

Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP)

Eco Working Group minutes

Date: 8 September 2025

Time: 10:00 am to 1:00pm

Venue: Caxton House (UKRI office) and 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

Twenty-three Eco working group members. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) officials. Welsh Government officials, DAERA officials.

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.

Welcome and updates

Judith welcomed everyone to the meeting and made a note of changes to the policy team at Defra, thanking outgoing members as we acknowledge their contributions. .

Defra general updates (10 mins): Karen Lepper

With a cabinet reshuffle announced over the previous weekend, there is a new Defra Secretary of State appointed, Emma Reynolds, and Dame Angela Eagle has been appointed as the new Farming Minister. The department will be briefing new ministers and confirming their priorities.

Defra has been looking at how we align our data work with the food strategy, and the governance structures. We intend that this group (Eco Working Group) continues as it is.

There may be a delay to the publication of the comms document. We still hope this goes through in the next 2 to 3 months. Eco Working Group members were thanked for their contributions over the summer in reviewing the draft comms document.

Research projects will continue as normal despite the reshuffle.

FDTP evaluation update (ICF International)

ICF International (ICF) presented an update on the evaluation activities of the FDTP. ICF has been appointed the independent evaluation contractor for the FDTP by Defra. They

are leading this work supported by Eunomia. They shared some slides summarising progress via email with the group.

ICF introduced the FDTP Theory of Change diagram and narrative. They asked the group to reflect on the diagram presented and send any thoughts back. They recognised that, as this is a dynamic partnership, the Theory of Change will evolve.

ICF explained that the process evaluation work has started to explore the FDTP working arrangements and coordination mechanisms. Early findings will be presented during the next group meeting. The impact evaluation will start early next year, which will help to understand how effective the project has been in terms of money and resources

The evaluation team also presented 3 options for a monitoring dashboard to enable Defra and partners to demonstrate progress.

Action: Group to send thoughts back to ICF on the monitoring options and the Theory of Change diagram by 22 September

WRAP – update on product level methodology (PLM) recommendations

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) representative noted that following on previous updates on PLM recommendations, the recommendations have been published. We are starting a testing phase with businesses, consultants and data service providers.

There are webinars on 10 and 24 September to enable as many people to have the opportunity to attend as possible.

Nature metrics session

Introduction – Defra

The discussion is intended to introduce the topic of nature metrics and reporting and how the FDTP can best contribute to this.

Nature is essential to our lives with growing evidence of its importance, but there has been a vast drop in global wildlife of 73% since 1970. The food system is dependent on healthy ecosystems, so as these natural assets degrade, the ability to ensure a healthy food chain is impacted. There are numerous initiatives underway to help mitigate against this.

In this meeting we have a range of presentations looking at environmental metrics beyond carbon.

WRAP – review of nature metrics and reporting under LED4Food work package 4

The 4 key steps in LED4Food WP4, which is designed to make recommendations on a multimetric approach to product level environmental impacts, include:

- a literature review

- assessing options
- engagement with stakeholders and developing feedback
- developing recommendations

WRAP has recently completed a literature review considering product level metrics, farm assurance schemes and regenerative agriculture frameworks. The review has looked at the picture at European and global level as well as within the UK.

High level findings indicate 4 categories of metrics:

- atmosphere
- biosphere and biodiversity
- geosphere
- hydrosphere

Different frameworks cover different environmental impacts. Capturing non-carbon metrics adds complexity to measuring agrifood environmental impacts.

Assessing options – the 3 options identified initially are focusing on product-based metrics, farm metrics or supporting corporate reporting on nature.

A multi-metric product environmental footprint is only achievable at scale with secondary data. This could allow ‘no regrets’ decision making based on expected outcomes in some cases.

Farm-based frameworks typically require farmers to log practices and measure outcomes, and this can support business and environmental resilience. Several frameworks have been developed. There is room for an assurance scheme-type benchmark describing the type of farm a product came from, such as a ‘biodiverse’ farm.

The Taskforce on Nature Disclosure (TNFD) sets out the key indicators for corporate reporting. We could think about a playbook or guide to leverage data collected for scope 3 reporting, plus a small amount of additional data for wider metrics.

With these 3 options in mind, we need to consider how we envisage the collection of non-carbon data.

Discussion

WRAP followed a similar approach to the work last year in LED 4 Food, by looking at what is done both in the UK and internationally.

Data: we need to determine what our ‘national capability’ is in terms of the data sources that underpin nature (and wider) reporting. We also need to consider how to integrate and maintain this data as part of this system. This includes data held by Defra or government and data held across research institutions and universities.

The WRAP review included both practice and outcome-based approaches.

Users and use cases: choice of metric and collection methods need to be determined by clarity around what the organisation or end user is trying to achieve.

Farm profitability review (Minette Batters)

This review has reached out to many parts of the food chain; retailers, producers, farmers. Lots of input has been received. Now, we are narrowing this down to the key recommendations.

The review has highlighted the following points.

There are pressures from our changing relationship with EU, COVID and the war in Ukraine.

There is not a balanced relationship between the prioritisation of food production and environmental outcomes.

The farming sector is our largest manufacturing sector and provides an opportunity to grow the economy and increase investment. There are opportunities for expanding the growth and trade potential for food and ingredients. Farms need access to business support and advice.

The market operates at a UK level, and we need join-up on cross-cutting issues. There has been a lack of focus on promoting the quality and profitability of English food products.

There remain information gaps for farm businesses and consumers including environmental standards and provenance information.

There are opportunities for:

- a food and agriculture standard that recognises production with a lower environmental impact, and that improves soil health – this could help attract private funding and support trade by assuring sustainability standards
- improving planning and collaboration between farmers in catchment areas
- partnerships between industry and Defra to work on these issues

Recommendations are due to be finalised by the end of October. FDTP offered to support this work in its next stage.

Discussion

A group member raised the importance of directing private investment towards sustainable farming. If current trends continue smaller producers will not be able to compete and we will lose the diversity of our farming sector. There are different potential financial instruments and models that can be used. We need to focus on soil health and nature to create high integrity schemes.

There needs to be joined up work on improving and standardising metrics. These should include resource use efficiency, soil health and nutritional content.

Action for Minette Batters and Farm Profitability Review Team: further information on the recommendations to be circulated to the group once developed in October.

Green Finance Institute – Task Force on Nature Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)

The primary focus of TNFD is the interaction between nature and business: how businesses impact on nature and how businesses depend on nature. TNFD encourages companies to think through their nature risks and opportunities and how to manage them. The framework is government-backed but market-led and has been written by taskforce members that include financial institutions and corporates.

There are 14 recommended disclosures globally and 3 sector-specific metrics that could be material for food and agriculture businesses. Nature covers everything related to the environment minus climate. TNFD uses the LEAP assessment method: locate, evaluate, assess, prepare.

There has been a big increase in TNFD-adopters. The investment community has public facing policies reporting in line with TNFD to manage risks and opportunities. There is sector-specific guidance on food and agriculture and value chains.

Discussion

The group discussed interaction between product and company level reporting but stressed that there is no specific guidance that links between the 2 approaches. It is a balance between materiality, what is most financially important and the availability of data.

TNFD location requirement is important as nature-impacts are location specific. This is a challenge for complex value chains.

Practical application of nature metrics in a food business

Food impacts and depends on nature. A proper assessment requires defining nature and finding a way forward for small businesses who find it difficult to produce data.

The business has used consultants previously but have now moved this in house. The business has used the LEAP framework; location has been a struggle to work back to specific producers although assailable.

Work has continued to define parameters, dependencies and impacts, risk clusters, and delivery. Climate is one-dimensional, but nature is spatial and thus a good deal more complex. This increases the computational requirement by orders of magnitude, particularly in marine applications where it is a 3D problem.

A challenge is the lack of nature specific scenarios in specific locations, so the majority of assessments are based on Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) climate change scenarios. Reconciling multiple metrics is very challenging, so qualitative narratives are often more effective than numeric tools in decision making.

The benefit to the business has been understanding where there is a need to diversify supply chains due to a long-term risk to business and targeting specific risks.

General discussion (hosted in 2 breakout groups)

What are the priority issues and challenges your organisation faces in relation to environmental metrics beyond carbon?

What would it take to address these issues, and who would be involved?

Metrics

It was recognised that taking a broader view (including nature metrics) is necessary to factor into decision making at corporate and farm level to avoid skewed outcomes. Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are not enough alone to motivate action. Businesses are increasingly focused on resilience and supply chain risks.

An alternative suggestion was that the group should remain focused on GHG emissions and setting up a good infrastructure. This would enable us to move on to incorporate other indicators at a later point. It was felt that biodiversity metrics were not sufficiently developed to be outcome-based yet. Rather they were at the practice based-stage, and that it may be too soon for the FDTP to shift attention beyond GHG emissions.

Members shared experiences of collecting and testing data against different metrics.

Water is a logical starting point, but setting targets is harder than with carbon due to the spatial context.

Agroecological and organic sectors have been collecting data on species richness and abundance for decades. The conversation has moved on to looking at functional diversity, flow and field genetics and relationships between species. Agroecology networks are looking at how to measure meaningfully, improving ecosystem health and resilience, genetics and relationships between species.

Research is looking at how carbon reduction affects biodiversity and what metrics are needed for reporting.

There are significant challenges in moving to a multi-metric approach at product level. There is no consensus on suitable methodologies for many metrics and a reliance on proxies (such as land use for biodiversity) and on practice-based approaches rather than outcome based.

Data

Geolocation: We need good geo-spatial data that serves multiple different uses but this is not so easily applicable for Nature Metrics where context is critical. However, good geo-special data is also necessary to be able to account for carbon removals.

Data type and quality: Different quality of data would be needed according to its purpose and user. There are a huge number of requirements for 'nature data', such as natural capital accounting and food security.

There is some data available, but it may be sensitive, incomplete or not well signposted. For example, the data collected and used by local councils who have mapped where nature recovery is needed.

Secondary data is okay for product reformulation and consumer labelling but will not drive change on farms where the biggest opportunities are. This needs primary data. However, we should not expect all primary data to come from farmers. Primary data collection should be a national capability and should then be shared back with farmers. Examples shared from Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) programme, EU Carbon Farming Framework and from marine.

Much of the current understanding of nature is qualitative, and quantitative measurement is expensive.

Data infrastructure and incentives for data sharing

Businesses are still grappling internally with scope 3 reporting: where to get the data and the systems to bring it in, and how to align it with plans and budgets.

The lack of proven, scalable frameworks such as the French approach (PEF) which can be said to have shown limitations is a barrier to progress for uptake.

Software and data infrastructure for multi-metric reporting is complex and not yet mature. Infrastructure for GHG should be designed to be future-proof. For nature-related metrics, it is important to consider geolocation.

We need a mechanism to present data back to farmers which provides an incentive to drive change. The AgNav tool in Ireland was cited as an example.

There is a need to bring all data insights together to support food and farm businesses in their profitability and resilience.

Capacity and capability

We need more experts on nature and an ability to interrogate this data within businesses. This is both on the tech side and ecology.

A lot of what we know about nature metrics is qualitative. Quantitative measurement tends to be expensive and resource intensive.

The School of Sustainable Food and Farming at Harper Adams University is collaborating with major supply chains to reduce carbon while also assessing broader nature impacts. They are happy to explore this further and bring it into discussion within the Eco Working Group and FDTP.

Summary

There was a general consensus that taking a broader view of sustainability was important within food and farming businesses. There were practical steps we could take now in FDTP work on data infrastructure and governance to:

- future-proof it for nature, such as consideration of geolocation
- improve the visibility and accessibility of existing data on nature that could be held in national or local datasets

However, there were mixed views on the viability of extending the existing approach to supply chain specific life-cycle assessments (LCAs) at product level to a broader set of nature metrics.

WRAP and Defra will further review this feedback in relation to the planned work on WP4 in Led4Food and revert to the Working Group for further input. Further comments should be shared with the Defra team via shared mailbox.