

Soil Action Plan Advisory Forum Newsletter

Issue 11: April 2006

Actions

1. Please send any information to be included in the next newsletter to [Becca Taylor](#) by **Tuesday 23 May**. It is our intention to circulate the newsletter at the end of each month unless the volume of material is insufficient.

General

1. The next Advisory Forum meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 May at Broadway House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NQ. The meeting will commence with lunch at 12.30; agenda and papers to be circulated shortly.

EVI (Evidence and Access to Information)

1. The Access to Soil Information Project reported in early April. The project, undertaken by ADAS, was extended in scope towards the end of the contract to include the production of a consultable database. The additional work was commissioned as it was felt that this would be the most effective way to store and utilise the large quantities of metadata generated in the course of the project. The database, which will be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders, can be queried by a number of parameters to assist a potential soils data user to identify which of the many data sets will provide the information that they require.
2. The second phase of research being undertaken by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology on biological indicators (SQID2) is now underway, running until the end-2008. This will field test the top thirteen indicators, identified in phase one, for deployment in a national-scale monitoring scheme (fitting with the work of the UK Soil Indicators Consortium). The biological indicators under investigation have specific relevance to the maintenance of soil health, via the delivery of ecological processes, and are highly relevant to a number of soil functions. [Further details](#).
3. Defra's sewage sludge programme will be peer-reviewed on the 21 June 2006. It will incorporate a range of work, including long term field trials which have been assessing the impacts of metal-rich sludges applied over a number of years on microbial biomass and activity. This review pulls in a number of Defra policy areas, including soils, as well as external funders such as UKWIR, EA and WAG and will consider the future scope and funding of sludge research against potential policy requirements.



BUI (Soils in the Built Environment/Planning)

1. The East Midlands Regional Assembly and partners (EA, Defra, CA) have commissioned ADAS to undertake a review of the soils of the East Midlands. This will provide the Assembly and regional partners with an overview of regional soil resources, their extent and use, the key functions delivered, especially relationships between soil and water resource issues, and the threats that soils face. The project will be used to inform regional policy and delivery in a number of key areas. These include the current review of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and the development of the Regional Rural Development Framework (RRDF) which will inform the forthcoming development of the England programme for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). It may also help to inform the geographical focus of project working in Natural England to deliver biodiversity, landscape and sustainable land use benefits at a landscape scale. The project will run until the end of July.
2. The inaugural meeting of the Topsoil Standards Working Group was held at the end-March. The Working Group has been established to review BS 3882 (British Standard for Topsoil). The first meeting produced a broad consensus view that the Standard required revision as it was felt that it was inadvertently encouraging unsustainable use of soil. Particular focus was placed on the present Standards scope, presentation and usage, and definition of the three grades of topsoil. Amongst the participants were past and present members of the committee responsible for creating and reviewing this Standard. The present members agreed to present the views of the Working Group to the committee at its next meeting during May.

AWE (Awareness and Education)

1. As previously reported ADAS are leading a Defra-funded project, Environment Sensitive Farming (ESF), to provide land managers and their advisers with free practical advice on integrated land management practices to help prevent pollution and protect the environment. The presentations part of the [ESF website](#) has recently been enhanced to include PowerPoint slides on Sustainable Soil Management Practices for *Potatoes* (slide set 10) and *Outdoor Pigs* (slide set 11), in addition to existing materials on GAEC For Soils, Soil Structure, Soil Erosion, Environmental Stewardship Schemes, etc. Similar materials are also available for the other aspects of ESF i.e. pesticide management, waste management, nutrient management, and manure management.
2. Since its launch in January this year the interactive Soilscales Viewer developed by NSRI with Defra funding (outlined in the November 2005 issue of this newsletter) has had an enthusiastic reception from a wide range of users. Feedback and correspondence has come from people in fields as wide as town planning and highway maintenance to landscape gardening. There is currently an average of c.150 spatial requests each day, with much interest coming from beyond the UK. Feedback has been consistently positive and the NSRI team are already planning some additional features including a search by coordinate pair or National Grid Reference. The Soilscales Viewer can be accessed via <http://www.landis.org.uk> and further details obtained from [Andrew Rayner](#).
3. An expert workshop on the *Definition of Best Indicators for Land Use Impacts in Life Cycle Assessment* is being held on 12-13 June 2006 at the University of Surrey. Soil quality will

be one of the topics discussed and a joint paper entitled “Impact of forestry on soil quality in the UK” will be presented by Forest Research. [Further details](#).

SUS (Sustainable Soil Management)

1. The Soils Policy Team are planning a project to compliment Defra’s Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme. The project will seek to establish whether or not management practices can be encouraged that could lead to a sustainable increase in, or reduced loss of soil organic matter. Whilst the project will seek to add value to the CSF Programme, it will be independent of this work, focussing on carbon loss and organic matter build up, rather than the specific concerns addressed under the CSF Programme. For more information, contact [John Hodgson](#).