

# [***Government criticised by Efra Committee for its 'vague' plans to improve soil health***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BM3-XPG1-JBJF-1004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The Efra Committee has criticised the Government for its 'vague' response to ***soil health***, with a lack of clarity on how the Government's farming incentive schemes and guidance for farmers will be adapted to focus more on ***soil health***.

The Committee have called on the Government to place ***soil health*** on the 'same footing' as water and air quality within Government policy.

***Soil health***

In response to the Government's report on ***soil health***, the Committee said despite reviews and reforms of ***soil*** and fertiliser regulations being mentioned, it was not known whether it would lead to meaningful change.

See also: [*Grassland guide: Understanding* ***soil health***](https://www.farmersguardian.com/advice/4116267/grassland-guide-understanding-soil-health)

It was recommended the Government should address issues in the food supply chain that encourage poor ***soil*** management, including low profitability for farmers and unsustainable consumer and retailer demands.

**'Few concrete proposals for change'**

In its response, the Government pointed to its June 2022 Food Strategy and its ongoing engagement with the agri-food industry. But the Committee said it set out 'few concrete proposals for change'.

They said there was a number of Government commitments that lack deadlines, referring to the 'hopes' to publish its new National Action Plan for Sustainable Use of Pesticides 'shortly' and no set date for determining how the Government will report on the effectiveness of its farming subsidy schemes for improving the environment, including ***soil health***.

**Sustainable *soil* management**

The Committee did welcome the Government's positive response on some of its recommendations, such as its acknowledgment of 'the value in establishing a shared understanding of sustainable ***soil*** management within the agricultural sector'.

See also: [*Better* ***soil****, better farming? Easy steps to help start your journey to better* ***soil health***](https://www.farmersguardian.com/news/4118460/soil-farming-easy-steps-help-start-journey-soil-health)

The Committee said they were also pleased that the Government earlier this year announced it would raise some payment rates to farmers and land managers for actions under the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements, echoing calls in the Committee's report for enhanced payments to support environmental gains.

**Efra Committee**

The chair of the Efra Committee, Sir Robert Goodwill, said: "We are glad that the Government shares our committee's concerns regarding the challenges facing ***soil health*** in England, but we are disappointed that its response to our report is noncommittal on several important measures, leaving much open to an unclear review process.

"There is also a lack of clarity to be found in the Government's response, on questions such as who will be responsible for ongoing ***soil*** monitoring once a baseline is established and how this will be funded.

See also: [*How Cambridgeshire farmer cut input costs in half with new approach to* ***soil health***](https://www.farmersguardian.com/news/4114140/cambridgeshire-farmer-cut-input-costs-half-approach-soil-health)

"While we wanted the Government to be more ambitious in its targets, urging for over 90 per cent of agricultural land to meet a definition of "sustainably managed" by 2040, we are disappointed that the Government has settled on a lower target in this area, without explaining why."

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