

SIP



SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION
RESEARCH PLATFORM



SCIENCE, POLICY AND PRACTICE NOTE 8 Benchmarking Sustainable Intensification





The Issue

Sustainable Intensification Benchmarking for Sustainable Futures

Benchmarking is about comparing performance or outcomes with a view to improving or changing something. Farmers have been informally benchmarking for centuries – such as comparing yields of crops, milk yields or lambing percentages. As both policy and market interests in sustainability have grown, farmers are increasingly interested in the wider performance of their business, and how this compares with other farm businesses. Some retailers now require farmers to undertake sustainable practices as part of their supply contract. The future direction of support payments from Government is likely to be more focused on sustainable farming and land management practices. All these points have led to a growing interest in farmers needing metrics and indicators of their sustainability practices. But as we all know, the foundation of any sustainable business is economic sustainability – in most cases this goes hand-in-hand with sound environmental and social practices.

Farm Business Benchmarking – the foundations of success

Farmers and advisers have been using data from the highly respected Farm Business Survey (FBS) for over 80 years for business comparison purposes. For over a decade, Rural Business Research (RBR) – the consortium that undertakes the Defra-FBS – has hosted and improved a Farm Business Benchmarking service (www.farmbusinesssurvey.co.uk). Key features of this site include:

- Free to use, interactive way to undertake farm business benchmarking
- Receives well over 100,000 hits per annum
- Benchmarking tools at enterprise and farm business levels
- EU benchmarking to compare performance with main trading nations
- Projection Calculator tool to allow farmers to plan ahead

Of course, farm businesses do not operate in isolation from their local and global environment, and achieving sustainable intensification requires development across economic, environmental and social areas.

SIP's Response

From Economic to Environmental and Social Benchmarking

The SIP project has extended the FBS Business Benchmarking site to develop a sister “Sustainable Intensification Benchmarking Tool”. We have drawn on methodologies and protocols from other SIP work to make the SI Benchmarking Tool accessible to farmers and advisers without the need for reams of detailed farm records. This exciting new benchmarking service allows farmer and advisers to compare their SI performance across a range of environmental metrics and social indicators, in addition to their economic performance. There are four main SI areas covered by the system:

- Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions
- Nutrient Balances
- Land Use Diversity
- Social Indicators

Each of these four main components has either local or global landscape implications that are of importance in achieving SI. GHG emissions are of global importance, while nutrient balances and land use diversity typically have greater impacts within the local landscape. Social factors impact across different scales, from the farm business to local and national levels.

Using Our New Benchmarking Tool

Match your Farm to Similar Businesses

The SI Benchmarking Tool allows you to compare your SI performance with a unique set of comparative farms that are very similar to your own – both geographically and with respect to the activities and enterprises on their farm. This is achieved by the benchmarking tool searching the FBS data set to find the farm businesses that are most closely matched to your own. Using the SI Benchmarking site you can:

- Chose to compare only part of your farm's SI performance (e.g. GHG emissions)
- Compare a wide range of SI performance metrics across the four main areas
- Obtain instant summary feedback results as soon as you start entering data



- Enter some data and save this so that you can return to it later
- Highlight areas of good performance, as well as areas for improvement

How can I Benchmark My Own Farm?

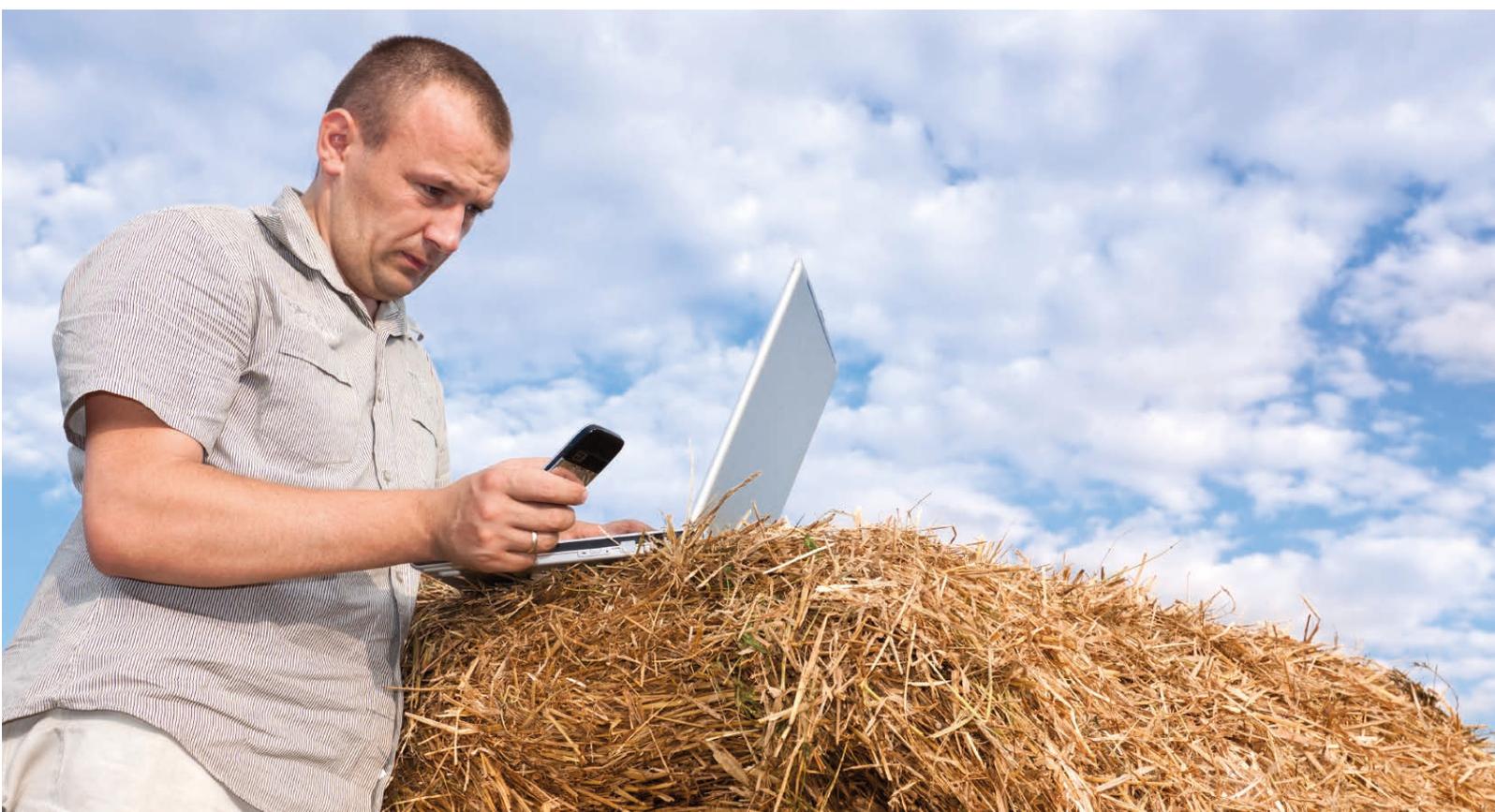
The new SI Benchmarking Tool is available at www.benchmarkmyfarm.co.uk

- The site is free-to-use and your data and information are entirely secure
- You need to complete a simple registration process to allow you to enter and save your data
- Your data can only be accessed by you, and your data will not be used by others – unlike many benchmarking sites, the SI benchmarking tool does not 'harvest' your data
- Comparative data is drawn from the Farm Business Survey (FBS) which has been independently validated to ensure you are comparing your performance with real farm business data

By providing the flexibility of use above you will start to receive comparative data back as soon as you start entering information into the tool. Like many things in life, the more you put into the system the more you will get out of it.

Opportunities for Policy and Practice

In addition to the many benefits that this sustainable intensification benchmarking tool brings to farmer and advisers, it also has direct relevance to wider stakeholders and policy makers. For example the tool facilitate comparison of the four key metrics and indicators noted above across farm types, or across locations. This means that policy makers can look across the SI performance per hectare, or per input uses, such as fertiliser inputs. These comparisons can help policy makers identify trade-offs and win-wins in policy design and implementation.





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NOTE: The www.benchmarkmyfarm.co.uk tool has been developed by Mark Reader, Ben Lang, Rachel Lawrence and Ian Hodge at the University of Cambridge and Stephen Ramsden and Paul Wilson at the University of Nottingham.

Further Resources

Farm Business Survey Benchmarking:
www.farmbusinesssurvey.co.uk

Rural Business Research:
www.ruralbusinessresearch.co.uk

Sustainable Intensification Benchmarking:
www.benchmarkmyfarm.co.uk

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

Wilson, P., Reader, M., Lang, B., Hodge, I. and Ramsden, S. (2017). *Design and Development of a Sustainable Intensification Benchmarking System to Stimulate Information-sharing Between Groups of Farmers*. Report for Defra project LM0302 Sustainable Intensification Research Platform Project 2: Opportunities and Risks for Farming and the Environment at Landscape Scales

Acknowledgements

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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

Visit: www.siplatform.org.uk

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