

Impact Report

2023–2024



Glossary

Agroecology: Nature-friendly farming and food systems that support a fair, sustainable society.

Agroforestry: Integrating trees onto farmland, creating healthier soils and increasing crop yields whilst also establishing vital homes for wildlife.

AI 4 Soil Health: An open access European-wide digital infrastructure, compiled using state-of-the-art Artificial Intelligence (AI) methods and new deep soil health understanding and measures.

Cool Food Pro: An innovative, free online carbon impact calculator supporting caterers to move towards more sustainable practices and share their environmental savings with customers. It is a Franco-British project created under the INTERREG FRANCE (CHANNEL) ENGLAND Programme, which we work on with a number of partners.

Countryside Stewardship: Countryside Stewardship provides financial incentives for farmers, foresters and land managers to look after and improve the environment.

DEFRA: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

EFRA committee: The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) exists to scrutinise the administration, spending and policy of DEFRA.

ELMs: The Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme is the overarching government grant funding scheme for farmers, foresters and land management.

Field labs: On-farm trials led by groups of farmers and growers who want to test and adapt their farming methods in real-time with support from researchers.

Food for Life (FFL): Soil Association's programme that makes good food the easy choice for everyone through a 'whole setting approach' and stratified award scheme.

Innovative Farmers: A not-for-profit membership network, for all farmers and growers who are running on-farm trials, on their own terms. The programme is managed by the Soil Association.

Interreg: Interreg NWE is a program that fosters transnational cooperation to make North West Europe more resilient, aiming to increase quality of life and wellbeing of citizens.

My Food Community: My Food Community is a community leadership programme intended to create a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action.

OFSTED: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

Organic: A certified example of an agroecological system. Governed by legal standards, and regularly and independently inspected, organic systems deliver produce in ways that benefit people, farm animals, wildlife, society and the natural world.

Regenerative farming: A conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems.

Sustainable Food Places (SFP): A programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain, to support local cross-sector food partnerships towards making good food a defining characteristic of the place where they live.

The Soil Association is the charity that joins forces with nature for a better future.

Working with everyone to transform the way we eat, farm, and care for our natural world, we build real solutions from the ground up.

Within the charitable group sit Soil Association Certification, Soil Association Exchange, and Soil Association Land Trust, which all deliver impact against our mission.



A letter from Helen



At the Soil Association, we work with and through a range of allies to achieve our goals. We start where people are, and through our wide-ranging programmes, schemes and services, help them take the next steps towards a healthier, happier and more sustainable future.

Increasingly, through initiatives like Soil Association Exchange, we are capturing data which demonstrates impact, helps us and others understand what is working well, and less well, and fuels our learning cycle. This evidence allows us to be a trusted partner for policy makers, encouraging them to put the right regulatory and economic frameworks in place, so that it's easier for individuals and businesses to make the choices and investments that will allow humanity to thrive in harmony with nature.

This is not easy work, requiring a coherent and seamless support system for the farmers, foresters, progressive businesses and citizen leaders who carry so much responsibility, and so much risk, in pursuing the pathways to agroecology and healthy, sustainable diets for everyone. We

made some big strides in developing and delivering this support system in 23/24, collaborating with our many friends and partners to enable us all to play our best role, without duplication of effort. We celebrated our 150th Field Lab, the farmer-led research projects that are at the heart of our Innovative Farmers programme. And with our partners, The Woodland Trust, we hosted the UK's first Agroforestry Show and were bowled over to have around 1,250 farmers and foresters attending. Just two snippets from an action-packed year.

As ever, our vision and ambition exceed our resource, and while we can look back at the year with some satisfaction, there is always frustration that we cannot do more, and faster. Despite some great strides, there continue to be worrying developments halting progress. We were

disappointed that Rishi Sunak's Government failed to give soil the same protection as water and air quality, despite the EFRA Committee on soil health recommending it. In January 2024, a new report by The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) warned that the government is unlikely to meet more than 4 out of the 40 targets set by its own Environmental Improvement Plan. And ultra-processed foods now make up around two-thirds of the average child's diet in the UK. So there is still much to do.

Thank you to the many funders and individuals who take the time to get to know us, to dig deep into our work and philosophy. Your preparedness to explore the breadth and depth of the range of issues that make up the food web, and to help us become ever more effective, is hugely appreciated. Every week, every month, I am astounded by the activities

and impact of what is still a relatively small team, a team so motivated and hardworking, sometimes too hard working! Many of them are young, fired up by the urgency and importance of our mission, and the part they can play in delivering it. They represent a generation whose lives will be shaped by the choices society makes this decade, and, judging by the numbers who apply for every position we recruit for, there are so many who want to actively play their part. Thank you to them, for their commitment and relentless hard work, and to all the members, supporters, trustees, funders and businesses who make their endeavours possible.

Chief Executive, Soil Association Group

Photo: Soil Association/Pete Williams



1,900 organic processors and 1,800 organic farmers certified by Soil Association Certification, as well as 200 health and beauty and 70 textiles licensees

900 farmers

benchmarking their farm environmental data through Soil Association Exchange



Impact on a page

Joined and supported **five European research projects** that are working on the best ways to support the transition to agroecological farming

Facilitated the launch and ongoing support of **30 farmer-led trials** (field labs)

1,250 attendees at the first UK Agroforestry Show, developing their knowledge and making new connections

Over **3,000 farmers**, growers and foresters learned from our 50 events and webinars or participated in our learning networks and field labs

27,407,392 hectares

of sustainably managed forest through **Soil Association Certification Forestry** (as of September 2024)



6,140 schools serving children nutritious, sustainable food, with 1.2 million meals served per day across a range of sectors, to Food for Life Served Here standards

1/3 of UK local authorities addressing food system challenges through Sustainable Food Places



145,310 people took part in Food for Life Get Togethers events between 2019 and 2023

152 communities supported to develop good food initiatives from Cornwall to the Outer Hebrides by My Food Community

7 million kilograms of CO₂ saved in the catering industry through Cool Food Pro



110 settings achieved a Food for Life Schools or Early Years Award this year, transforming their food culture from food education to food provision

175% increase in Green Kitchen Standard certified caterers this year, demonstrating their ongoing commitment to reducing energy, water and waste usage



140 items of news coverage per month, growing knowledge and deepening the public's connection with the natural world and our work to protect it



Over **7,800** monthly readers of our farming newsletter on average

2.5km

of hedgerow planted by volunteers at Woodoaks so far, with significant increases in biodiversity on farm



Photos: Soil Association/Sophie Nixon, Community Farm





We Work for

Every Farmer and for Forests

The farming and forestry sectors play a crucial role in tackling environmental crises and regenerating our relationship with the natural world.

By working with farmers, foresters, companies and citizens on the ground we're boosting uptake of nature-friendly farming and supporting high animal welfare standards. This "boots on the ground" approach strengthens our advocacy position with policymakers as we continue our work to bring government support for farmers and land managers in line with sustainable practices. In 23/24, we have influenced key decisions across the UK, leading to outcomes such as:

- DEFRA confirming Countryside Stewardship organic options would be taken forward into ELMS, ensuring support for organic farmers and those looking to transition;
- Welsh Government reinstating some support for certified organic farms and publicly acknowledging the environmental and economic benefits of organic;
- Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme was redesigned and saw increased uptake following our campaigning to include agroforestry options.

FABulous Farming

From 2019—2023, we supported 80 farms to adopt agroecological practice through the **Interreg NW FABulous Farmers** project. We promoted 10 farming practices that benefit biodiversity to farmers across 14 regions in 6 European countries and the UK.

For our farmers, coming together as peers around a particular practice or idea to 'show and tell' adds a level of relatability that can speed up adoption on the farm. Our on-farm walks and demonstrations have attracted over 500 attendees, and webinars 450, whilst our agroforestry learning networks involved some 120 members, highlighting the power of FABfarmers to bring communities together to share knowledge. We engaged over 1,000 farmers throughout the programme through events, webinars, 'kitchen table' talks and facilitating learning networks.

Devon farmer David Snowden says:

“You can be quite isolated on a farm, but when you go [to a FAB event], you get the opportunity to chew the fat with other farmers and find out about what they're doing.”

Support from FAB enabled us to make two films about agroforestry, which have a total of over 106,000 views and articles about FAB-related measures have been

published in more than 20 farmer-facing magazines – spreading the word about agroecological practice even wider.

The legacy of FABulous Farmers continues to live on, with findings and successes influencing national events such as Groundswell and our work through Soil Association Exchange. The learnings influenced and supported much of our stakeholder and policy work, with key practices that the programme championed now featuring in devolved farm subsidy schemes and the wealth of resources continues to be built on. The project also supported Soil Association's Citizen Science campaigns such as the Worm Hunt, which is now an annual event. Beyond this, we are continuing to contribute to new research projects, promote the uptake of knowledge and the development of networks in the farming sector through Innovative Farmers, the DEFRA funded 'Farm Resilience Fund – Scale Up' programme and Horizon Europe funded 'AI 4 Soil Health'.



Photos: FAB Wales Agroforestry Group/Cefn Coch, Community Farm

The Impact of Innovation

Since 2012, through **Innovative Farmers**, we've aimed to put farmers in the driving seat of agricultural research in the UK. By facilitating on-farm research and supporting farmers and researchers to work together, we support them to collaborate and find solutions to accelerate and sustain the transition to agroecological farming.

“It has been a privilege to support such an important programme, bringing together farmers and researchers to test transferable, nature-friendly and affordable approaches, and to see those influencing broader farming practices for a more sustainable future.”

Nikki Jeffery, Executive Director, King Charles III Charitable Fund

In November 2023, we surveyed farmers who had previously taken part in field labs. 87% said they continued with the practices they trialled. We asked them why they continued with the practices:

‘Diverse winter forage crop for grazing livestock’ field lab: “The trial backed our conclusions that a diversity of plants had greater benefits to the grazing livestock and soil health over winter, I considered it is worth pursuing further experimenting with the mixtures to improve overall yield and performance.”

‘Establishing and managing diverse swards in Cumbria’ field lab: “There were things that we were already doing or considering doing and I now have more confidence to continue. For example, identification of grasses and meadow flowers — each year I start off a bit rusty, but with the training from ecologists and field guides I can now identify and record the diversity of my swards and monitor changes resulting from the changes we are making to our grazing regimes”.

Photo: Innovative Farmers



Supporting Farm Woodlands

With a third of all UK woodland located on farms we need to find better ways to encourage and support farmers to manage their woodland sustainably alongside more new tree planting. We have launched a new project in England with funding from the Forestry Commission to develop and test a ‘Whole Farm Tree Plan’ approach.

This concept aims to provide a new entry point for engaging with farmers on woodland management as it analyses and visualises the tree resources, how they link with the farm system and the opportunities for enhancing the value from farm woodlands, hedgerows and agroforestry systems. This year saw the development of the concept, next year we will be testing the approach on 30 pilot farms. The funding allowed us for the first time to employ a specialist farm woodlands advisor.

The Value of Learning Together – Our Work in Scotland

Bringing diverse groups of people together to learn from each other can open up opportunities for collaboration, break down stereotypes, and help people reimagine what truly sustainable agriculture can look like. In Scotland, across 2023 and 2024, we've been involved in the **Agroecology: Strengthening Livelihoods** project, with six other organisations. This is the third iteration of our collaborative effort to support more knowledge exchange and peer learning around agroecological practices, funded by Scottish Government's Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund.

176 farmers, crofters and growers came together to explore agroecological, nature-friendly farming practices. Crucially, these included 20 of the practices featured in the Agricultural Reform Programme Draft List of Measures. This means our work directly prepared participants for the planned changes to agricultural support in Scotland.



We Work for

Every Child and for Local Community Leaders



What we eat has a significant effect on our health, and ability to concentrate and develop.

Yet we live in a nation where food insecurity and poor access to good options is increasing. Our **Food for Life Served Here** standards ensure that children have at least one nutritious meal a day. Our work with schools and Early Years settings transforms the food culture through a whole-setting approach. Our work within communities helps to give power back to the people who know most acutely what needs to change. On a wider scale, we have also continued to play a key role in shaping political opinions relating to sustainable diets:

Our open letter to the Prime Minister calling for action on ultra-processed foods in schools was endorsed by celebrity chefs and influencers including Yotam Ottolenghi and Thomasina Miers, furthering our reach and reinforcing the appetite for change. We continued to exercise formative influence over government policy, with revised procurement standards for public settings, including a proposed target for 15% of food in these settings to be organic.

Food for Life in the Early Years



Through our **Food for Life** programme we know that early intervention can make good food interesting even to the youngest members of a community, sowing the seeds for lifelong healthy habits. A shining example of this is Abu Bakr Nursery in the heart of Walsall – the location of one of our largest local authority public health funded Food for Life commissions – who have completed the Food for Life Early Years Award three times. Pleck, where the nursery is based, has a high level of economic deprivation.

By following the Food for Life Early Years Awards framework, Abu Bakr has continuously supported their community to access a higher quality of food and information. Sonia, Deputy Nursery Manager and Food for Life Lead, explained the impact the programme has had: “Food for Life has brought everything together. It’s not

just about educating the children, it’s educating the team and the family as well. We share activities that parents can do at home, giving them the tools to continue [learning] at home.”

The programme blends well with the cultural activities that Abu Bakr puts on, too. During Ramadan, the children cooked a different dish each week and took the food home for Iftar – **“It’s about taking that cooking experience home and sharing it and for families to share Iftar together,”** says Sonia.

In their latest report on the nursery, OFSTED stated: **“Children’s awareness of their own health and wellbeing is continually supported. Parents explain that their children remind them to make sure that they put only healthy foods into their lunchboxes and that jam sandwiches are not allowed.”**

Photo: Organic Farm Shop

Food and Farming Education in Kent

Where does our food come from, and how does it get to us?

It's a question we believe everyone should be asking, but for many people there is often a struggle to connect with the journey food has made, as well as to make swaps for more sustainable options. These issues are only exacerbated in areas where even access to food providers is limited.

St James' CoE Primary School in Medway, and the community it sits in, have no greengrocers or supermarkets available locally, with the nearest major supermarket half an hour away by car. Despite this, staff at the school wanted to give their students the opportunity to try new food and to get involved with growing – so with Food for Life, they set up a Farm to Fork group.

The group supports pupils to grow their own food, but also offers them and their families activity ideas so that the work can continue at home.

In the children themselves, the effect the group has had is tangible. **“One child was very resistant to trying new things. By the end of the term they'd tried an orange – mum couldn't believe it. It's little steps like that for our children which really mean the most”** says Lucy Williams, one of the staff leading the Farm to Fork group.

The work in Medway doesn't just stop there. We received funding from the Buffini Chao Foundation in 2023 to fund a project to link schools in Kent with a network of farmers and producers, providing children with the opportunity to visit a farm and better understand where food comes from. Children who are growing up surrounded by ultra-processed products face considerable barriers to developing a healthy relationship with food, and this project supports a whole-school approach to food education, giving children a better start.



Driving the UK's Expanding Good Food Movement

Through Sustainable Food Places we've seen our network of food partnerships go from strength to strength.

Sustainable Food Places is a programme we deliver in partnership with Food Matters and Sustain, and is funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and National Lottery Community Fund. It supports a movement of Food Partnerships to catalyse shifts to better food systems through local and national advocacy. Now with more than 110 member locations covering over 30% of all local authority areas in the UK, these food partnerships are transforming food and farming in their place, driving long-term change towards a more sustainable and resilient food system. Some highlights from Sustainable Food Places include:

Newry, Mourne and Down Food Partnership works to put local food producers at the heart of the area's tourism industry. Working with the Ark Social Farm, the food partnership is supporting its neighbouring communities that are experiencing food insecurity to access locally grown organic food.

Granite City Good Food supported Aberdeen City Council to sign the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration. The food partnership supports leading caterers and businesses to adopt sustainable food policies and runs the popular Community Garden Festival.



Bwyd Sir Gâr Food secured funding from the Welsh Rural Development Programme to grow a more resilient and sustainable local horticulture sector by developing procurement hubs to help put local food onto Welsh public plates. They also utilised UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support small-scale farmers to access machinery to improve sustainable land management.

This year, we have also worked with over 50 emerging food leaders from across the country, and from across the food system, through our flagship My Food Community programme. We build their capacity and confidence to 'champion good food' and make change in their local area.

Photos: Sustainable Food Places/Food Partnerships in Wales, Organic Farm Shop, Food for Life/Abu Bakr Nursery

We Work for

Organic for All

The standards we set for organic production are a key part of how we make impact in the world, pushing for more sustainable, climate-friendly food, forestry, textiles and more.

Yet in the UK, the value of organic is not yet fully realised by government and retailers, nor available to the whole of society. While organic has recognised ecological and health benefits, cost and access are currently seen to outweigh this.

To us, this is unacceptable – organic food shouldn't be a privilege. Our new vision for a future, where everyone has access to healthy food, produced in a way which protects our planet, is **Organic for All**. Through this strategy, which was developed with key stakeholders across the industry, we aim to:

- Influence political manifestos and strategically engage retailers
- Create a stable route to market and build demand for organic by influencing public procurement targets and driving consumer uptake of organic products
- Produce a state of knowledge report to demonstrate organic agriculture's performance in relation to nature, climate and health

Our **Organic Market Report**, released in February 2024, highlighted the missed opportunity of organic, showing that while

organic sales are growing in the UK, this is largely driven by imports. Just 3% of UK land is farmed organically; by contrast, in the EU— where member states are actively encouraged to implement policies and incentives to drive organic production and accessibility – the average is 10%. All 27 nations of the EU have an organic action plan and the EU as a whole is aiming for 25%. Organic farms are home to 30% more species of wildlife on average.*

To redress this, we've stepped up our work to promote stronger policy support for organic farming, including lobbying for an English organic action plan and seeking government-funded commitments within the forthcoming Scottish organic action plan. We've also been organising activities at conferences, exhibitions and webinars, highlighting to businesses and investors how organic can deliver against their net zero and biodiversity strategies.

We are also working to identify and connect key players across the supply chain – farmers, businesses, citizens, policy makers and civil society organisations – to identify opportunities

to boost domestic organic production. At the moment, around 90% of organic arable crops (like wheat) are imported when they could be grown here. There are complicated reasons for this, so in March 2024, we held an arable roundtable to bring together those who can unpick these complexities and unlock the huge potential for organic arable crops in the UK.

We've also been looking at ways to normalise organic and open up new routes to market for farmers, starting by linking up local organic producers with key public procurement outlets – our schools and hospitals. This year, we have brought together leaders from some of the most inspiring food hubs across the UK, seeking to understand what support is needed to grow their impact and replicate their models elsewhere. In Scotland, we're collaborating with Sustain to pilot our 12-month **Give Peas a Chance** project, connecting local organic farms with schools in Aberdeenshire to provide organic peas for 8,000 meals a day.

This is just the start – we want to see more work like this happen. As Sarah Compson, our Director of Standards Innovation explains,

“The organic movement offers a clear solution to the climate, nature and health crisis – we just need it to scale up.”

By educating on its benefits and providing the correct incentives and on the ground support through policy and initiatives like Food for Life and Innovative Farmers, we are taking concrete steps to normalise organic. **“Around 90% of school meals in Copenhagen are organic and it's been like that for close to a decade. Now adults who grew up with organic food every day in school see organic food as a no brainer for them. It's not an exclusive thing, it's just food as it should be.”**



* Land-use intensity and the effects of organic farming on biodiversity: a hierarchical meta-analysis Sean L. Tuck, Camilla Winqvist, Flávia Mota, Johan Ahnström, Lindsay A. Turnbull, Janne Bengtsson First published: 30 December 2013 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.12219> Citations: 509

Partnerships for Impact

A lot of our work for climate, nature, and health goes on behind the scenes – whether it's helping farmers make new connections to share information, supporting community leaders to develop plans for their local areas, or influencing governmental policy.

Over the last year, we've been working with our partners to share practical solutions to the health, nature and climate crises far and wide so we can create more impact together.

The Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance (SNA), a group of 14 members led by the Soil Association, was established in 2023 to combine areas of interest and expertise towards a shared goal: to secure integrated law and policy to address the full nitrogen cycle. Over the past year, the Alliance has commissioned research which demonstrates the huge quantities of nitrogen being lost from food and farming and increase awareness of the damaging impacts.

The Agroforestry show, organised with our partners Woodland Trust, drew around 1,250 people, all backing a 'win-win' future of farming with trees for climate and farm resilience. The show saw the beginning of change in action, with consensus across the many delegates that trees are key to ensuring food production while tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. This work was part of our wider push for more

trees on farmland supporting farmers to lead the way in reversing our declining biodiversity and wildlife.

“The UK's 1st Agroforestry Show was the pinnacle of our successful partnership with the Soil Association over the last decade, where together we have helped raise the profile and implementation of agroforestry across the UK. By bringing our respective knowledge and skills together we are enabling real change to take place and look forward to building on this with the next show in 2025.” –

Helen Chesshire, Lead Farming Advocate, Woodland Trust

With our partner Blue Diamond Garden Centres, we transported our nature friendly gardening vision to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023. Our interactive display entitled 'Why Soil?' helped highlight what you can do in your own garden, and also included free organic approved seeds (red clover and phacelia which are great green manures) for visitors. This drew praise from attendees and the press, with The Telegraph commenting that **“While every**

exhibitor at Chelsea Flower Show relies on it, only this educational exhibit is going the extra mile to celebrate the wonderful stuff that is soil”. The stand also attracted lots of celebrity attention including from Monty Don, Will Young and Alan Titchmarsh.

In October 2023, we were delighted to be one of three charity partners at the Blue Earth Summit; three days of talks and networking provided excellent opportunities to learn and connect with the movers and shakers in sustainability. Our Chief Executive, Helen Browning, spoke on a panel with Saasha Celestial-One, Co-founder and CEO of Olio, and Tom Wright, CEO of Yeo Valley, moderated by Patrick Holden, discussing 'The Future of Food'. We are excited to return to the Blue Earth Summit in 2024, as an Ecosystem Partner.

In February 2024, we launched our new 'Farm to Fork' Partnership with Ocado Retail, which aims to significantly boost the adoption of nature and climate-friendly farming practices around the UK.

Our partnership will include establishing five demonstration farms, each focusing on a different area of farming. The partnership will also support research to advance animal welfare, working closely with farmers to enhance positive animal welfare and demonstrate how giving farmed animals a good life is practical, profitable and sustainable.

Alongside the work on the ground, Ocado Retail and Soil Association will build a 'Farm to Fork Ambassadors programme' – encouraging people who provide healthy and sustainable food to share their stories and experiences with others in the industry.

Photo: Soil Association/Ocado Retail



Hannah Gibson, Ocado Retail CEO said of the partnership:

“

Supporting local farmers and promoting homegrown produce is something we care deeply about at Ocado. Earlier this year, we launched a Best of British aisle on site to make it easier for our customers to shop for food that's farmed and produced in the UK. Our new partnership with the Soil Association reinforces our commitment and by working with farmers who are pioneering agroecological farming practices, we're increasing the quality, freshness and sustainability of the food we're able to offer our customers. ”

Delivering impact across the Group

Every forest – Certified difference in Uganda



So far, 17 forests have been awarded the FSC’s Ecosystem Services certification by **Soil Association Certification**, with the first UK forest receiving certification in 2023. The certification aims to reward those who responsibly manage forests, providing a framework for verifying impacts and approving claims for forest managers. Through it, we’re also making a difference further away from home too – working with Uganda Timber Growers Association (UTGA), a group committed to restoring a large area of natural forest in

West Bugwe Central Forest Reserve. It’s an area that has been severely deforested in recent decades due to illegal harvesting of timber, firewood, charcoal burning, grazing and agricultural encroachment, resulting in 82% of forest cover being lost between 1986 and 2016.

To combat this, the forest restoration project started by setting aside all existing native ecosystem in the area for protection. UTGA have now restored 500 hectares of natural forest cover, planted over 180,000 native tree seedlings, and restoration is still ongoing. This will protect soil, contribute to global climate goals and improve biodiversity for years to come. In fact, the forest is home to two nationally threatened species of butterfly that will benefit from the increased forest cover.

And it’s not just the environment that has benefited from the reforestation work in Uganda. UTGA has worked with local communities to involve them in the project, training them to plant and tend to the trees, and patrol the forests. This created more jobs in the community and a sense of pride in the forest. Locally, people are still involved in the project, showing the power of community in sustainable forestry.



Exchanging data for reward

Farmers are increasingly being tasked to deliver nature restoration while continuing to supply quality food. Historically, it has been challenging for busy land managers to measure their performance across key environmental and agricultural metrics, optimise their practices, and identify the right funding opportunities.

Soil Association Exchange is now working with over 900 farmers to make this process more accessible and effective. This year, they introduced the Dynamic Benchmarking tool, which is revolutionising how farmers understand their relationship with nature. This innovative tool provides real-time insights into farm performance

across 40 key metrics, including carbon emissions, bird species abundance, plant diversity and soil organic matter.

For the first time, farmers can see how they score in each metric compared to hundreds of other farms, empowering them to make data-driven decisions. These insights, combined with guidance from our advisors, help farmers improve the resilience, productivity, and sustainability of their operations.

Robert Fleming of Castle Sinniness Farm shared his experience: **“Getting a better understanding of where we stood, matched with some sound advice, has given confidence to take the next step.”**

Bringing nature back in local communities



Woodoaks Farm has been on the map for the last 500 years. More recently, it has been under the stewardship of the Findlay Family, who generously donated the 300-acre farm to the **Soil Association Land Trust** in 2020, ensuring its preservation and continued legacy.

As proud stewards of this historic land, Woodoaks Farm’s mission is to ensure that it remains a sustainable source of nutritious food, a haven for wildlife, and a place for learning, community connection and wellbeing. We’ve seen more migrant birds in the last year, including the Common Whinchat, Northern Wheatears, and Stonechats coming throughout the year using the Market Garden as a hotspot refuelling point. There have also been increasing numbers of passerines birds such as common linnet, goldfinch, yellow hammers, meadow pipets and skylarks, plus breeding pairs of Green Finches, Little Owls and Kites. And our connection to the community has grown too, with our school visits doubling to over 350 school children

visiting the farm in 23/24, alongside our first visits from Girlguiding and Scouting groups.

We are also making progress developing the site further. Nestled in the heart of The Farm is a recently restored 16th Century Grade II listed Black Barn – a glorious, heritage-rich building that offers an incredible opportunity to reconnect communities with food, farming, and nature.

With initial funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, plans are now in place to develop the surrounding buildings and cart sheds into a community and educational hub with a year-round, inclusive activity programme that will inspire, engage, and welcome everyone.

As a small farm with strong connections and wide reach, Woodoaks is determined to bring school children, growers, volunteers, and community groups on their regenerative farming journey, inspiring them to make healthier food and growing choices, whilst living and working in ways that support nature and a climate-friendly future.

Plans for next year

We have an exciting year ahead of us:

For every farm and forest, we will:

- ✓ Support farmers to be paid fairly for the food and environmental services they provide and accelerate the transition to agroecological farming by continuing to lobby for supportive and effective farm subsidies, promote all available support, and facilitate better access to green finance.
- ✓ Deliver projects with European partners, which include research on the use of AI for better soil health, the development of training modules for farm advisors on nature-based solutions and rural innovation services, and research that aims to increase the uptake of intercropping - a novel sustainable farming method.
- ✓ Get people growing and eating more fruit and vegetables, supporting growers to increase UK production. We will use our Horticulture Report to launch a campaign aimed at Government and policymakers.
- ✓ Develop a new programme focussing on farm animals. A framework to talk positively about animal welfare on UK farms: identifying, observing and optimising quality of life opportunities and choices.
- ✓ Continue work on agroforestry and supporting the sustainable management of farm woodlands with preparations for the next Agroforestry Show taking place in September 2025. We will facilitate learning networks, provide resources and deliver an innovation project to identify ways to support the sustainable management of UK farm woodlands (which comprise 1/3 of all UK woodlands).
- ✓ Promote the need to repair the health of our rivers by working with the Wildlife Trusts and Sustain to tackle the impact of industrial livestock farming, pushing for dietary change towards 'less and better' meat, beginning with industrial poultry.



For every child and local community, we will:

- ✓ Support even more children and communities to access and enjoy healthy, sustainable meals through our Food for Life programme and Sustainable Food Places. This will tie into the opportunities presented by the Good Food Nation Act in Scotland, including government support for a better food system.
- ✓ Encourage climate friendly food procurement through Cool Food Pro with support from Deloitte, ensuring it continues to cut CO2 by accurately responding to caterers' environmental impact management and reporting needs.
- ✓ Protect children's health by launching a new citizen engagement campaign on ultra-processed foods, informed by the Lords Inquiry and the upcoming Lancet series, which we have been contributing to.
- ✓ Work with the new government to increase access and support for healthy and sustainable food by advancing policy on public procurement, animal welfare and eco-labelling, ultra-processed foods, dietary inequalities, and healthy and sustainable diets.



For Organic for All, we will:

- ✓ Work from the ground up to make organic affordable, available, and accessible to everyone in society, securing tangible change for the sector. The 'Organic for All' vision will leverage our unique role working across the sector to join the dots between consumers, policymakers, farmers, businesses, and communities to address challenges and collaborate on solutions. This will include:
 - bringing more new diverse entrants into organic food production through our New Organic Entrepreneurs work.
 - lobbying policymakers for organic action plans and adequate support for farmers to convert to organic.
 - engaging with the development of new organic regulations in the UK – pushing for rules that make it easier for small growers to access the market.
 - working closely with the retail sector to secure more organic ranging in supermarkets.
 - supporting schools and hospitals to source more organic for their menus.
 - presenting the latest scientific research on the impact of organic agriculture to build a stronger case for support with all stakeholders.

Photos: Sustainable Food Places/Food Partnerships in Wales, Heart of BS13

Charity financial performance report

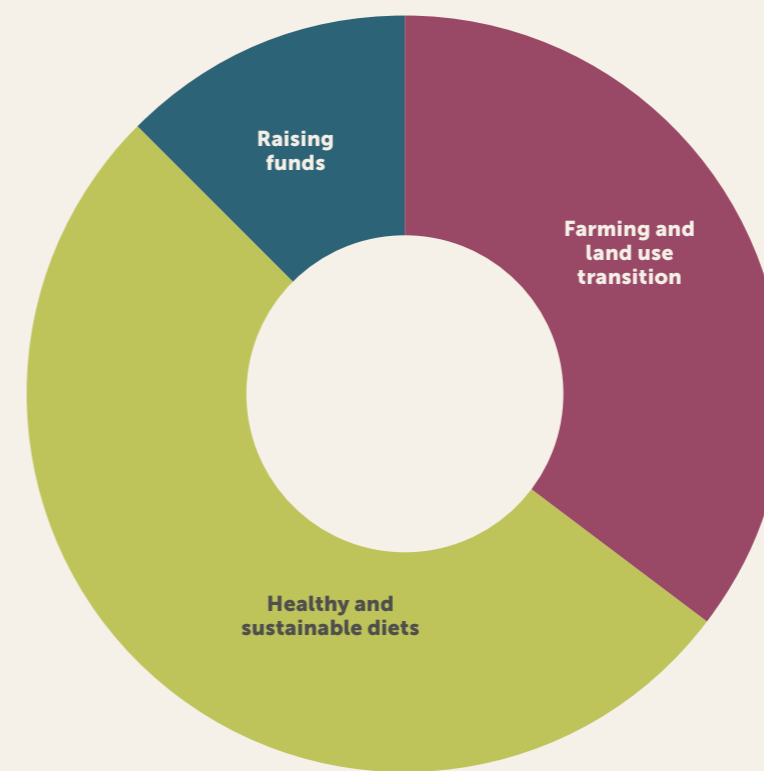
This is a summary of the charity's financial performance taken from the 2023/24 audited statutory accounts of The Soil Association Limited.

Full copies of The Soil Association Charity and Consolidated Group Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2024 are available at <https://www.soilassociation.org/who-we-are/agm-annual-review-and-finances/>



Total income

This year, our total incoming resources reached **£8,148,000**, an increase of around £850,000 on the previous year. This included both restricted funds, for the delivery of specific programmes, and unrestricted funds, which the charity Trustees can determine how best to use.



Total expenditure

This year, our total expenditure was **£8,689,000** which was reduced from the previous year due to a higher level of spend in the prior year on restricted programmes and investment in our charitable work from unrestricted funds. Expenditure showing in the report and accounts is reduced by the £690,000 release of a long-term creditor held for repayment of some grant funding which has now been resolved.

The Group 'free' reserves reduced from £993k last year end to £932k at 31st March 2024, which is still within the targeted range of free reserves set by the Trustees. Our reserves are generated by and held for the benefit of the Soil Association Charity and its trading subsidiaries, Soil Association Certification and SA Sales and Services.

Donations

£978,000 (2022/23 £964,000)
Donations from corporate donors, trusts and foundations and individual supporters.

Legacies

£94,000 (2022/23 £377,000)
Legacies are an invaluable source of income for the charity, but income can vary considerably from year to year.

Membership subscriptions

£787,000 (2022/23 £791,000)
Monthly donations from our 11,106 members.

Grants

£3,405,000 (2022/23 £3,310,000)
Restricted grant funding to run key areas of our programmatic work increased by 3%.

Contract income

£1,328,000 (2022/23 £1,099,000)
This includes income earned from providing services, principally associated with our Food for Life programmes to local authorities and caterers.

Income from trading subsidiaries

£1,514,000 (2022/23 £741,000)
The trading profits donated to the Charity by Soil Association Certification and SA Sales and Services were significantly increased, driven by increased corporate partnership income in SA Sales and Services.

Other

£42,000 (2022/23 £20,000) E.g. royalty income, rental income, bank interest.

Farming and land use transition*

£3,066,000 (2022/23 £2,723,000)
Our largest farming programmes in the year were Innovative Farmers, Defra funded 'Farm Resilience Fund — Scale Up' and Horizon Europe funded 'AI4SoilHealth'. We also co-hosted the UK's first Agroforestry Show.

Healthy and sustainable diets**

£4,554,000 (2022/23 £5,622,000)
Continuation of significant multi-year programmes including Sustainable Food Places and Food for Life (FFL) Scotland, with FFL Get Togethers spend reducing in the final year of the programme. We also continued to run a portfolio of local authority FFL Commissions.

Raising funds

£1,069,000 (2022/23 £897,000)
The cost of raising funds increased from the prior year as we continued to invest in developing sustainable income streams for the future.

* Inclusive of activity supporting every farm and forest and organic for all
** Inclusive of activity supporting every child and community and organic for all

Thank you

The work we do has never been more important and we're so grateful to have the support of our generous members, supporters, and partners. Together, we're able to continue transforming the food and farming landscape, making the planet a better place.

From everyone at the charity and everyone we work with - in the fields, in school kitchens, in forests and beyond - our thanks go out to all of our members, supporters and partners, including:

B and J Lloyd Family Charitable Trust

Chapman Charitable Trust

Counter Culture Drinks Ltd

Deloitte

Dentons UK and Middle East LLP

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Ethical Shop

Forestry Commission England

Garfield Weston Foundation

Hugh Fraser Foundation

John Salmon Trust

Joseph and Annie Cattle Trust

King Charles III Charitable Fund

Lund Trust

National Lottery Community Fund

National Lottery Heritage Fund

NatureScot

Ocado Retail Ltd.

Persula Foundation

Samworth Foundation

ShareGift

Stella Symons Charitable Trust

Stewardship

The A Team Foundation

The Aurora Trust

The Aurum Charitable Trust

The Big Give Trust

The Blair Foundation

The Blue Diamond Group

The Buffini Chao Foundation

The Downforce Trust

The Earthsong Foundation

The John and Mary Ann Foundation

The Joseph Nickerson Charitable Foundation

The Northwick Trust

The Leslie Mary Carter Charitable Trust

The Oglesby Charitable Trust

The MacRobert Trust

The Paget Charitable Trust

The Reed Foundation

The Sanderson Foundation

The Savitri Waney Charitable Trust

The Sylvia Waddilove Foundation

The William Dean Countryside And Educational Trust

Tisbury Telegraph Trust

Toby and Regina Wyles Charitable Trust

Triodos Bank

Vintage Roots

W M Mann Foundation

Whitley Animal Protection Trust

and all our supporters who wish to remain anonymous.

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www.soilassociation.org



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T **0131 370 8150**

Registered charity no. SC039168

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www.soilassociation.org/support-us

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