

Innovative Farmers 2025 – 2028

Investment: £2.5 million (£520,000/year)

Goal: To empower farmers to research and adopt agroecological practices with the confidence that they'll deliver for nature and their business.



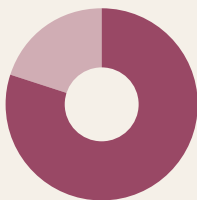
The need

Intensive farming methods can damage the soil, reducing the future productivity of farmland, and are the biggest driver of biodiversity loss on land.

With farmland making up 70% of the UK, a significant shift in farming practices is urgently needed. We know that farmers learn best from other farmers. However, farmer voices are under-represented within both public and industry-funded agricultural research. This results in a lack of support needed to meet the practical challenges and risks they face when implementing changes to their established practices. **Innovative Farmers** (IF) is a key element of the Soil Association's strategy to help farmers confidently transition to nature-friendly farming.

By bridging the gap between academic research and on-farm application, we support a just transition in rural communities, enabling knowledge sharing, reducing risk for early adopters, and promoting long-term environmental and economic sustainability. This builds climate resilience and food security from the ground up. With farmers facing increased pressure to deliver cheap food alongside public goods, the next phase of IF will be critical for achieving a widespread, just transition towards agroecology.

Why we're best placed



80% of triallists have said that IF inspired them to do something new or differently on farm

In the past 12 years, we have supported **over 150 field labs** with **750 triallists** and **40 research institutions**. Knowledge and experience gained is freely available to other farmers in the UK and beyond, accelerating the widespread adoption of nature-friendly farming. **Every year over 2,500 people take part in learning events** (including farm walks, conference sessions and online workshops). Findings are also shared with the wider farming community through the press, social media, the IF website and newsletter with 5000+ subscribers and other Soil Association and farming networks. In a recent survey, **80% of triallists said that IF inspired them to do something new or differently** on-farm.

Project objectives

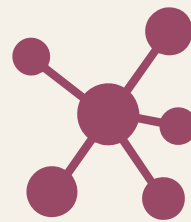
- **Improved on-farm testing**; this includes longer trials (5+years), increased research budgets (including farmer time and overseas knowledge sharing opportunities), and statutory research mapping.
- Uncovering **innovative agroecological solutions**; trials will be measured against environmental, animal welfare, farmer welfare and economic metrics for real world viability.
- **Knowledge exchange**; we will run **local learning networks** alongside field labs of high thematic interest, enabling more people to share knowledge and learnings. We will also co-create “living labs” around broader themes e.g. water quality.

Project activities



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new field labs with 155 new farmers, focused on 5 priority themes: Diverse and resilient pastures; nature-friendly weed, disease and pest control; animal health and welfare; home-grown animal protein; cover crops and reduced tillage.



14 wider learning networks, including 2 agroecological living labs, reaching 150 farmers.

Knowledge exchange events reaching **7,000 people**; farm walks, webinars, conference sessions.



A research **study trip fund for 40 farmers** to explore innovative practices outside the UK.

How you can help

A gift of:

£9,000 could fund a Learning Network for one year.

£10,000 could enable outreach and events, including free farm walks and webinars open to all farmers, for 5,000 farmers over one year.

£42,000 could fully fund one Field Lab lasting three years.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal. For more information please get in touch on **0117 914 2442** or email **development@soilassociation.org**
www.soilassociation.org

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