



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco working group minutes

**Date** 24 February 2025  
**Time** 10:00 – 13:00  
**Venue** Caxton House / Microsoft Teams

## Attendance

*Co-Chairs:* Judith Batchelar, Food sector expert and Environment Agency Deputy Chair and Karen Lepper, Deputy Director for Food Data, Standards and Sustainability

Eighteen Eco working group members

Defra officials (FDTP policy team and two AFC scientists).

*The Eco working group is a stakeholder engagement group that provides input on policy development as part of an open policy design process. These discussions do not reflect agreed government policy.*

## 1. Welcome and introductions:

- Judith Batchelar (JB) welcomed members to the meeting and recapped Chatham House rules.
- JB set out the agenda, including presentations and discussion on:
  - AHDB's proof-of-concept for a Farm Data Exchange system.
  - LED 4 Food's standardised data format.
  - Planned Defra research on data governance and data infrastructure.
  - Karen Fisher and Defra official's scoping work for skills and capacity building in the agri-food sector.

## 2. Defra updates:

### a) General update from Karen Lepper:

- The FDTP team is feeding into the recently announced food strategy and 25-year farming roadmap.
- The FDTP team are continuing to engage with colleagues in the Devolved Governments. Minister Zeichner recently wrote to his counterparts in each of the Devolved Governments to ask officials across the UK to work together on shared and interoperable approaches to environmental data. This will help formalise some of the existing working relationships.

### b) FDTP updates:

A Defra official gave an update on recent and upcoming FDTP progress. This included:

- **LED 4 Food** recommendations for a **product-level methodology** are due to be shared in the coming weeks.
- **3Keel** (presented at the November meeting) have now published their [report and recommendations](#) on **Within Value Chain Mitigation** (WVCM) for the Forestry, Land use and Agriculture (FLAG) sector. Defra are doing internal scoping to determine what Defra and DESNZ should do with the recommendations.
- We are closer to determining priorities for **data sharing infrastructure and governance** – will discuss later in meeting.
- Good progress on **skills and capacity building**. Karen Fisher has supported Defra with a needs assessment, again to discuss in this meeting.

It was also acknowledged that the FDTP have made a lot of progress since the publication of last year's [FDTP eco roadmap paper](#).

- The Defra team are considering our approach to communicating progress with businesses, including outputs from research as they are delivered. We also want businesses to understand our longer-term direction of travel.
- JB asked the group for feedback on the best channels to do this and what messaging should focus on.

### c) Farm carbon audits:

A Defra official gave an update on farm carbon audits.

- Government is committed to increasing robustness of MRV of on-farm emissions.
- FDTP officials are looking at options to standardise the methodology for carbon calculator tools.
- Since the November meeting, officials have conducted engagement with farming bodies, banks, retailers, academics to develop ideas further.
- **Carbon calculator standardisation:**
  - Industry (particularly retailers and banks) say standardisation key for unlocking data from carbon audits.
  - Defra acknowledge that there will not be a single methodology for all use cases and users. There will need to be some trade-offs and prioritisation, including on comparability vs granularity and ease of use.
  - Mixed reactions from stakeholders.
  - Considering how to achieve widescale uptake of a standardised methodology.

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- Ministers will make the ultimate decision – will be sending advice in the coming weeks.
- **Farm carbon audits:**
  - Looking at full range of options to encourage uptake of farm carbon audits in England. Recognise that methodology divergence is just one of several barriers.
  - Options will be significantly constrained by fiscal situation and spending review. It is looking unlikely that Defra will be able to fund carbon audits at scale.
  - Exploring regulatory options and tweaks to support an enabling environment (e.g. ensure they make good business sense).
  - Working with the Farming Countryside Programme within Defra to tackle barriers of training and awareness.
  - Will aim to announce within one of the Defra strategies.
- Will likely be able to share more on tool standardisation sooner than on farm carbon audits more broadly.

### Discussion / questions:

- Members discussed the need for farm carbon audits to make sense for farmers at a “common-sense” level. One member suggested lessons should be drawn from Northern Ireland’s carbon audit rollout, and the EU’s policies to support individuals and reallocate of support.
  - A Defra official clarified that we are drawing from international and Devolved Government experiences.
- One member asked if data from carbon calculators would directly feed into the National Inventory.
  - A Defra official confirmed there were currently no clear plans to integrate data into the national inventory. National Inventory modelling requires farm level activity data, as emissions are calculated using a bottom-up approach at national levels. Individual farm carbon footprints, without underlying activity data, would not be suitable for national inventory reporting. Whilst the inventory has not in the past commissioned any direct data collection or surveys of UK farms, the inventory does make use of various Defra and Devolved Government-led agricultural surveys.
  - However, the widespread use of harmonised carbon foot printing for farms could be a valuable data source for national reporting on the uptake of various mitigation measures. We are considering how this could inform the national inventory and will be trialling an approach in collaboration with DAERA. Making inventory methodologies available publicly to enable alignment is also being considered.
- Another member asked if there had been any work to map out other types of data farms are already reporting (to government, retailers, and standards bodies).
  - A Defra official confirmed there had been some mapping, although some data collection is confidential so need to plug these gaps.
- Attendees agreed that farmers would need granular enough data to reflect changes on-farm to ensure there can be incentives to invest time and money into making improvements.

### 3. **AHDB Farm Data Exchange proof-of-concept:**

AHDB presented on their Farm Data Exchange proof-of-concept.

- AHDB's research has identified four current key challenges for environmental data:
  - Trust barrier, particularly from farmer's perspective.
  - Uncoordinated requests, particularly for mixed enterprises.
  - Inconsistent approaches to calculation. This is being addressed by the FDTP policy discussions heard earlier.
  - Risk of double counting for reductions/sequestrations. This is being addressed by technical standards bodies.
  
- **The Farm Data Exchange:**
  - To address the first two issues, subject to finalising the funding package, AHDB are launching a **Proof of Concept (PoC)** pilot of their data exchange system, previously dubbed the data custodian.
  - The PoC will test the system's ability to ingest and share existing data for carbon calculation, giving levy payers control of their data while it travels through the Exchange. The PoC aims to facilitate collaboration across industry to enhancing the project, and build credibility with users before expansion.
  - The PoC will focus on Beef and/or Dairy to prove feasibility and investigate opportunities to expand into Lamb. The PoC also hopes to begin identifying data insights for farmers without additional data entry.
  - In the longer term, the aim is for the exchange to take in much more data from a range of sources, with similar expansion in potential outputs including to government and industry for supply chain scope 3 reporting – where there is permission from the data owner.
  - The data exchange can be thought of as the plumbing by which any and all farm data can flow, with the levy payer choosing what can be shared where.
  - The PoC is being funded by levy and non-levy sources. AHDB will then raise seed funding to launch the exchange, which should be self-funding once operational.
  
- **The PoC will launch this year**, followed by work on governance due to be completed in early 2026. Moving beyond the PoC will be dependent on seed funding, AHDB expect this may take a couple of years.

#### Discussion / questions:

- Members were supportive of the project, and keen to see how it works in practice given the difficulties in accessing data to be used many times.
  
- A member queried how the project would be funded as some sectors are currently not paying the levy.
  - AHDB assured the member that the PoC is costed for this year, and seed funding from non-levy sources will enable the system to take off before becoming self-sustaining and potentially revenue raising.
  
- A member raised that data would need to flow both ways through the system to support reporting, referencing Tesco's portability hub and Mondra's many touchpoints with data.
  - AHDB recognises the importance of supply chain collaboration and will continue to engage the supply chain as the project develops. It is important

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that the cost model work is complete before engagement with data users such as Mondra to understand the value of data for levy payers.

- A member raised similarities in the project to other initiatives and suggested that other projects/solutions were supported by better underlying datasets but may have had challenges with scale, trust and uptake.
  - AHDB believe they are uniquely positioned given existing trust from farmers, are working on a cost model to show where value can be gained by farmers as there is confusing rhetoric on this at present.
- A member asked how the exchange would interact with the wider system, whether it required widespread use to be effective and how difficult it could be to bring in more data.
  - AHDB acknowledged the complexity of the challenge. The PoC targets lower hanging fruit, which can then be built upon.
- A member queried whether processor data would be feeding in and suggested engagement with Seafish and the marine sector.
  - Processor data would feed in. Marine integration is not being considered as part of the PoC but may be included later. AHDB will engage with them in the meantime.
- A member raised the potential to work alongside assurance schemes, as has happened in other countries, to prevent duplication of data collection/sharing.
  - This was acknowledged, and AHDB have engaged with assurance scheme providers, but any steps would need agreement and support from levy payers.

#### **4. LED 4 Food Update - Data format harmonisation:**

WRAP introduced their ongoing work into data format harmonisation (LED 4 Food work package 2).

- Data currently exists in numerous places in different formats that can be hard to access and share. Consistently formatted data will enable greater interoperability and more accurate accounting for environmental impacts more easily.
- The **HESTIA format** can be a common language, leveraging the fact that the format is respected, and HESTIA provides free access to their data platform and open-source models.
- A roadmap to 2027 was presented.
  - Currently the focus is mapping work with calculators and the FLEA project, and development of a how to guide to support businesses in implementation alongside PACT.
  - Next year there will be further mapping work with LCA providers and case studies developed to showcase how consistently formatted data can flow through the supply chain due to the increased interoperability.
- This will enable granular and aggregated data to be shared at scale.

#### Discussion / questions:

- Members received the work well, recognising the importance of a common language to achieve data interoperability.
- A member raised the use of multiple data systems by farmers and the complexities of integration with farm management software.

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- WRAP acknowledged the complexities and will engage with farm management software providers.
- A Member queried the potential to use commodity codes in line with the Digital Border plan, to enable use on commodity import and export.
  - WRAP confirmed that there are Harmonised System codes in the glossary
- A member asked how byproducts and co-products are allocated.
  - Another member confirmed that you can add as many products as necessary, with examples such as animal excretion being converted to fuel for biogas, with options on allocation approaches as appropriate.

### **5. Defra data sharing infrastructure and governance research:**

Defra officials introduced a new research project being commissioned, based on conversations from previous meetings on data infrastructure and governance. The project will be procured through an open tender in early summer and will run for 12-18 months from late summer/early autumn this year.

- The **Food Data Infrastructure and Governance project (FIG)**:
  - The project aims to produce an evidence base to inform development of infrastructure and governance that enables scalable data sharing in the agri-food system.
  - The project will review, test, and recommend models of governance needed to enable development of an ecosystem of data-sharing infrastructure. This will build on previous work and provide a scalable proof of concept for the collection and communication of agri-food data across supply chains.
  - There will be three stages to delivery, starting with a discovery phase mapping existing data sharing in agri-food landscape. The project will then explore existing approaches to governance and design of data sharing systems to provide recommendations. Finally, the project will test and deliver proof of concepts for scalable data sharing.
- Defra will engage with wide range of experts to co-develop ideas for the specification.
- A member referenced existing research on related areas for awareness including that of Leeds University on healthy and sustainable places data services.

### Discussion / questions:

Members were asked to share examples of where GHG or other environmental impact data is shared between different organisations in agri-food supply chains. The following questions were shared in advance to guide discussion:

1. What technical or organisational / cultural barriers have you encountered / observed that hinder effective data sharing?
  2. What improvements to data sharing have you experienced/observed in the past few years?
  3. What improvements are you expecting / hoping for in the next few years?
- A member raised that own-brand suppliers were typically more willing to provide data to retailers. Branded supplies had concerns over the robustness of data and how it would be used. There were also concerns about being required to provide

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explanations if there were changes in data over time, and concerns around the understanding of reasons given.

- A member raised that some important data in the agri-food is not even stored digitally and is therefore inaccessible.
- There was discussion on data at a farm level. It is difficult to identify the same farm across systems, which could be solved using unique identifiers for farms. However, it was acknowledged this may be challenging as farms are ever changing. It was also recognised some may be unwilling to share sustainability data, and recent reactions to methane suppressing feed products demonstrates the importance of good communication around work done in this space.
- A member shared their difficulties in going from companywide to product level data.
- Several members recognised improvements in the space overall and praised the clear effort to converge work going forward. The need for further consideration for imports and exports was identified and the need to prevent oversimplification of nuanced areas was highlighted.
- A member encouraged the use of existing networks such as those in farming, and the important role they can play in ground truthing and widespread adoption.
- It was recognised that the work should be joined up across Defra and its arm's length bodies, and other departments such as DESNZ and DBT around reporting requirements.

### 6. **Data skills:**

An FDTP official and Karen Fisher tested an approach to furthering the environmental data skills and capacity building objectives within the FDTP roadmap.

- Two phases of work to cover UK businesses across the value chain. Initially focussing on GHG emissions. The goal is to partner with existing and emerging organisations that are supporting data and carbon literacy skills.
- Phase one is a needs assessment exercise, which is almost finalised.
  - This aims to identify which segments of industry are major influencers and/or contributors to food system emissions. Also identify which areas have high need for skills but are currently offered little support.
  - Influencers identified include Senior Leadership, Procurement and Commercial teams, and those working on product development. Different roles have different information requirements.
- Phase two is to identify opportunities to use existing/emerging channels for the delivery of training.

### Discussion / questions:

The following questions were shared in advance alongside the slides to guide discussion:

1. Do you support the direction of travel we have laid out in Phase 1 and Phase 2?
2. Do you have any suggested builds on this approach?
3. Would your organisation be willing to help sense-check & refine the initial needs assessment?
4. Do you have any suggestions for organisations we should approach to partner with for Phase 2?
5. Do you think this work should be prioritised alongside the development of the component parts of the agrifood data system?

There was discussion on current providers of this type of training.

- Farming education:
  - Often peer to peer via farming networks.
  - Harper Adams University's School of Sustainable Food and Farming was raised.
  - A member highlighted work connecting 25 existing farming networks to create the Sustainable Farming Network. Supported by Landex and the Agricultural Universities Council, the network connects farm networks to educators.
  - Members raised the "Poultry Passport" in the poultry sector, which provides training for poultry farmers, and that AIC and ADAS offer training.
  - Red Tractor and Red Lion standards also require formal training be undertaken – it could be possible to add sustainability or data standards as part of this.
- CEOs and Seniors Leaders:
  - Many will have membership to Chapter Zero, Business Connect and Future Food Movement.
  - IGD provide programmes to a network of CEOs and Senior Leaders, and are considering sustainability specific courses in this area.
  - Senior leaders were seen as a key audience to cascade information and drive the agenda.
- EIT Food are also working on education packages for the food sector.
- Members shared difficulties in finding appropriate training off the shelf (existing materials too technical, or don't exist at all). This has led to many organisations creating bespoke materials, which adds cost and complexity.
- When considering the training, members raised the importance of speaking with one voice to avoid confusion causing inaction. It was also raised that while sustainability training is important, data fundamentals are a necessary bedrock on which to build.
- Members shared concerns that farmers are likely to feel the conversation has left them behind, which should be addressed before the gap with the rest of the supply chain widens further.

## 7. **Summary / next steps:**

- JB gave a summary of the meeting's topics and encouraged members to bring discussions to their networks and senior leaders. Responses to questions posed during the meeting will be gratefully received after the meeting too.
- JB reiterated the request on communications, emphasising that the FDTP team are keen to hear what members believe the key messages and channels are that the FDTP should be using for engaging with relevant parties.
- JB requested members get in touch if they have suggestions for meeting venues.
- JB raised the possibility of the FDTP team taking on industry secondments to support work on governance and external communication, asking members to get in touch if they know of suitable candidates.