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Improving Soil Health in the UK

Response 1: Department for
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Our ref: TO2026/02449

Daisy and Lucky
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12 February 2026

Dear Daisy and Lucky,

Thank you for your email of 15 January about improving soil health in the UK. We have been asked to reply.

Thank you for sharing the key recommendations and considerations from your report on Improving Soil Health in the UK. Defra recognises the importance of healthy, resilient soil and that it is vital for producing food, improving water quality, increasing biodiversity, storing carbon, and helping to mitigate climate change impacts such as flooding and drought. We want soil to be responsibly managed, improved and protected through the sustainable management of soil, which improves soil health.

The revised Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP25), published in December 2025, sets out the commitment to bring at least 40% of England's agricultural soil into sustainable management by 2028, increasing to 60% by 2030. To help achieve this, we plan to publish principles of sustainable soil management by 2026 and encourage farmers and land managers to sustainably manage and protect their soils through agri-environment schemes. As part of this, the Sustainable Farming Incentive funds actions such as introducing herbal leys, cover crops, and reduced tillage. These actions aim to support farmers to transition from conventional farming methods to sustainable land management practices. As your report mentions, it is important to have a shared understanding of what is meant when we talk about healthy soil, and the EIP25 includes definitions of soil health and sustainable soil management.

Through the Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment programme, we are carrying out national soil monitoring to build a robust national baseline from which we can monitor improvements in soil health, identify trends and support future policy decisions. This data will aid an improved understanding of national soil condition, including soil microbial activity, and will feed into a healthy soil indicator that will help to monitor national trends in soil health. We also plan to publish a methodology and guidance consistent soil health monitoring by 2026, that will help empower farmers and land managers to establish baselines and implement sustainable soil management practices.

We have sent the details of your report and its findings to the relevant Defra officials for their information.

Yours sincerely,

Ministerial Contact Unit