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Shared Insights, Stronger Collaboration: The Route to a More Resilient Food System?

Summary and Key Recommendations.

1st October 2026



Transforming **Agriculture** Through
Trusted Data Insights.



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I'm grateful to our speakers and delegates, whose candid insight and lively discussion shaped every page of this report. Together they made a clear case: build trust with farmers, standardise the underlying data rather than every output, and make sure the people creating the value share in it. That is how we will help to build a more resilient food system.

Stuart Thomson, Map of Ag



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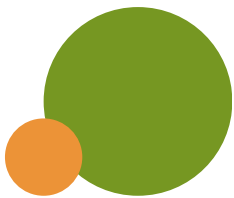


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Executive Summary.

Farm-level data is becoming increasingly important to the food and farming supply chain, helping businesses understand their supply base, measure environmental and animal welfare sustainability performance, identify opportunities for improvement and demonstrate progress.

Farmers are being asked to provide information to multiple organisations, often through different systems and methodologies, while also being asked to make changes that can require time, investment and long-term commitment.

Against this backdrop, the **Shared Insights, Stronger Collaboration: The Route to a More Resilient Food System** event, hosted by Map of Ag in London on 1st October 2026, explored three questions:

1. What practical steps can improve farmer engagement in supply chain programmes?
2. How important is standardisation of on-farm data reporting, and how can it be achieved?
3. How can the value and cost of sustainability programmes be distributed more fairly across the supply chain?



Although the questions focused on different parts of the challenge, the discussions highlighted a common theme: **farmers need to be at the centre of how supply chain data and sustainability programmes are designed.**

For engagement to improve, farmers need to trust the process, understand why information is being requested and see a clear benefit from participating. Data collection also needs to become simpler, with greater use of existing information and less duplication.

Standardisation can help achieve this, but the priority should be to create common foundations for the underlying farm data rather than attempting to make every final reporting output identical.

Finally, sustainability programmes need to recognise the economics of farming. Financial incentives have a role, but understanding what is preventing farmers from investing in change is just as important as understanding what motivates them. Longer-term contracts, access to finance, technical support and better use of data could all form part of a more effective approach.

The main take home was that the value of farm data and sustainability action will only be realised if the systems collecting that information are intuitive, easy to use and aligned to the performance of the farm.



An Introduction.

The food and farming sector is collecting more data than ever. Farm businesses generate information across production, inputs, outputs, environmental performance and business management. Further up the supply chain, businesses are increasingly using farm-level data to understand their supply base, manage risk and meet sustainability objectives.

However, this growing demand for information can create its own challenges.

Farmers may receive multiple requests for similar data from different organisations, while the information they provide may be collected using different definitions and methodologies. At the same time, sustainability programmes can ask farmers to make changes without always providing the practical or financial support required to implement them.

The challenge is therefore not simply to collect more information, but to create a system in which data is trusted, efficiently collected, **turned into useful insight and used to support action and create value across the supply chain.**

These issues were explored at the Map of Ag event in London on 1 October 2026 through three questions focused on farmer engagement, data standardisation and the distribution of sustainability costs and value.



What practical steps can improve farmer engagement in supply chain programmes?



Farmer engagement starts with recognising that farmers are not a single group. Farms differ in size, production system, staffing, geography, resources and technical capability. A data request that is relatively straightforward for a large business with dedicated administrative support can represent a significant burden for an individual farmer.

Successful programmes therefore need to **understand the farmer behind the data**.

Trust was identified as fundamental to effective data sharing. Farmers need to understand why data is being collected, how it will be used, who will have access to it and what they will gain from providing it. This is particularly important, as farmers' experience to date has largely involved reporting systems that have been tricky to use, with little clarity about how the information may subsequently be used.

Clear data governance and communication across the supply chain can help build confidence. Involving an objective third party can also help, while organisations should be clear about why they are requesting wider business or demographic information and how it will contribute to a defined objective.

Transparency should extend across the supply chain. Where several organisations need similar information, greater coordination is needed to prevent farmers being asked the same questions repeatedly, particularly if this happens at a pre-competitive stage, such as on the farm.

One of the strongest messages from the discussion was the need to **collect data once and use it intelligently**.



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Farmers may already hold much of the information being requested through farm management systems and other platforms. Where data already exists, businesses should explore how it can be reused, with robust farmer permissioning, rather than requiring farmers to enter it again.

Automation and AI could increasingly help bring together information from different sources and reduce the administrative burden, particularly while wider industry standardisation develops.

Making data collection easier is likely to be one of the most effective ways of improving engagement.

However, collecting data is only the beginning. Farmers need to see value from their involvement. That value may be financial, but it can also come through insights into the data, benchmarking, production insights, business support, useful tools or access to practical expertise.

Farmers need to understand what their information tells them and how it can help them make decisions. **Reports should therefore lead to practical, farm-specific recommendations rather than simply presenting data.**

Those recommendations need to recognise the realities of individual businesses, including cost, labour, infrastructure, production system and geography.

Discussions highlighted how knowledge exchange and peer support can help with this. Farmers may benefit from being able to discuss findings with others facing similar challenges, while consistent points of contact can provide support when results are difficult to interpret.

'What if' analysis could be particularly useful, allowing farmers to explore potential outcomes from different management changes and understand what may realistically be achievable within their system.

What needs to change:

- Be transparent about why data is collected and how it will be used.
- Reduce duplication and make greater use of existing farm data.
- Make data collection as simple and automated as possible.
- Turn data into practical, farm-specific insight.
- Provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and consistent support.



How important is standardisation of on-farm data reporting, and how can it be achieved?

Standardisation could play an important role in reducing the burden on everyone involved in the agrifood and land-based industries, but achieving it across the food supply chain is not straightforward.

Different businesses have different customers, commercial priorities and sustainability objectives. Those requirements can be passed down through processors and suppliers, creating multiple approaches to data collection and reporting.



The challenge is therefore not simply to decide whether standardisation is needed, but what should actually be standardised. The discussion highlighted an important distinction between the underlying data being collected and the final calculations or reports produced from it.

If the underlying data is consistent and robust, it can then support different legitimate reporting requirements without farmers having to repeatedly provide the same information.

Consistent underlying data could also help emerging areas such as carbon sequestration and the recently published Land Sector Removals Guidance, avoiding some of the fragmentation seen in existing greenhouse gas reporting.

Greater integration with existing farm management software systems could allow information to flow between platforms rather than requiring repeated manual entry.

Farmers should also have a greater understanding of and confidence in how the information they generate is managed, including how it is stored, who can access it and how it can be used.





This shifts the relationship from one where farmers are simply asked to provide data to one where their data becomes a useful business asset. However, the value does not necessarily lie in the individual measurement or score itself, but in establishing a consistent baseline against which performance can be assessed over time. Agreeing a common starting point and identifying realistic minimum standards could help businesses set meaningful targets, track progress and identify where improvements are needed.

There was recognition that methodologies need to be robust and aligned with recognised standards.

The priority should therefore be to **create reliable foundations that allow businesses and farmers to make meaningful decisions**, rather than allowing differences between methodologies to become a barrier to action.

Achieving this will require collaboration. The food supply chain is too fragmented for individual organisations to solve the problem independently, particularly where different businesses have competing commercial interests.

What needs to change:

- Prioritise consistency in the underlying data rather than identical reporting outputs.
- Integrate with existing farm management software systems and reduce manual entry.
- Give farmers greater understanding, ownership and confidence in their data.
- Develop approaches collaboratively, particularly in emerging areas such as carbon sequestration.
- Focus on meaningful trends and outcomes while maintaining methodological rigour.



How can the value and cost of sustainability programmes be distributed more fairly across the supply chain?

The third question moved the discussion from data collection to one of the biggest practical challenges facing sustainability programmes: who pays for change, and who benefits from it?

Sustainability improvements can require farmers to invest money, time and management capacity, while the return may take years to materialise. At the same time, consumers increasingly expect sustainable production as a baseline and may not necessarily be willing to pay a premium for it. This means the supply chain needs to consider how the cost of change is shared and how value is returned to the businesses making that change.

There was support for the principle of incentivising farmers to improve sustainability, but also recognition that **simply adding a payment will not solve every problem**.

A key question discussed was what is preventing farmers from investing in change?

The barriers can be financial, but they can also be structural or practical. Access to capital, farm tenure, succession, inheritance, labour, infrastructure and uncertainty about future markets can all influence whether a farmer is able or willing to invest.

Different farms will therefore need different forms of support. Financial payments and premiums linked to performance and pricing matrices have an important role, but they are only one potential lever.

Longer-term contracts could provide farmers with greater confidence that there will be a market and commercial relationship in the future, helping to justify investments that may take several years to deliver a return.



Other approaches could include access to finance, technical support, benchmarking, business insights and partnerships that reduce the cost or risk of making changes. The appropriate combination will depend on the farm, the supply chain and the barrier preventing investment.

The discussion also considered the role of government, private-sector finance and the supply chain.

Government support can help deliver environmental outcomes that extend beyond the immediate commercial value of food production, reflecting the principle of 'public money for public goods'. However, public funding alone is unlikely to provide all the investment required over the long term.



Private-sector investment could help fill some of that gap, but businesses need clarity over what their investment is intended to achieve, how outcomes will be measured and what return or benefit they will receive.

For farmers, however, the underlying commercial return from food production remains fundamental. **Farming needs to be economically viable if businesses are going to invest in environmental improvements alongside food production.**

This points towards a more joined-up approach in which food production, environmental outcomes and farm profitability are considered together.

The scale of the challenge also makes collaboration important. Even large processors and other supply chain businesses can only reach part of the farming population, meaning that individual organisations cannot address every barrier alone.

Reliable farm-level data can provide the feedback loop needed to make sustainability investment more effective. It can show whether an intervention is delivering the intended outcome, help identify where further investment is needed and provide evidence of the value created further along the supply chain.

Data is therefore not simply a reporting requirement. It can help connect investment, action and outcomes.

Ultimately, if farmers are providing the data and making the changes that create value, they need to see a meaningful share of that value.

What needs to change:

- Understand the barriers preventing investment before designing incentives.
- Combine financial rewards with longer-term commercial certainty and practical support.
- Explore longer-term contracts and other mechanisms that reduce investment risk.
- Bring together public, private and supply chain investment where appropriate.
- Use farm-level data to demonstrate outcomes and the value created.
- Ensure farmers share in the commercial and sustainability value generated by their actions.



Conclusion.

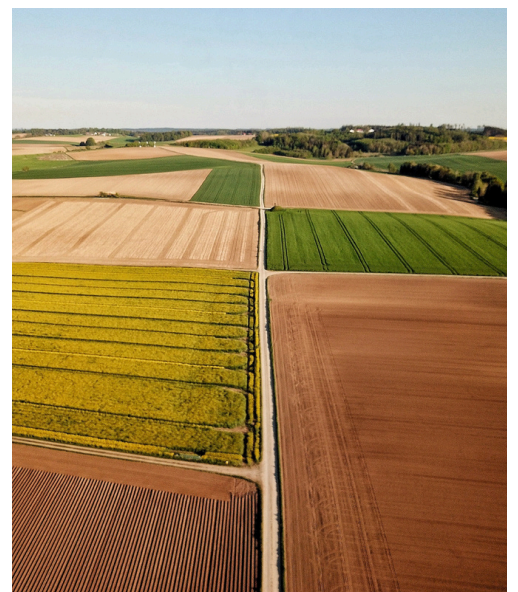
The three questions explored at the Map of Ag event point to a common challenge: how can the food supply chain build a more productive relationship with the farmers who underpin it?

Improving engagement requires trust, transparency and less administrative burden.

Greater standardisation can help by creating common foundations for farm data, reducing duplication and making information more useful.

And sustainability programmes need to recognise that lasting environmental and animal welfare change depends on economically resilient farm businesses. Understanding what prevents investment, alongside providing the right combination of incentives, certainty and support, will be critical.

In summary, better engagement creates better data. Better data creates better insight. Better insight supports better decisions. **And better decisions, backed by the right investment, can create a more resilient food supply system.**



Want to learn more?

If you have any questions, ideas, or simply want to explore how we can work together, please get in touch.



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