

Soil Health Industry Platform (SHIP)
Meeting Summary

Introduction

On 7th October 2022, the Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) hosted the fourth meeting 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.

The meeting was attended by 8 representatives of the 11 members of the Platform: Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Kellogg's, Nestlé, Nomad Foods, PepsiCo and (new member), G's Fresh. Guest organisations included the National Farmers Union (NFU), NIAB, the Sustainable Markets Initiative (SMI) Agribusiness Task Force and WWF.

The following is a summary, under Chatham House rules, of the discussions and decisions made during the meeting, organised according to the three key SHIP components, **Knowledge Exchange, Categories (formerly known as projects)** and **Public Commitment**.

1. Knowledge Exchange: *An overview of relevant soil initiatives*

The meeting began with a discussion of relevant soil related policies and initiatives that have taken place since the previous (July) SHIP meeting, based on the briefing note that had been disseminated in advance. The NFU, G's Fresh and SMI provided further detail on their new schemes:

- *NFU Report: The Foundation of Food*

The NFU shared the content and process behind their July [vision for soil health](#) report which highlighted the need for a coordinated industry approach. Policy asks include economically viable and regular soil testing, robust data collection, better knowledge exchange and developing a soil carbon marketplace.

Key actions are outlined for their farmers and growers, recognising the diversity in UK soils and warning food businesses against opting for a one size fits all approach, but rather a decentralised system with local solutions to local problems. The NFU would like to see SHIP businesses support all the asks highlighted in the report, particularly supporting peer to peer learning and enabling knowledge sharing. The report will be reviewed and reported on in the years to come.

In addition, the NFU have also published five key principles for environmental markets to help share their development and ensure they are appropriate for the agriculture sector to engage in. These principles are scheduled to be discussed at a workshop on 1st November, while carbon/environmental markets will be the subject of the next SHIP meeting.

- *G's Fresh*

G's Fresh have made a strategic commitment to become a regenerative farming company across their supply chain so as to become more resilient and profitable. They have committed to being largely regenerative by 2030, meaning all their farms will have started the transition by then. They

also see regenerative agriculture as a way of producing more nutritious food and it will be part of their carbon sequestration program. However, G's is first focusing on carbon cycling (building the biological microbiome of soils) over the next 5 years prior to carbon sequestration.

G's is working on a five-year transition menu and building a model to test how to progress to regenerative agriculture over a 5-10 year period. They are developing a suit of measures for top level reporting against progress which will evolve throughout the transition. G's is interested in sharing this work once completed to encourage knowledge sharing and learning from other businesses' experience.

- *Sustainable Market Initiative (SMI) Agribusiness Taskforce*

The former Prince of Wales's Sustainable Markets Initiative launched their Agribusiness Taskforce earlier in the year to collaborate across the value chain and develop scalable business models that will enable regenerative agriculture to move from a niche to the mainstream. CEOs from businesses including Waitrose, PepsiCo, Mars and McDonald's have taken part.

The group is now pulling together an action plan launching at the end of October/early November with sector specific recommendations. A key conclusion has been the need for a shift in business mindset from telling farmers what to do to changing market dynamics so that farmers will see regenerative agriculture as a viable option for them. This plan will be shared with all SHIP members once published.

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

Category 1: Risk Mitigation and Reduction

Following July's meeting when an individual from the Environment Agency highlighted the risk subsoil compaction represents within supply chains and the importance of the management and timing of agricultural practices according to context (subsoil compaction, soil type), the SSA has built on this research by collating a table mapping risks to soil health according to farming type and context. A draft table has been shared with stakeholders from across the field including Defra, Soil Association, LEAF, Westcountry Rivers Trust for their input and feedback. The aim of this research is to:

- Understand where risks to soil health are most common (according to context, region and cropping type).
- Identify the causes creating these risks in order to highlight the mitigation actions and interventions needed to remedy them.
- The exercise will provide a framework to consider the role that food businesses might play to reduce risk to soils within their supply chains and other steps that they can take to mitigate risk through guidance, advice and/or investment. It may also allow for a review of the regulatory framework against these risks to establish if it is fit for purpose.

Next steps

- **Participants expressed that it would be useful to share the draft table internally to discuss with relevant colleagues and add to it. The latest draft accompanies this workshop report. Businesses are encouraged to consider the ways in which this research will be most useful to them and to get in touch if they wish to follow up on a one to one basis with the SSA.**
- **The SSA will explore this work via the lens of the mechanisms looking to explore the financial risk businesses have in the context of various climate and nature scenarios - the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).**

- **The SSA will continue the mapping exercise, engaging with stakeholders from across the industry and will seek to understand what mitigating actions businesses can implement. An updated table will be shared at the next meeting.**

Category 2: Soil Measurement

The SSA provided an update on the digitalisation of the AHDB soil health scorecard. This project was presented to SHIP members in July and has now evolved into the *Soil Health Improvement Network (SHINe)*. The aim of this project is twofold:

1. To digitise the paper-based Soil Health Scorecard approach into an app.
2. To create an open-access repository for data collected via the app.

This will:

- Provide common metrics for soil health a framework that can adapt to meet evolving industry and policy requirements.
- Be free at the point of use for farmers and land-managers to:
 - Compare and benchmark their own soil health data with wider farm data,
 - Focus on areas for improvement,
 - Work with their own agronomist/advisor to plan,
 - Execute and track soil-improving practices,
 - Share data to enable peer-peer learning.
- Enable supply chains and industry to:
 - Include soil health data within their ESG commitments and reporting,
 - Quantify the value of soil interventions,
 - Deliver effective producer/land-manager support.

The SSA and a range of partners will enter this project to the UKRI Farming Innovation Programme (research and development funding pot). Partners currently include a range of organisations (SSA, NIAB, ABACO, the National Trust, Anglian Water, Plymouth University). Businesses who are already working on soil health projects (all soil health projects are suitable) can include their work in the SHINe bid to add value to their own work and SHINe. The benefits other than those highlighted above would include:

- Receiving 50% of project costs back through the Innovate Programme for that work.
- Receiving additional support from the SHINe researcher team, including research evidencing the outcomes of their work.
- Releasing further research funds to develop the SHINe platform further for the benefit of all.

Discussion and next steps:

- It was highlighted once again that establishing core soil health metrics and issues around data ownership and transparency are some of the biggest obstacles facing the farming industry. This is something the NFU is working on with the Food Data Transparency Partnership and they will follow-up with SHINe.
- **Businesses who would like to include some of their work on soil health into the Innovate bid will need to get in contact with the SSA before Wednesday 26th October. The deadline for the Innovate bid is on 2nd of November.**
- **Businesses who wish to collaborate at a later date or would like to partner but cannot commit to funding at the moment are also encouraged to get in touch to discuss potential opportunities.**

Category 3: Carbon / Net Zero

The SSA continues to examine the evolution of the soil carbon marketplace to evaluate whether it is delivering for farmers and soil health (alongside the Code project). Soil carbon and scope 3 emissions will be a complex issue for businesses to grapple with in the next few years and there are two recent developments which put land-based emissions and the role of soil carbon in achieving them in the spotlight in corporate inventories:

1. [The Science Based Targets initiative \(SBTi\)](#): The leading guidance on Paris agreement-aligned net-zero goal-setting has published its guidance for companies to set targets that account for land-based emission reductions and removals – including soil.
2. [The Greenhouse Gas Protocol \(GHGP\) Land Sector and Removals Guidance draft](#): This explains how companies should account for and report GHG emissions and removals from land management in GHG inventories. A draft has been published for external consultation.

In practice, these documents provide further clarity about how land-based emissions and removals can and should contribute to overall scope 3 reporting. SBTi sets out how businesses set a target for GHG emissions and the GHGP sets out how businesses account for GHG accounting.

Many of the SHIP businesses will also be involved with WRAP which published its *Scope 3 GHG Measurement and Reporting Protocols for Food and Drink* in May, translating global recommendations from the GHGP and the SBTi into simpler terms and interprets the information specifically for the UK food and drink sector. WRAP will also review their own guidance – to reflect these two documents, and subsequently every two years.

What does this all mean for soil?

- For the first time Carbon removals are now being included in FLAG (forestry, land and agriculture) and are a requirement. Both reductions or removals will need to be recorded.
- In terms of land use change, land use management and carbon removals, examples of the kind of interventions have now been included, such as enhancing soil organic carbon shifting to erosion control, larger root plants reduce tillage, cover cropping, degraded soil is restoration, biochar amendments.
- It is important to note that removals may not be used to meet any other energy/industry targets under the SBTi. For example, removals from soil carbon may be included in a FLAG target but would have no impact on energy/industry target.
- Only removals on land owned or operated by a company or within a company's supply chain can be included in FLAG pathways and count toward achieving a FLAG target.
- Existing carbon calculating toolkits aren't fit for purpose as they currently do not comply with Tier II IPCC guidelines for GHG reporting for soil. They may comply for other factors (e.g. livestock). The SSA is exploring this issue further with members of the UK Farm Soil Carbon Code Consortium.

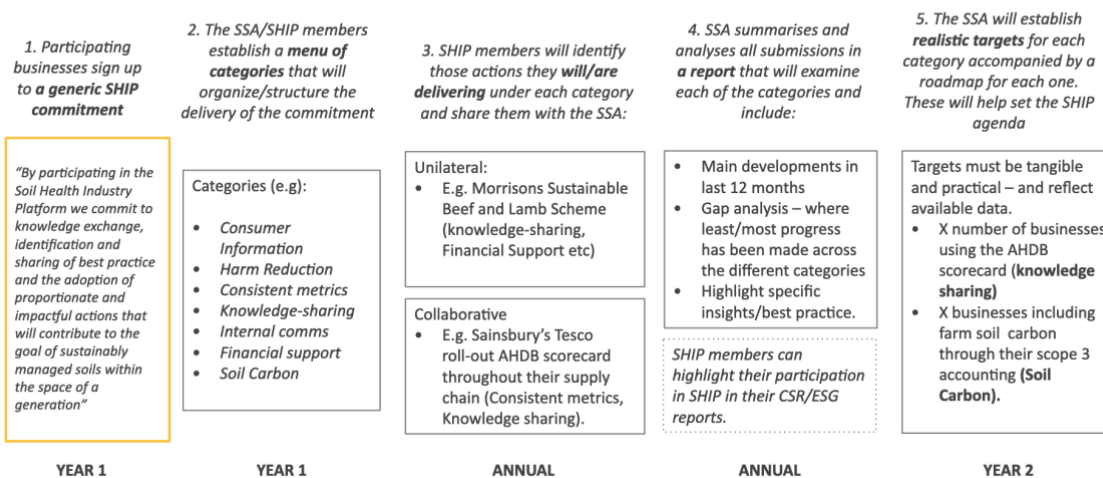
Discussion and next steps

- Some businesses present have signed up to SBTi and are happy to share their experiences with other businesses. This is an area some expressed were keen to work on together as a pre competitive space and ensure values align within the industry to ensure benefits stay within the food value chain.
- [A report](#) on the potential of agri-carbon markets by the Green Alliance (funded by the WWF and Tesco partnership) earlier in the year discusses similar issues and highlights the importance of farmers being the ones who should reap the benefits of soil carbon sequestration.

- The SSA will publish a briefing note on the developments discussed above to highlight what this means for businesses.
 - Members from NFU Net Zero will be invited to the next SHIP meeting to discuss this from a farmers perspective with the businesses present and delve into the complex questions around ownership and accounting.
3. **Shared Commitment/Target:** *How can the Supply Chain demonstrate collective/measurable commitment to delivering soil health*

From the beginning, the aim of SHIP has been to have a shared commitment/target to align and represent the work being done. The following pathway/framework was shared with the group at the previous meeting to outline the process of establishing a commitment and what this means for business:

Shared Commitment/Target Process



This will serve as an agenda for future SHIP meetings as this approach will enable the SHIP to strike a balance between a loose knowledge sharing platform and dealing with global brands with pre-existing global commitments that shouldn't be put in conflict.

A **commitment** has been drafted and is open for discussion and feedback: *"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 within the space of a generation"*.

Six **categories** have also been established which reflect the conclusions of the [Soil in the UK Supply](#) report published last year. These are: 1. *Consistent soil health metrics* 2. *Soil risk reduction and mitigation* 3. *Communications* 4. *Knowledge sharing* 5. *Financial support* 6. *Carbon/Net Zero*.

Clear **outcomes** have been established under each category and a **menu of actions** to achieve these outcomes have been drafted (see table attached to the same email). Some of these actions will be more straightforward than others and will already be undertaken by businesses on an individual level, others will require more collaboration or involve a coalition of the willing.

Shared Commitment/Target
What would it look like in practice

Commitment	<p><i>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 within the space of a generation.</i></p>					
Categories	1. Consistent metrics	2. Risk reduction & mitigation	3. Communication	4. Knowledge sharing	5. Financial support	6. Net Zero
Menu of actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish consistent metrics Roll-out metrics Incentivise monitoring Open-access repository 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research/identify risk Compliance in contracts 3rd party certification/assurance Internal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer education Sustainability labelling CSR/ESG reporting Internal messaging Supplier toolkits Regenerative definition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research collaboration Impact measurement Results publication Internal training Peer 2 peer promotion Farmer survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regenerative 'premium' Research transition Capital/training costs subsidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply chain clarity Carbon toolkits Incentivise measurement Develop guidance Internal clarity
Examples	TESCO participating in digitalisation of the Soil Health Scorecard	NESTLÉ Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENs)	MORRISONS 'Make Good Things Happen' blog	KELLOGG'S Origins Farmers	NOMAD The Sustainable Landscapes Humber Project	YEO VALLEY Regenerative Organic Farming Project

This framing will allow the SSA to:

- Frame and organise the complex issue of delivering for soils within businesses' supply chains.
- Identify gaps within business strategies and projects - where action is needed, where there is a lack of consistency etc.
- Create a menu of actions that will grow over time as projects develop and refine actions where more detail is needed.
- Identify experts to involve in SHIP.
- Report on the SHIP annually to measure progress against these outcomes over time - and allow for its future development.

This framing will allow SHIP members to:

- Identify best practice – what businesses can and should be doing.
- Communicate the importance of soil health to stakeholders, the issues being faced to tackle it and achievable ways to deliver for soil health.
- Leverage to push businesses – internally and externally.

Discussion and next steps

- Some participants found this commitment and framework useful in order to identify what a business is or isn't delivering for soil health at the moment within their supply chains and sourcing strategies.
- It will also be a useful tool to create internal alignment as different teams within businesses may be delivering (or hindering) these various actions and this will allow for the identification of such overlaps. E.g. Looking beyond the Environmental teams, discussing with animal welfare or healthy diets teams.
- It will be important to find measurable and realistic outcomes in order for businesses to report on their progress.
- This will also be a useful tool to communicate whether businesses have delivered on broader commitments such as the WWF Basket Metric.
- **Businesses will share the SHIP commitment table (attached) internally and are requested to book a one to one call with the SSA before the next SHIP meeting to discuss this**

approach, give feedback and start identifying which areas they are already working on and/or would like to start working on.

AOB and Next Meeting

- **Expanding the SHIP membership: The objective of the SHIP is to deliver change, which may need to involve other businesses. Businesses are asked to give some thought on who should be involved for the next meeting (sectors, type of membership etc).**
- **Next meeting: The next meeting will take place at the end of December. Guests may include individuals from NFU Net Zero and businesses are invited to suggest others they would like to hear from.**