



Ymddiriedolaeth  
Genedlaethol  
National Trust

## ETRA Committee – Soil Health in Agriculture Inquiry National Trust Cymru response

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### Response submitted by National Trust Cymru to the Economy Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

20 June 2025

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#### Introduction

National Trust Cymru (NTC) welcomes the inquiry into soil health in agriculture and we are pleased to share with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee our views on how tenants might be supported or encouraged to improve soil health on land they rent.

Our response reflects our position as a conservation charity caring for the natural and historic environment in Wales, and our commitment to playing our part so that people and nature can thrive for generations to come. National Trust Cymru proudly looks after 46,000 hectares of land, 157 miles of coast and 18 of our nation's historic houses, gardens and industrial sites, for everyone's benefit. Approximately 37% of this land is let – via approximately 300 separate agreements - on a variety of tenancies and licences.

Sustainably managed, resilient soils are key to improving the condition of our natural resources, whilst producing high quality food and fibre, and allowing the agricultural industry to withstand - and respond - to climate change.

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#### Feedback response

We understand the committee has received extensive evidence and feedback from soil scientists, farming unions and farming organisations such as the Nature Friendly Farming Network and the Soil Association about their specific areas of knowledge. We provide below a summary of our position specifically in relation to supporting tenants and licensees to improve soil health on the land they rent:

#### High Nature Status and Healthy Soils

Due to the specific nature of much of the land within the National Trust ownership, (for example the high proportion of land under environmental designations), the overall health of that land, and the ecosystem services it provides, has continually been a priority, with specific focus put on its improvement via our strategic objectives.

Our outgoing strategy called for 'nature rich landscapes' and 'high nature status farms'. This was to be achieved by implementing appropriate - nature positive - land management principles alongside a drive to conserve, improve and expand nature rich habitats. Healthy soils (assessed by condition, stability and structure) were an important part of this, but we also considered productivity, wildlife, water, culture, and access across all our land, both managed by ourselves and by our tenants.

#### Current process – tenancy clauses and ad-hoc support

The primary method for achieving our strategy on our let land, utilises the agreements themselves to influence land management practices. When a change of tenancy is due, for

example because of succession or retirement, the tenancy clauses and land condition would be reviewed by staff with a range of expertise to decide if that land is achieving, or moving towards achieving, the desired objectives. For example, depending on the specifics of the farm, we may include clauses at a field or whole farm level to undertake or prohibit specific activities to allow certain species to thrive; or to encourage a specific habitat. By the nature of these clauses, soil health would be positively affected but it is not always specifically targeted.

For shorter term agreements such as grazing or mowing licences, they are often used to manage specific sites to achieve specific outcomes. As a result, the terms of the agreement are tailored to those outcomes; and as with longer term tenancies, soil health is positively impacted but not necessarily specifically targeted.

In addition to the opportunities presented by tenancy changes, National Trust Cymru offers direct support to our tenants via access to soil sampling contribution or access to advice and support from in-house expertise. This is often on an ad-hoc basis as requested by the tenant, or perhaps through a NTC project that the tenant is participating in.

We recognise the positive financial implications that farm businesses can achieve when soil health is optimal, lessening the need for costly inputs and improving yields and livestock health. As a result, we also encourage our tenants to participate in agri-environment schemes or explore accreditations such as Pasture For Life or Organic which facilitate improvements to soil health through environmentally sensitive land management practices but may also offer premiums for products.

In summary, to date our support of tenants to improve soil health has been in-direct and ad-hoc, focusing on holistic land management improvements to achieve multiple objectives, rather than solely soil health.

### **Direction of travel and the future – novel tenancy approaches; nature friendly farming**

Our new 10-year strategy has ramped up our focus on the scale of our ambition, to help nature recover and create climate resilient systems whilst producing high quality food and fibre and allowing rural communities to thrive. Nature friendly farming is a key vehicle to achieve that and we see “good soil health” as a fundamental aspect to this approach.

In order to achieve the scale of change required, a much more collaborative and pro-active approach is necessary. We will talk with farmers, to understand their current position and any plans, and to share our ideas. We’ll make suggestions for next steps based on those discussions, including identifying relevant schemes and opportunities. It is likely that many of these discussions will focus on improving soil health as the underpinning feature of all other actions. These conversations will occur throughout the tenancy term, rather than just at renewal, succession or retirement.

At some Trust properties (though not in Wales), we have explored opportunities to include environmental KPIs within contract farming arrangements. We understand that other organisations such as The Crown Estate and The Church Commission are also introducing newly developed tenancies such as “eFBTs”; where specific soil health and/or other environmental conditions are explicitly required within the terms of the tenancy.

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In parallel, we are working to ensure there are funding opportunities available to support planned delivery. We anticipate this will be from a mix of grants, green finance, and income from fundraising and commercial activity.

We believe that a collaborative approach between tenants and landlords, alongside clear policy, abundant evidence-based guidance and well-funded schemes is crucial to achieving the necessary soil health improvements that will directly benefit farm businesses and wider society. The Sustainable Farming Scheme offers significant opportunity to support the improvement of soil health across Wales, but actions will need to go beyond the current proposals of basic soil testing and should include opportunities for CPD on the subject, alongside expansion of the biological metrics assessed, which will give a much clearer picture of soil health as a whole (rather than focusing on chemical components related to productivity value). Alongside this, clear and cohesive advice and recommendations will be needed to translate the testing outputs into “real world” change.

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National Trust Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the inquiry into soil health in agriculture, and we look forward to further engaging with the process in due course.