

# LUNZ Soil TAG – In conversation with the Soil TAG Community

MONDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024

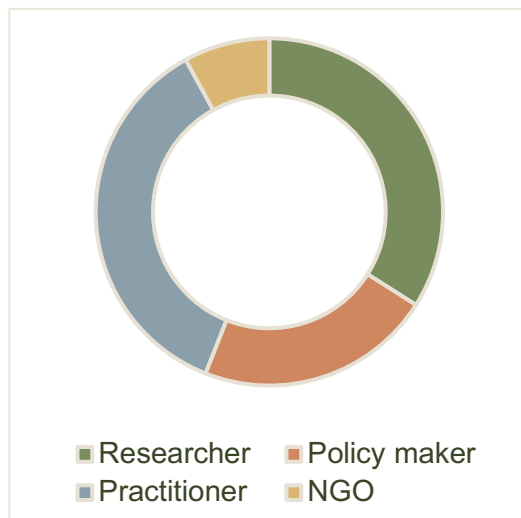
TAG Co-leads:

Professor Pete Smith  
and Ellen Fay



## INTRODUCTION TO SOIL TAG

Following an in-person inception meeting at the beginning of 2024 during the Hub launch, combined with proactive engagement with the wider community, 52 people have signed up to be part of the Land Use for Net Zero, Nature and People (LUNZ) Hub- Soil Health and Carbon Dynamics Topic Advisory Group (TAG), spread across the disciplines as outlined below:



This June, the co-leads invited all those who have joined the TAG community to meet online to keep members abreast of our progress (an overview of the TAG objectives and methodology can be found [here](#)) and to provide an opportunity for the group to share their own ideas for shaping our work, ask questions, provide feedback and hold a wider discussion.

Prior to the meeting, a short [survey](#) was sent to give another opportunity for thoughts to be collated, the results of which are incorporated into the note below.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

The survey shared ahead of the meeting provided initial insight into some of the most important themes for TAG members, and these were expanded on during the call. Following an outline of



progress to date, participants were invited to share ideas on topics they hope the TAG will explore over the course of LUNZ. Below is a summary of the verbal discussion, including comments made in the survey and the Zoom chat:

### **1. Linking practices with soil health outcomes**



*There was broad discussion about how and why to link practices associated with soil health with actual outcomes and whether this will enable more confidence for those undertaking initiatives aimed at improving the soil, including more clarity about monitoring approaches and technologies:*

- It was recognised that this will involve drawing on the extensive background work already done by organisations working in this space, which make up the third leg of soil monitoring initiatives – either driven by land managers themselves, the industries they supply or other engaged parties, such as water companies, the investment community and those with an interest in green finance.
- It was commented that this work is as much about helping to clarify which metrics are best for which purposes, so it is easier for practitioners/farmers to decide what the best option is for them and evaluate how to integrate soil assessment into their approaches to improving the soil.
- Government and researchers are in a strong position to enable better this level of on-farm engagement in soil health assessment and understanding, so that stakeholders can decide on a set of metrics and monitoring protocols and have confidence these are robust and will be useful to anything the government announces in the future.
- It was also noted that it will be important for any agreement on soil metrics to be looked at in relation to any established work on soil health assessment, such as the ongoing Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment in England that is monitoring soils across different land uses, led by Forest Research and Natural England.
- To this end, it was agreed that all soils are important, not just farms. Managed and semi-natural habitat soils and soils under infrastructure all impact or contribute to net zero, biodiversity targets, and are especially relevant to questions of land use change.

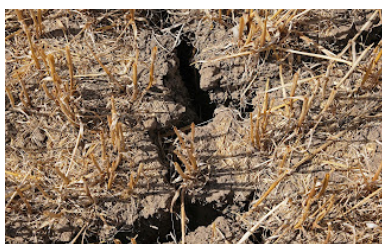
## 2. Collating, aggregating and promoting existing evidence, especially around soil carbon



*There was a clear appetite for further identification and clarification about the key actions needed for soil's role in approaching the nature and climate emergencies.*

- It was suggested that greater focus on soil biodiversity monitoring could provide a golden thread to unify other approaches to soil health. The TAG is keen to help identify those *golden threads* and learn from across the UK about which add most value.
- While each nation has established its approaches to national monitoring, technical alignment on specific elements such as soil organic carbon may be possible. This would enable the UK to report on some critical indicators at a national level in the future.
- It was also noted that the TAG should try to help land managers feel confident that the soil management practices they are adopting will make a difference and investment in soil assessment will be worthwhile.
- This is especially relevant to work beyond the devolved administrations – it was suggested the TAG should plan to calibrate recommendations with other nations (non-UK), especially the Republic of Ireland. This could be covered in a talking heads interview with the Irish leads in this space.

## 3. Interlink between LUNZ topic areas



*A number of comments referenced topics that were of great interest to the TAG but would perhaps be best suited to some of the other Work Packages/TAGs/National Teams/LUNZ projects, or through collaboration across the Hub, notably on quantifying the benefits of regenerative farming, defining the term better, or even avoiding the term completely. This was a wide-ranging discussion touching on:*

- The need to recognise that farmers use the term a lot, evidenced in the well-attended Groundswell festival centred around regenerative principles, with similar events in other parts of the UK.
- A need to keep in mind that the term refers to practices, and the impact of those practices on soil health.
- A feeling that the agricultural systems TAG is also relevant for this topic, but there are parallel initiatives beyond LUNZ also, such as the Agrifood for Net Zero Network (AFN Network+).
- It was suggested that useful outputs on this topic could take the form of a 'LUNZ Note' on defining/explaining terms and different activities under the 'umbrella' of Regenerative Agriculture.
- It was noted that the British Ecological Society will soon be publishing a report on Regenerative Agriculture in the UK which will include a definition of Regenerative Agriculture and highlight its potential, and that a Cranfield project has made a start on this (Environmental Sustainability and Wider Impacts of Agroecological compared to Conventional Farming Systems).
- Beyond this, the value of making it mandatory to integrate LUNZ projects working on soil with the Hub Soil TAG was emphasised, and although the TAG doesn't have the capacity to dictate project workstreams, it was agreed thinking in these terms will help create a unified approach to research.

---

## NEXT STEPS

The call finished with a reminder that the TAG is an open forum for collaboration, discussion and co-design, and we're hoping for as much input from 'external' TAG members as from the LUNZ consortium. We hope this will build a community which can help deliver the objectives of the Hub, as well as more effectively share insights into soil research and policy.

With that in mind we will continue our drumbeat of updates and engagement and would encourage all TAG community members to reach out for involvement in talking heads, evidence reviews, contributions to content, advice and any assistance that can help us work together on questions of soil health and carbon dynamics.

This contribution doesn't need to be time consuming. We're keen to receive articles (new or historic), diagrams, or comments that may need further investigation or promotion, or which nicely encapsulate an aspect of the story that we're trying to tell.

On behalf of all the TAG members and the LUNZ HUB, Ellen and Pete would like to thank all those who contributed, and we look forward to working with you throughout the 40-month project.

