they would like to officially become members of SHAPE, including the £3,000 contribution, in the next month.
2. The SSA will discuss with the Grocer's Features Editor the inclusion of the SHIP in a future soils-focused special.
3. The SSA will develop a proposal on the comparative analysis of sustainable farming initiatives that include soil measurement and improvement, for discussion at the next meeting.
4. SSA will send a doodle poll for the next two meetings.

Background:

SHIP was prompted by the recommendations of the SSA report [Soils in the UK Supply Chain](#) published December last year (commissioned by the WWF/Tesco partnership), which highlighted that efforts by major UK food and drink businesses to promote soil management throughout their supply chains will not have a tangible impact on Net Zero, biodiversity or sustainable farming outcomes without a more ambitious, strategic, collaborative and targeted approach.

During an October workshop at which representatives of 11 participating businesses discussed the report's findings, there was also a strong consensus that industry collaboration and alignment was needed in order to deliver for soil health.

Annex 1: Comparative analysis of sustainable farming initiatives that include soil measurement and improvement



2. Specific Actions: Proposal

Comparative analysis of sustainable farming initiatives that include soil measurement and improvement

	Defra's SFI	Defra's SSMMS	Soil Association Exchange	AHDB Soil Health Scorecard	Farm Carbon Toolkit	Cool Farm Tool	Trinity AgTech	Global Farm Metrics
Type of initiative	Gov incentive scheme	Gov monitoring scheme	Toolkit	Guidance	Toolkit	Toolkit	Toolkit	Standards
Focus	Farmer participation	National benchmarks	Ecological farms	Soil health				
Objective								
Geography								
Soil Metrics	SOM	SOM, earthworms, VA	SOM, pH, earthworms, VESS	SOM, pH, MPK, earthworms, VESS	SOM	SOM, soil moisture	Soil Carbon	SOM, earthworms, VA
Outcomes vs practices								
Businesses involved	N/A	N/A	M&S, Sainsbury's, Arla, Nandos	ASDA, Sainsbury's	Yeo Valley	Pepsico, Heineken, Kelloggs, M&S, Nestle, MCD		Morrisons, Waitrose, Nestle