



An international framework for measuring food and farming sustainability

Our aim to create a globally agreed metric for food and farming sustainability.

We stand at a critical moment in history for food and farming. Concerns about accelerating climate change, the impact of industrial agriculture, and growing public awareness about the connection between the way we produce food and our health, nature and future prosperity presents a moment of reset to build a more sustainable farming future. Alternatively, a global economic recession, triggered by the current health pandemic, could lead to a race to the bottom of cheap, unhealthy and unsafe food, that drives further climate change.

We believe an international Global Farm Metric (HFSM) could be a game changer in speeding up the much-needed transition to more sustainable food and farming systems, giving power to farmers, consumers, governments and businesses to make the right choices.

The problem we are trying to solve

At present, there is a lack of a common means for assessing the sustainability of food and farming systems across the world. Taking the mantra of ‘you can’t manage what you can’t measure’, this can make it very hard for farmers to understand how to make incremental improvements, governments to know which systems of production to incentivise, food companies to source more sustainable products, and consumers to understand what to buy to be sustainable and healthy.

Connected to this, the hidden costs of unsustainable food and farming systems are not included in the price of producing that food or the price consumers pay, meaning that those who pollute are not held financially accountable for the damage caused. Instead, these costs are passed on to other parts of society or the environment for generations to come.

An internationally harmonised framework

In order to set international targets for agriculture, monitor progress towards sustainable, regenerative and circular food production and internalise these hidden costs – akin to the financial accounting standards - we first need a common approach to measuring impact at farm level (both



positive and negative). To do this, we must facilitate the emergence of an internationally harmonised framework of metrics for measuring on-farm sustainability. This framework should be driven and developed by farmers in collaboration with experts and key organisations. The framework will aid farmer understanding and provide a common language for farm-level sustainability. It should take an inclusive approach, allowing all farmers to make incremental steps towards becoming more resilient, sustainable, regenerative and ultimately a climate change solution.

The framework could also be used by governments to design future public support schemes, food companies to aid supply chain transparency, the finance community as a basis for sustainable investment and consumers to better understand the relative sustainability of food products they purchase. This way, we can reward those producers who are delivering genuine benefit to the environment and public health and subsequently shift the balance of financial advantage towards more sustainable production on a global scale. The Sustainable Food Trust has been consulting with farmers for over 4 years to help design the first iteration of a harmonised framework of assessment. The categories of assessment are:

- Soil
- Water
- Air and climate
- Biodiversity
- Energy and resource use
- Nutrient management
- Plant and crop health
- Animal husbandry
- Social capital
- Human capital
- Productivity

With our partners we are now ready to take this to another level – locally and globally – to prove the idea in practice, create a simple tool for all farmers to use and gain support for a global framework.

In more detail our 3 pronged strategy:

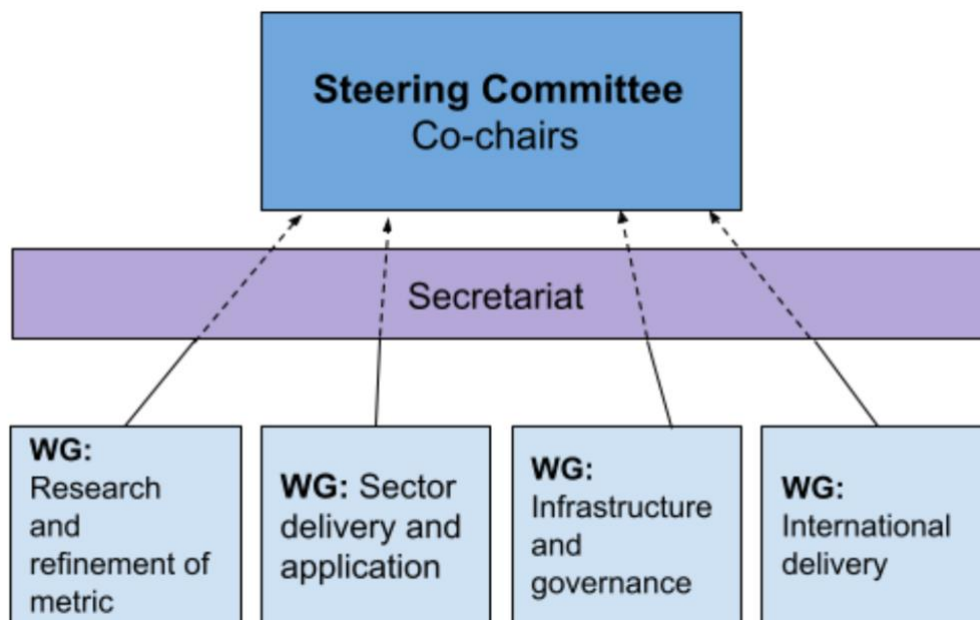
1. **Proof of concept** – Through country-based pilots and building on the pilots in Wales, England and the US and working closely with farmers, develop a coordinated effort to further pilot and test the metric to a) create a living case study of success that can serve as an example for others b) a rigorous data set to prove the effectiveness and c) to further improve the design of the framework.
2. **Work with key stakeholder to understand how the metric should be applied** – Develop proposals and working examples to show how the metric could be used by key sectors - beginning with farmers, but also government, retail/food companies and finance. These proposals and case studies will be developed by the Global Farm Metric (GFM) steering committee and working groups (see below).
3. **Reach agreement on a global food and farming metric** – build support from governments, private sector, farmers and consumers for a harmonised framework of on-farm sustainability assessment. This could either be voluntary agreement between all actors or a more formal agreement between governments in the context of the COP26 negotiations or UN Food Systems Summit.

To take this strategy forward, in February 2021, we launched the Global Farm Metric (GFM) leadership group. Thus far, representation on this group includes the National Farmers Union; WWF; Defra; Welsh Government; National Food Strategy; AHDB; WRAP; Morrisons; Tesco; Sainsbury's; Waitrose; LEAF; Soil

Association; NatWest Group; Ellen MacArthur Foundation; Food, Farming and Countryside Commission; Sustainable Markets Initiative and Systemiq. Now work is underway and an initial plan agreed, this group will be widened, with terms of reference for joining.

The structure we are working towards implementing with this group is illustrated below. A steering committee with co-chairs, underneath which four interrelated working groups (each led by one of the organisations involved) will operate - 1) to further develop and refine the metric, 2) to understand how it could be applied for within stakeholder groups, for example retailers or the finance sector, 3) understanding what future infrastructure and governance is needed is take this work forward in future and 4) building international support.

This work will be supported by a secretariat, housed within the SFT, which is accountable to the steering group. This secretariat will be made up a mixture of SFT staff and individuals seconded from the organisations and companies involved.



Alignment with existing schemes

The emergence of a harmonised framework does not mean to say existing schemes, including certification and private sector led sustainability assessment tools, become obsolete – in fact the opposite. Our aim would be for a globally agreed metric to sit above these, and provide guidance of how sustainability should be reported, whilst allowing for a healthy diversity of tools and platforms to operate under it. This includes the emerging carbon offset markets, which need a standardised approach to measuring and reporting to avoid market distortions and confusion. To see our 2017 gap analysis of existing scheme and report on the case for harmonisation, click [here](#).

The opportunity now

With significant change on the horizon for food and farming policy coupled with a greater awareness amongst the general public about the need for healthy food and farming, now is the opportunity to work towards consensus on developing a unified approach to measuring and communicating on-farm sustainability.

Our plan is to work with the teams organising COP26 and the UN Food Systems Summit and use these events as a platform to launch this initiative with the support of a collation of organisations and individuals.

Supporting Organisations:

