

# SIP



SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION  
RESEARCH PLATFORM

# SIPSCENE

The newsletter of the Sustainable Intensification Research Platform

**ISSUE 7 - AUTUMN 2017**



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## Editorial: The hard work begins...

**In the opening editorial for SIP Scene, I reflected, with some trepidation, on the scale of the task ahead for our ambitious programme of applied research into sustainable intensification.**

I write today as the lights have gone down on a series of 'dissemination' events, where researchers and practitioners explored the achievements of the Platform across each of the study areas. You will see some of the energy at work in these events on the pages of this final issue of the 'Scene', alongside a larger narrative of achievements that has defined the Platform's work and sets the tone for what is far from exhausted by the work of a three year project. What we now know on reflection is that - 3 years in - SIP today is really only partly about the dissemination of final products. It's also a time when we reflect, with some pride, on the kind of community SIP has created, and a whole bunch of new and original questions now guiding how the larger work of SIP continues.

So, as the SIP adventure now comes to end, can I encourage all readers to continue to engage in this dynamic area of research and practice by contributing their views and experiences to the lively work of the Sustainable Intensification Research Network (<https://sirn.org.uk/>). The Network aims to represent the SI community by harnessing the strengths of different research areas and expertise, as well as identifying future needs and aspirations. It perhaps goes without saying but participation in the Network will be vital if we are to build a community of practice with a shared and dynamic view to address the challenges posed by SI. The hard work begins....



*Robert Fish is a Reader in Human Ecology at the University of Kent and part of the Platform's knowledge exchange team*



# SIP Says

## Views from in and around the Platform

### Reflecting on SIP

*Stuart Knight, lead for Project 1 and Michael Winter, lead for Project 2 offer their thoughts on SIP and future opportunities.*

#### Stuart's Reflections

*Stuart, why did you want to get involved in SIP?*

Because of the nature of the challenge! Understanding how to accomplish SI at different scales, from farms to landscapes to supply chains, is a big ask. I wanted us to be able to help government and industry to identify things that would make SI more achievable.

*How do you think SIP research will help the agriculture industry?*

We have demonstrated where there is potential, where things could be done differently, and have identified and shared favourable practices that are already happening on some farms to make them more widely known. We have also equipped farmers, advisers, industry and policy makers, with new decision making tools that will help make complex issues simpler and overcome some of the barriers to implementing SI.

*What outcome, output or impact from SIP have you been most impressed by?*

The way in which we have managed to bring such a diverse community together to address the challenges and participate in both the research and knowledge exchange. We knew it would be a challenge working academically in

an interdisciplinary way, and engaging with practitioners, policy makers and other organisations who have interest in this area. The way in which we have brought all these people together to discuss the same issues has been really positive.

*What opportunities are there for the industry using SIP research? What would you like to see happen next?*

We have identified a number of opportunities where there are win-wins that can be taken advantage of, for example, increasing productivity while providing environmental or social benefits at the same time. There is also an opportunity to use the various tools that have been developed to understand where farms are at in terms of their SI performance and then look at what practices, characteristics and features of different farms are influencing their performance. I'd like to see the SIP community stay together to address these opportunities.

*What have you enjoyed the most about working on SIP?*

It has been tremendously enjoyable working with researchers from such a wide range of disciplines. As a research agronomist, I have had the opportunity to work with economists, social scientists and environmental scientists, as well as practitioners and policymakers, to understand the issues and decision-making from the widest possible perspective.



*Stuart Knight is Deputy Director of NIAB and led Project 1 of SIP.*





## Michael's Reflections

*Michael, why did you want to get involved in SIP?*

It was an amazing opportunity to influence policy and science thinking going forward. It was also a great opportunity to work closely with other disciplines and lead a big project.

*How do you think SIP research will help the agriculture industry?*

It is quite hard to say right now. Circumstances have changed since SIP started – the pressure to maximise food production is not quite as great as it was. That said, a lot of the on-farm work, for example around cover crops or soil management, will have a positive influence. I hope the Benchmarking Tool will be adopted by farmers and contribute to the ongoing adaptation by the industry.

*What outcome, output or impact from SIP have you been most impressed by?*

Personally, the Dynamic Typology Tool, especially from a landscape planning perspective. The ability of SIP researchers to pull together complex datasets and make something that is interactive and user-friendly is hugely

impressive. It has great potential for use by stakeholders working collaboratively at a landscape scale to ensure win-wins for agriculture and the environment.

*What opportunities are there for the industry using SIP research? What would you like to see happen next?*

There is a huge need for applied research, but securing funding is an issue. The number one priority is to ensure the tools developed by SIP continue to be maintained and improved. The stakeholder groups and farmer networks, which have grown through SIP, also need to be maintained.

*What have you enjoyed the most about working on SIP?*

I have really enjoyed going to the various study areas and farms, but it is the interdisciplinary challenges that I have enjoyed most. I very much enjoy working with natural scientists, ecologists and agricultural scientists, getting to know new people involved in research in this area.



*Michael Winter is Professor of Land Economy and Society at the Centre of Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter and led Project 2 of SIP.*





# SIP in Focus

## What We Learnt

**SIP scene is all about taking a sideways look at the activities defining the work of the Platform, but we are proud in this, the final edition, to draw your attention to a series of Science, Policy and Practice briefing Notes that have been produced by the SIP team to summarise some of our learning, and to point all readers to further resources that stand alongside the formal reports to our funder, Defra.**

At the time of writing we've produced eight notes that convey many of our key messages. These, along with links to our technical reports, which will be appearing by the end of the year, can be found on the dedicated 'Output' page of the SIP website: [www.siplatform.org.uk/outputs](http://www.siplatform.org.uk/outputs)

### 1. Meeting the Challenge of Sustainable Intensification – An Introduction to SIP

Establishes the key issues and drivers that shape the policy and practice agenda of Sustainable Intensification.

### 2. Farmer and Adviser Attitudes to Integrated Farm Management

Examines the extent to which farmers understand and use the framework of IFM, and how the project and further work could promote wider uptake.

### 3. The Role of Cover Crops within Sustainable Soil Management

Summarises a component of the Platform that evaluated farming practices with the potential to improve crop or livestock productivity and at the same time deliver environmental benefits.

### 4. Sustaining Trace Elements in Grazing Sheep

Explores the seasonality within grazed pasture and leys of the key trace elements for sheep production.

### 5. Assessing the Performance of Commercial Farms

Considers how we can measure a farm's SI performance in agronomic, economic, environmental and social terms.

### 6. Farmer Collaboration and Engagement

Explains how approaches to farmer collaboration and engagement can foster practices that support SI.

### 7. Dynamic Landscape Typology Tool for Sustainable Intensification

Outlines a dynamic national 'Landscape Typology' to assist planning for SI in the context of regional needs and opportunities.

### 8. Benchmarking Sustainable Intensification

Describes a SI Benchmarking Tool that enables farmers to compare SI performance with comparative farms both geographically and with respect to enterprise activities.

## SIP Events

**In this section of our final SIP in Focus we look at a series of recent knowledge exchange events which were held to review and discuss SIP findings.**

### Knowledge Exchange (KE) Workshop

A key part of the SIP project has been the collaborative way in which the research was conducted. Much of the research has been focussed around 7 study areas and has been reliant and reactive to input from farmers and stakeholders from the start. With this in mind, a national workshop was run, focusing on the knowledge exchange that has occurred within the project to establish what can be taken forward in future multi-actor projects, and where the legacy of the project can be continued.

The workshop was held on the 11th July at Stoneleigh Park with around 30 participants from a range of research and knowledge exchange organisations, both within and outside of the project team. All had experience in disseminating research to farmers.

The morning included talks to explain the overall communicative, collaborative and coordinator methods of KE undertaken in the project. We also heard from those who had developed tools within the project and gathered stakeholder input throughout the process, as well as from study farm leads who had coordinated farmer facing activities at two of the sites. Following this, the participants gave their views in a number of break-out sessions.

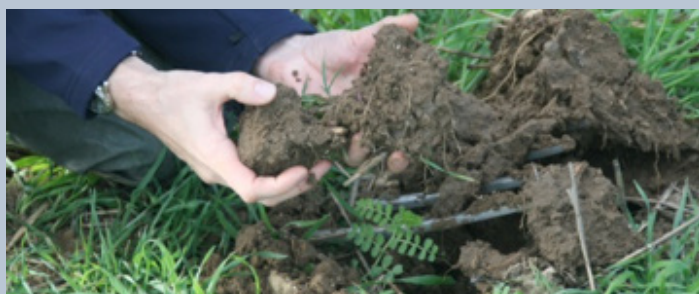
Having such a breadth of individuals actively involved in farmer facing activities led to some clear recommendations for future multi-actor projects and actions for SIP. Recommendations ranged from managing stakeholder time and expectations, ensuring research presented is relevant, the importance of coordinating communication, mapping stakeholders and the need to identify appropriate facilitators. The project partners will also be following up with specific KE organisations, looking for mechanisms to continue the work of the study farms and developing SIP tools further.





## Landbridge Workshop: Coordinating landscape -scale sustainable activity - farm advisors as facilitators?

Collaboration between farmers is not new, but moving beyond the farm to develop landscape-scale interventions. This raises the question of who is going to coordinate planning that could enable sustainable intensification to increase yields, while also protecting the environment and maximising natural resources such as biodiversity, pollination services, water resources, iconic landscapes and carbon storage? Farm advisers, as independent practitioners working with farmers across geographical areas, have the potential to play a key role. In a workshop facilitated by Landbridge as part of the Sustainable Intensification Platform (SIP) and hosted by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) at their Stoneleigh HQ on 4th October 2017, thirty advisory professionals gathered to reflect on the key issues and challenges of coordinating landscape-scale sustainable activity. The workshop was chaired by Susannah Bolton, Knowledge Exchange Director at AHDB and included a keynote from Carol Morris reflecting on the findings from SIP 2 on collaboration and coordination, and an interactive panel discussion featuring Prysor Williams, Ross Cherington and Alice Midmer, exploring the role of adviser experience and expertise in landscape-level activity. The workshop also included lively breakout sessions and an opportunity for advisers to test out the Landscape Typology Tool in a session led by Jack Cosby. Findings from the event will be used to generate recommendations for SIP on the role of advisers in coordinating landscape-scale activity and how to do this effectively. The results of this work will appear on the SIP website's 'Outputs' page in due course.

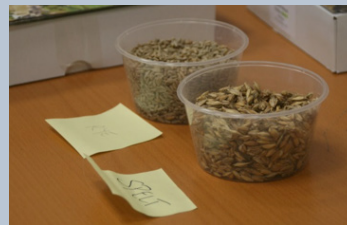


## SIP: Dissemination Workshops

A series of workshops entitled *Enhancing our Agricultural Landscapes: Sustainable Intensification in Practice*, took place 20-27th October in the SIP study areas showcasing the Platform's work. Farmers, advisers, representatives from environmental groups, national and local government, industry, government agencies and utilities companies came together to hear about and discuss local research and trials, and nationally important work, such as research on farmer collaboration, on farm performance, and on decision support. There was also an opportunity to try-out the **Dynamic Typology Tool** and **SI Benchmarking Tool** developed by SIP and in the afternoon there were activities such as exploring how to implement SI, what makes effective knowledge exchange and identifying potential future initiatives. As the weather was unusually kind for late-October, there was a chance to visit some of the research sites out on the respective farms. Thank you to everyone who came along to take part in the workshops. There was much discussion during and in-between the sessions, providing some valuable feedback to the research teams, and we hope you found it useful too!

**The Dynamic Typology Tool can be found at <https://eip.ceh.ac.uk/apps/sustainable-intensification/info/>**

**SI Benchmarking Tool can be found at [www.benchmarkmyfarm.co.uk](http://www.benchmarkmyfarm.co.uk)**





# Viewpoint

## Beyond SIP: How to maintain and expand the SI community under current changes in the political and funding landscape

*In our final Viewpoint, Adélia de Paula of the Sustainable Intensification Research Network (SIRN) invites us to think about the future of SI research and action after SIP.*

As the SIP programme ends, there is an opportunity for the community to think beyond the end of this project. Some questions that come to mind are:

- What are the next steps needed for the SIP community to continue sharing knowledge, learn from each other and suggest ways to use existing and new approaches to deliver SI?
- How can we still gather evidence to help shape long term policies, especially under the forthcoming exit of the UK from the EU?
- Where can we find the appropriate funding to develop this work further?

One thing is clear, for most of these tasks a significant level of energy and commitment will be required. And without having an obvious 'carrot' in front, the incentive to continue activities should focus on the benefits, not the difficulties. In the first SIP newsletter, Gavin Huggett described the project scope as comprehensive with a huge ambition and an interactive approach. At the same time, Jennifer Preston highlighted the wish for the establishment of a community of practice. Originally coming from an educational perspective for collective learning, communities of practices were described by Wenger as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly". As the funding ceases, it is important to keep up the momentum and find an effective motivation for the community.

The Sustainable Intensification Research Network (SIRN) invites you to join efforts to consolidate SI as a research priority area:

SIRN was created to increase community integration, deliver new high-quality system-orientated interdisciplinary projects and influence future agenda setting for research, funding and policies. The network is funded by BBSRC and NERC from April 2016 to April 2019 and current leadership team involves Andy Whitmore (PI) at Rothamsted Research, Michael Winter at the University of Exeter, Sue Hartley at the University of York and Matt Heard at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology with Adelia de Paula coordinating the activities. The network is open to all and we aim to represent the SI community by harnessing the strengths of different research areas and expertise, as well as identifying future needs and aspirations. Therefore, your participation in these discussions could help ensure continuity of your own efforts and be of great benefit to all.

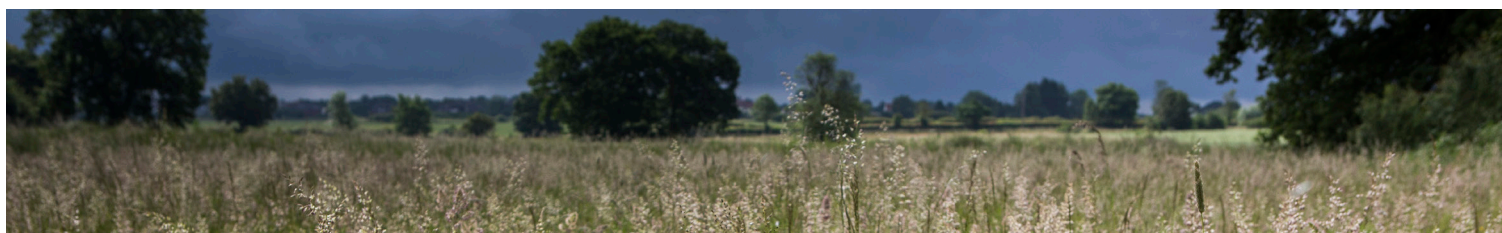
To learn more how to get involved visit [www.sirn.org.uk](http://www.sirn.org.uk) or contact us on [info@sirn.org.uk](mailto:info@sirn.org.uk)

Wenger, E. (2011). *Communities of Practice: A brief introduction*. Watertown, MA: Harvard Business Press. [Google Scholar: http://bit.ly/2koGyyE](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=...)



*Adelia de Paula is the co-ordinator for the Sustainable Intensification Research Network (SIRN) and is based at Rothamsted Research.*





# Sippets

## Latest news from the platform

### **Are you looking for a partner for the next research calls? Find out more about SIRN online tools.**

We are aware that recent calls will be very competitive and a few colleagues are already working on their proposals. However, if you are still looking for a partner, SIRN has created two online tools that may help you.

#### **Partner registration (online tool):**

This facility allows people to share ideas for engagement and collaboration. If you would like to make contact with others interested in the sustainable intensification of agriculture you can register your interest in the link below. The information provided will be available on our website and you will be able to filter registrations by academic discipline, research area and capability, countries and funding opportunities you may be interested in. The form is easy to complete but you will need to agree with our Terms and Conditions.

Please register your expertise at <https://sirn.org.uk/get-involved/partner-registration/> and soon you will be able to view list of registered partners at: <https://sirn.org.uk/get-involved/view-list-of-partners/>

#### **Discussion Forum (online tool)**

SIRN can also facilitate a closed discussion where you and your colleagues can share ideas for future projects without using emails. You can join in and out wherever you are available and information will not get mixed with other topics. You will need to contact us to create the discussion forum, and to have a password to login. If you want to use this tool, please contact us at [info@sirn.org.uk](mailto:info@sirn.org.uk)

### **AAB Sustainable Intensification Conference (Harpenden, 28-30th November 2017)**

As has been acknowledged through these pages and previous editions of SIPScene, the challenge facing the agricultural sector is one of sustainable intensification (SI). The UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government have sought to address this challenge by investing in the SIP, a three-year (2014-2017), multi-partner research programme to explore the opportunities and risks associated with SI at a range of perspectives and scales across England and Wales. This conference will explore the outcomes of the SIP, and other relevant research.

Topics covered by the conference will include:

- Management practices for SI at the farm and landscape scale
- Landscape typology: identifying opportunities and risks for agricultural land use
- Indicators and metrics for SI
- Assessing and benchmarking the economic and environmental performance of farms
- Decision support for Integrated Farm Management
- Knowledge exchange and communication
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Supply chains and consumer demand
- What's next for SI?
- More details can be found on the AAB SI conference website, including details on how to register.

18 BASIS points have been awarded for this event.





Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

Defra have been proud to support the Sustainable Intensification Research Platform, and work is underway to look at how outcomes from SIP can be used to inform the future development of environmental and farming policy.

Options for the future of the SIP programme are currently under consideration. SIP has provided an excellent resource to engage with farmers, and there is great potential to build upon research undertaken on demonstration farms.

Defra are also working with the BBSRC to continue work on SI through the Sustainable Intensification Community Network and the JPI FACCE Knowledge Network on Sustainable Intensification.

**Thank you**  
from the **SIP** team

The SIP team would like to extend their sincere thanks to everyone who has participated in the project over the last three-a-half-years.

You can find links to all the outputs from the programme at  
**[www.siplatform.org.uk/outputs](http://www.siplatform.org.uk/outputs)**

Please do sign-up to the Sustainable Intensification Research Network (SIRN) and be involved in future debate and research around SI  
**[www.sirn.org.uk](http://www.sirn.org.uk)**





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## Research Partners

