SIP

SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION RESEARCH PLATFORM

SCIENCE, POLICY AND PRACTICE NOTE 2

Farmer and Adviser Attitudes to Integrated Farm Management

The Issue

Integrated Farm Management (IFM) is a whole farm business approach that delivers more sustainable farming. It uses the best of modern technology and traditional methods to deliver prosperous farming that enriches the environment and engages local communities. IFM includes all areas of a farming business and one way of breaking down the approach is represented in the nine areas that make up LEAF's IFM wheel (Figure 1).

IFM promotes practical, site-specific practices in each of these areas and offers a useful framework for growers to continually improve their business and farm more sustainably. The term and associated practices however, are not universally understood or carried out. This part of the SIP project, therefore, undertook research to examine the extent to which farmers understand and use the framework, and how the project and further work could promote wider uptake.

SIP's Response

An initial literature review found that there had been much historical confusion about the concept of IFM. Fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2015 set out to understand the attitudes towards IFM across the farming community in England and Wales. The following groups were asked a number of different questions about IFM, including whether they had heard of it, seen the diagram, how they would define it and to make suggestions about how to improve knowledge exchange around the idea:

- two arable farmer groups in Norfolk
- one arable adviser group [agronomists covering the East Anglia region]
- one dairy farmer group in Sussex
- one red meat farmer group in Central Wales
- 78 interviews with other farmers and advisers
- three industry-specific workshops for representatives from the supply chain

Figure 1. LEAF's IFM wheel

What SIP Learnt

Following these interactions, it was clear that there was significant confusion about IFM as a concept. Livestock farmers, in particular, were rarely aware of the term, although arable farmers and advisers tended to know more about it. This could be because the term IFM developed out of the practices and terminology around Integrated Crop Management. Similarly, SIP Partner, LEAF, has been involved with promoting IFM for many years in the UK and their membership base favours arable and horticulture farmers over livestock. Despite this, the approach is equally relevant and useful in livestock systems.

Despite varying terminology use however, nearly all farmers suggested that they were carrying out some elements of IFM practices without necessarily using the specific phrase. Some respondents, particularly arable advisers, wondered how IFM differed from other terms used to explain methods and practices to farm sustainably such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and agro-ecology. While IPM is a crucial part of IFM, its coverage however is limited to the management of pests in crops, whereas IFM covers the whole farm.

Since the summer of 2015, as well as researching IFM, SIP has been disseminating information. The project has developed many of the practices that fit well with an IFM approach and these have been well communicated within the study areas. The knowledge exchange partners within the project have been communicating these practices and SIP tools more widely within their own and other networks. The SIP findings have also fed in to existing industry tools, training and networks such as BASIS IFM training, the LEAF Sustainable Farming Review, an online management decision-making IFM tool and demonstration farms.

Opportunities for Policy and Practice

The low awareness of IFM as a concept, combined with its overlap with other ideas, suggests the exact definition and its practical use needs to be better communicated. A specific area that needs to be better understood by farmers and advisors is the role IFM can have in improving profitability as well as longer term economic sustainability. IFM delivers this though better attention to detail, improved efficiencies and contribution to greater resilience in the farming system in areas such as soil management and crop protection.

One challenge highlighted by advisers, a key trusted source of information, was the fact that many of them are specialists, and not necessarily trained to give integrated advice across the whole business (particularly on aspects like community engagement). Encouraging advisors to train in and subsequently offer more integrated advice would be a key learning here. This could be facilitated by encouraging more diverse training programmes and ensuring continual professional development requirements include attending different events.

It is clear that if IFM as a concept is to be encouraged further, knowledge exchange activities should address the whole farming community, from grower, to adviser, through to farming organisations. **These knowledge exchange activities would be most productive if they utilised existing trusted support networks, such as advisers and peer-to-peer farming groups.**

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Further Resources

David C. Rose, William J. Sutherland, Andrew Barnes, Fiona Borthwick, Charles Ffoulkes, Clare Hall, Jon Moorby, Phillipa Nicholas-Davies, Susan Twining, and Lynn V. Dicks *in revision* 'Thinking holistically for sustainable agriculture: understanding farmer, advisor, and industry attitudes towards integrated farm management, *Land Use Policy*

The below report can be accessed via the Defra website. Please visit: http://bit.ly/2sN9WUW

Rose, D., Dicks, L., Sutherland, W., Parker, C., Lobley, M. and Twining, S. (2016). *Final Report for Work Package 1.3A: Identifying the characteristics of effective decision support and guidance systems*. Report for Defra project LM0302 Sustainable Intensification Research Platform Project 1: Integrated Farm Management for Improved Economic, Environmental and Social Performance

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The Sustainable Intensification Research Platform (SIP) is a multi-partner research programme comprising academia, farmers, industry experts, environmental organisations, and policymakers.

Funded by Defra and the Welsh Government, the platform explores the opportunities and risks of Sustainable Intensification (SI) from a range of perspectives and landscape scales across England and Wales.

The Platform, run from 2014-17, has investigated ways to increase farm productivity, reduce environmental impacts, and increase the benefits that agricultural land provides to society.

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More Information

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