

*Response from the*

## **Welsh Agri-food Partnership Organic Strategy Group**

*prepared by Organic Centre Wales*  
(University of Wales, Aberystwyth, SY23 3AL)

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*to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bangor, consultation on*

### **Sustainable Use of Soils in Wales**

(Author: Nic Lampkin, 01970 622248, fax: 01970 622238, e-mail [nhl@aber.ac.uk](mailto:nhl@aber.ac.uk))

I agree to be identified as the respondent and for the nature of this response to be identified in reports)

#### **Main activities and involvement with land and soil:**

Research, knowledge transfer and production

#### **1. In what way does soil benefit or influence the main activities with which you are involved?**

Soil is the fundamental basis for organic crop and livestock production and contributes to plant and animal health, thereby affecting food quality and human health. Organic Centre Wales is responsible for knowledge transfer and research on organic farming including issues relating to soils.

#### **2. Which if any of the issues identified in the briefing note are important to you/your organisation and why?**

All of the issues identified are important in this context, but we are particularly concerned about the soil as an ecosystem, including soil biological activity, organic matter and interactions with nutrient availability and plant health. The organic sector is concerned about the impacts that agricultural practices and inputs, including cultivations, phosphorus and heavy metals from sewage sludge, can have on the soil ecosystem, and these issues are reflected in organic production standards. Both quantitative loss of soil through erosion, and degradation of soil quality, are significant concerns.

#### **3. Estimate or describe, if you can, the seriousness and, if appropriate, cost of each of these issues to your organisation.**

We are not in a position to respond specifically on this and would instead draw attention to the wider literature.

#### **4. Are you aware of existing regulations, policies or codes of good practice that are aimed at controlling the issues that you have identified and are these fully effective?**

Yes, but the effectiveness or otherwise of these is largely due to voluntary activity on the part of farmers. Organic standards also contain important provision with respect to soil protection, and should be seen as codes of good practice that have a regulatory

foundation, but also a positive incentive for farmers to adhere to them given premium marketing opportunities.

**5. Do you think additional codes of good practice and/or regulations are needed to control the activities that are causing these issues, or can existing ones be extended or made more effective?**

The main focus should be in making existing codes, including if appropriate organic standards, more effective, with a stronger focus on the soil as an ecosystem.

**6. Are there other issues affecting soil quality that you can identify or that you expect to be of future significance?**

There is still a need for more work on soil ecosystem functions and the links between soil biological activity, nutrient availability, pest and disease suppression, plant and animal health and food quality.

**7. Do you collect, use or have access to soils data or information, and are you aware of any soil monitoring programmes?**

No, we do not collect or directly use soils data, but we are aware of the Soil Survey and of analytical services available to individual producers.

**8. Do you think soils information is lacking; if so where do you believe activities should be focused in future?**

More information on biological elements is required.

**9. On the basis of soil functions are you able to identify any relevant indicators of soil sustainability or quality?**

The Royal Commission on Soils (1996), the work of the OECD on agri-environmental indicators, and Paoletti's (1999) book provide useful information, the latter in particular referring to biological soil indicators.

**10. Concluding points**

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in a Welsh Soils Discussion Group seminar on this topic, and we would also be interested in due course in the possibility of specific training courses organised by Organic Centre Wales to raise producer awareness of any issues identified.