



**Summary Minutes of the Soil Association AGM
Saturday 17th November 2018
Spear House, 51 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6AD**

Present:

Staff: Joseph Applegate (Service Delivery Analyst), Sandra Bartolomeu-Rook (Executive Assistant), Liz Bowles (Head of Farming), Helen Browning (CEO), James Cashmore (Director of Food For Life), Martin Dawson (COO), Megan Farrow (Head of Nurture Programme), Rachel Johnston (Fundraising Administrator), Georgina McLeod (Director of Communications), Louis Pharoah (Director of Fundraising), Julie Wilkins (Head of Marketing) and Grace Young (Marketing Manager - Supporter Development).

Trustees: Gabriel Scally (Chair) and Rosemary Radcliffe.

Members and guests Tamsin Brown, Juliet Chalk, Robert Clarke, Sandy Coates, Mark Coleman; Susan Coppard, Roger Crowther, Helen Cusins, Mr Cutcliffe, Mike Gower; Ken Guy, Jerry Harding, Stella Hurley, Marie Ingle, Susan Jonas, Karen Lord, Jennie Maughan, Dr Rosemary Merson, Martin Miller, Neil Preedy, Mary Rivers, Alastair Sawday, Nick and Sally Scholefield, Victoria Seaman, David and Carol Self, Gillian Smith, Debbie Staveley, Helen Williams, Julian Wood and Sarah Worthington

Apologies:

Trustees: Thomas Bourne, John Carson, Oliver Dowding, Jo Ingleby, Rachel Martino Graeme Matravers, Martin Nye and Isabel Oliver.

1.0 Welcome & Introduction - Gabriel Scally - Chair of Trustees

In keeping with the Soil Association's tradition, a minute's silence was held before the meeting began and to remember Peter Melchett (former Director of Policy at the Soil Association and member of the House of Lords).

Gabriel gave a few words on Peter. He was a very modest and shy man who came from the Mond family, who collectively made a huge contribution to society. He had the distinction of serving as a government minister, including in Northern Ireland where he was universally respected. He steered through the legislation for schools which enabled the development of the first set of integrated schools in Northern Ireland and he created a network of leisure centres around Northern Ireland, particularly in deprived communities.

The Mond family motto was 'make yourself necessary' which rung true in Peter's case. Peter brought Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth into the mainstream; he oversaw many high-profile campaigns and was involved in the destruction of GM crops at Walnut Tree Farm in Lyng, a landmark trial which became solidified in the public conscience. He had an excellent understanding of science, even the most heavy-duty of academic papers and he was the first Chair for the Food for Life partnership – a phenomenal success in the way children approach food. He will be greatly missed.

Gabriel commented on the opening of the new HQ 'Spear House'. It's been a long time coming and great thanks are due to Hazel and Francis Spear of the Spear Charitable Trust for their generous donation which has made it possible.

2.0 Financial & governance – Martin Dawson, Chief Operating Officer

Martin gave an overview of the charities financial performance and explained that there are two different types of funding; restricted and unrestricted. Unrestricted funding means the organisation can choose how the money is spent to achieve the Charity's aims and restricted funding means that the money is spent to achieve charitable aims but in accordance with the funder's specific instructions. Martin continued to explain that membership fees are unrestricted and are therefore a very important source of funding. He then ran through a number of positive financial changes including an increase in donations and legacy income as well as changes to contract income. He then went through less positive changes including a decrease in membership since last year and highlighted that public sector funding is under huge pressure at present, however, he also stated that the Charity is not here to generate large annual surpluses but to spend funds on delivering good in the world.

The Soil Association published accounts show the financial performance of the Charity but also a Group position incorporating: Soil Association Certification Limited, Soil Association Land Trust and Soil Association Sales and Services Limited. Certification revenues have increased to just over £8m/year with profits increasing from £70k to over £100k this financial year. Full published accounts are available on the Charity Commission and Companies House websites.

3.0 Review of the year – Helen Browning, Chief Executive Officer

This year has been an extremely busy one, driven by the threats/opportunities of Brexit. The main threat to organic farming is that we end up with a period where we can't trade. We are currently doing a lot of work to ensure that we can continue our work and our licensees can continue to function.

We have tried to get in front of as many influencers as possible as the world continues to walk up to the issues of climate change, antibiotics, malnutrition and obesity. This means that our campaigning work has a chance to do much more and we can start to talk about a world where we aren't using pesticides.

There have been some extraordinary highlights from the last year. We have had the opportunity to work with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall who has been involved in the TV programme 'Britain's Fat Fight' driving people to think about how they can positively impact their health, through what they eat. We are also very proud of the work we are doing on children's food, ensuring their health is safeguarded by fantastic food and our core schools' programmes have continued to grow year on year. The fundraising work we did in London with Guys & St Thomas raised money for disadvantaged schools in Lambeth and Southwark. The Better Care programme is now underway, exploring how food can tackle isolation and malnutrition and the Sustainable Food Cities programme now has 50 cities actively participating.

A lot of what we do at the Soil Association is around standard setting i.e. what does good look like? This allows us to deliver confidence surrounding food. Although, we are best known for certification in food, we also certify textiles, health & beauty. The creation of Organic Served Here has enabled cafes and restaurants that aren't likely to get fully certified, to get some recognition. Organic sales have been rising for the last 5 years and every sector in the organic market has seen growth. It's always good to see that independent and home delivery sales are rising too.

For the next year we want to highlight some of the changes businesses can make when it comes to single use plastic, following on from what David Attenborough did with Blue Planet, by reducing the use of packaging as well as shorter supply chains where possible.

4.0 Farming for the Future - Liz Bowles, Head of Farming

By working together with farmers, growers, researchers and campaigners to find innovative solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing farmers we are helping to create farming systems fit for the future.

Farming for the future highlights:

- The Soil Association was mentioned by **George Eustice** in a short video highlighting the prominent position of soil in the 25-year Environment Plan.
- We continue to encourage the agricultural sectors to minimise the use of antimicrobials on animals such as day-old chicks, through our membership of **The Antibiotics Alliance**.
- We are working on specific alternatives to contentious inputs such as copper, antimicrobials and anthelmintics
- We are helping farmers to understand how they can be more sustainable
- We now have a group of **farmers researching** how we can more accurately identify the cause of mastitis and amend treatment protocols to reduce reliance on antimicrobials.
- We have conducted **research on glyphosate** and the impact it is having on soil and target species
- The Soil Association has been involved in the Assurewel project for the last 6 years, this has resulted in the production of a manual which sets out all the different outcomes.
- Our involvement with **Health & Harmony consultations** has led to an event being held in September at Sheepdrove.
- **Organic Congress** was held, this was the first time the whole organic movement came together to outline the benefits of organic farming.
- This is the first year that there is **more land being farmed organically** than the previous year; this is generally in response to increasing demand for organic food.
- **Rising Demand for Organic Cereals** means we are now seeing larger farms embracing the opportunity to produce organic cereals
- The **Innovative Farmers programme** was created to put farmers in the driving seat of research, allowing more sustainable farming practices to become mainstream within agriculture.
- This year we have been lucky enough to engage with organisations like **BBSRC and AHDB**
- The Soil Association is **leading the Rural Innovation Support Service** in Scotland and we've recently started working with a group of farmers in East Scotland.

5.0 Food for Life - James Cashmore, Director of Food For Life

Our Food for Life Programme is helping us to realise our vision of 'good food for all'. We are focussed on how food gets from 'farm to fork' and we are trying to make the connection between soil/animals/plants and humans. The program promotes a healthy and sustainable diet with less high fat/salt/sugar processed foods, less but better-quality meat, more fruit and vegetables, a higher proportion of whole grains and sustainable fish. The program also promotes the consumption of more fresh, local, seasonal, sustainable food, with low climate impact and high welfare standards.

We are very interested in children's food and this year we again ran our Out to Lunch scheme exploring the menu options available for children in both high street restaurants and UK attractions. We are also calling for further positive changes in schools, including to the School Fruit and Veg Scheme.

There are risks and opportunities associated with the Food for Life programme. Ahead of a clear Brexit outcome, the food service industry feels challenged our Food for Life Served Here licensee caterers are sticking with us, and we are figuring out a way to have more impact on hospital food and the 'grab and go' industry. We want to see a thriving population buying, growing, cooking and eating good food. We want both the young and the elderly to have the opportunity to access good food and we want to make good food the easy choice for everyone, whoever and wherever they are.

6.0 Panel Q&A

The panel answered and discussed a series of questions from members and supporters.

Ends.