

Grower Platform Survey

Introduction

The 'Grower Platform' is a key component of a new Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB) funded project on the Management of Rotations. The Grower Platform is a group of like-minded researchers, farmers, agronomists and businesses who have an interest in improving the agronomic and economic sustainability of UK farming.

What is the purpose of the survey?

The survey will help answer the following types of question:

- Is there an association between use of soil amendments and agronomic and economic sustainability?
- What cultivation practices may be associated with good soil characteristics?
- Is there an association between the types of crops in a rotation and soil health and resilience?
- Is there an economic benefit with having an association with livestock in the rotation?

The analysis of grower responses will help us prioritise future experiments as part of the AHDB research program.

What are the benefits to supplying crop survey information and platform membership

This survey information will be invaluable to understand the key factors that may limit the long-term resilience of current farming systems. This understanding will be fed back to the Platform by regular meetings and news-letters to inform participants on the consequences of their current management decisions and to devise improved ones. Through regular contact with the Research Partnership, the Platform will be kept informed of recent developments in other project areas and they will help shape future research effort.

What is the Research Partnership?

The Research Partnership comprises four core partners: NIAB CUF, The James Hutton Institute, Rothamsted Research and Lancaster University who will work with a wider group of potato industry collaborators to deliver the objectives of the AHDB funded research project.

Structure of the survey and how data will be used

The aim of the survey is to collect as much relevant information as possible from farmers and agronomists throughout the UK. We have tried to keep our survey simple so that it is not too onerous to complete for as many fields as possible. We estimate that, with access to good farm records, each form should take about 45 minutes to complete.

We understand that the data you send us may be commercially sensitive. Data will be stored on secure servers within the project partnership. Contact details will be retained within the project partnership and not circulated to third parties. Similarly, crop location information will only be used for the purpose of obtaining soil mapping and meteorological data and only averaged or otherwise aggregated data will be published. We will not publish data that could be identifiable unless we have the express permission of all relevant parties.

How do I get a survey form?

Contact Marc Allison (marc.allison@niab.com or **01223 651599**) to request the number of survey forms you will need or go to <http://www.niab.com/ahdb-rotations-survey> to download as many forms as you like. *Remember the more completed forms we have the more powerful our analyses.*

Where do I get help in filling in the form?

Please phone Marc Allison or Jennifer Preston on **01223 651599** to get help in filling in the form. Alternatively e-mail Marc Allison (marc.allison@niab.com) with your question.

Where do I send the completed survey forms?

Please e-mail the completed survey forms to Marc Allison (marc.allison@niab.com).



Grower Platform Survey

Introduction to filling in the survey forms

The survey forms are designed to collect key information about crop rotations used in the UK whilst minimising the time needed to complete each form.

Each survey form is an excel spreadsheet and is used to collect data from a single field. Tabs within the excel file are used to collect data for specific “Intervals” during the rotation. These intervals will collect data about specific crops but will also collect data from the fallow intervals between crops.

The forms will collect data on ‘inputs’ (e.g. fertilizers, irrigation, crop residues and organic amendments), cultivations and also on outputs (crop yields). For each crop we are also very interested in the grower’s opinion of the extent to which certain factors may have limited the achievement of the crops’ potential yield and quality.

Rotational sustainability is a long-term issue which is difficult to address with short-term research projects. By collecting historic crop survey data (going back a minimum of 5 years) this will increase the robustness of our analyses.

General comments

- Please fill in the grey shaded cells.
- For many questions the answer will be supplied using the drop-down list.
- It is important for us to be able to distinguish between ‘Not specified’, ‘Not applicable’ or ‘None’. Please try to minimise the use of ‘Not specified’.
- We’ve tried to make the drop down lists as comprehensive as possible but if none of the options are suitable select ‘Other’ from the drop-down menu and specify in the text boxes available. If you see any obvious omissions please let us know and we can modify later versions of the survey form.

Specific comments

- Hopefully the form will be self-explanatory and the Example Sheet gives an example for a cereal crop, its stubble and the following potato crop. Please contact NIAB-CUF (**01223 651599**) if you have any questions.
- We are particularly interested in the ‘fallow’ intervals between cash crops and these should be recorded as separate intervals.
- Once completed, the Summary sheet at the start of the survey form should contain no gaps in the dates from the first to the final interval.

What fields to select

- We would like to get information on as many different kind of rotation as possible. So these might include purely combinable rotations or mixed combinable and root crops or rotations with a grass or livestock component.

- We would also be interested in data from fields with similar soil types that have been managed in contrasting ways e.g. different rotations, use of manures or cover crops etc.
- We would also be particularly interested in survey data from fields that may be managed by two or more entities (e.g. owned and contracted out or owned and short term tenancy).

How many fields to select

- The power of our data analysis and therefore the value to the contributing Platform members will increase as more data is added to our database so please include as many fields as you feel able to.

How many years' worth of data to supply per field

- We know that some changes in soil characteristics take place over many years. Where possible each survey should contain a minimum of five years' worth of data.
- Start in the cropping year 2015 and work back as far as possible.
- When new cropping data become available (2016, 2017 etc.) these can be added to the survey.
- The standard survey spreadsheet has sheets for 20 cropping Intervals – if you need more either copy and re-label the sheets or contact us (**01223 651599**) so that we can modify the sheet for you.

