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Global Farm Metric

A holistic framework for sustainable farm systems

An overview — from principles to practice

GLOBAL FARM METRIC

www.globalfarmmetric.org

What is the Global Farm Metric?

Our mission is to drive the transition towards farming systems that deliver positive outcomes for climate, nature and people.

The Global Farm Metric (GFM) is a framework to align global farming stakeholders around a shared understanding of holistic sustainability at farm-level. It defines shared outcomes and indicators across social, environmental and economic dimensions.

Farmers and stakeholders across the sector can use the framework to build knowledge, guide sustainability measurement and inform action.

This enables systems change from the ground up and top down, driving the collective action needed to restore and nourish the health of people and planet.

The GFM 2.0 framework

The wheel identifies key areas of the farming system where sustainability impacts occur. The grey outer ring highlights the role of farm context, recognising that sustainability outcomes are affected by factors beyond the farmer's control.

Why do we need the GFM?

Farming contributes to a wide range of global challenges. It can also be the solution.

Almost half of the world's habitable land is now farmed to meet growing needs for food, feed, fuel and fibre. The way these products are produced impacts the health of nature, climate and people.

Unsustainable production contributes to challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity and water scarcity. Sustainable farms are powerful drivers of positive change. Together, farmers can help to rebuild the health of both people and the planet.

However, farmers face significant barriers to driving change. Conflicting information and socio-economic structures create confusion and disincentivise sustainable practices. These issues are compounded by measurement and monitoring initiatives that perpetuate uncertainty and narrow views of sustainability.

The GFM is designed to overcome the barriers that prevent farmers from transitioning to more sustainable systems. It aligns understanding, improves sustainability assessment and drives systems change.

This empowers all farmers and stakeholders to create farming systems that tackle global challenges from the ground-up.

Knowledge and understanding

Barrier

The absence of a common language has led to varied definitions for farm sustainability which often overlook the interconnectedness of the farming system. This lack of alignment hinders collaboration and innovation and can lead to siloed approaches, where positive impacts in one area (e.g. carbon) mask negative consequences elsewhere (e.g. biodiversity or food production).

Many sustainable farming approaches come with fixed methods and philosophies, which can struggle to adapt to the diverse needs of individual farming systems and contexts. This can limit engagement and understanding and reinforce education and skills gaps.

Solution

The GFM enables holistic, systems-thinking by identifying key social, environmental and economic dimensions of the farm where impact occurs.

Shared outcomes are established from a multi-stakeholder perspective that can be applied to a diversity of farming systems, scales and contexts. By defining farm sustainability through the shared outcomes, the framework clarifies understanding and drives alignment across different farming philosophies and practices.

Measurement and monitoring

Barrier

Sustainability assessments vary in objectives, metrics and perspectives, often focusing on a specific area, such as carbon or productivity. Farm practices (e.g. cover-cropping) tend to be used as proxies for desirable outcomes (e.g. soil health), without monitoring the actual long-term impact.
To understand a farm holistically, multiple data-collection tools are required – resulting in duplication, added costs and inefficiencies for users. Lack of a common framework hinders alignment of tools and the development of scalable data-sets that can evidence sustainability.

Solution

The GFM has been developed in collaboration with farmers and farming stakeholders to guide primary data-collection that informs decision making and accelerates the transition to sustainable farm systems.

A focus on outcomes, rather than practices, supports the monitoring of progress towards individual and shared goals to better manage risks, prevent unintended consequences and identify new opportunities. Common indicators enable alignment in farm-level data collection and the development of scalable data-sets. These can be used across the industry to evidence outcomes and tackle uncertainty and misconceptions about sustainable farming, including its ability to maintain profitability, support food security and meet socio-economic goals.

Systemic and structural

Barrier

Factors outside the farmer's control affect the achievement of sustainability outcomes. This includes environmental challenges, such as the weather or soil-type, agricultural policies and economic incentives. High costs, limited market access and an absence of financial incentives means that farming unsustainably is often more financially viable, discouraging the transition towards more sustainable systems.

A lack of government support and policies that conflict with sustainability goals create additional challenges, while current levels of transparency and public awareness limit broader engagement and demand for sustainable farming.

Solution

The GFM highlights contextual factors that can affect the farm, recognising that sustainability is not the responsibility of farmers alone.

The GFM highlights contextual factors that can affect the farm, recognising that sustainability is not the responsibility of farmers alone. The framework drives alignment in understanding and measurement, enabling collaboration across diverse stakeholder groups, as well as the collation of data at multiple scales. This can demonstrate the delivery of public goods and highlight the hidden costs of unsustainable production. It supports evidence-based policymaking and enables transparent financial systems that incentivise and reward positive outcomes. This drives the creation of a supportive policy and economic environment that empowers sustainable farming.

The GFM in action

The GFM builds knowledge, strengthens sustainability measurement and breaks down systemic barriers.

From grassroots action on farms to evidence-based decision-making in policy and finance, it unlocks change at every level and empowers a transformative shift in food and farming that delivers lasting benefits for nature, climate and people.

Stakeholders across the food and farming system can use the framework in multiple ways.

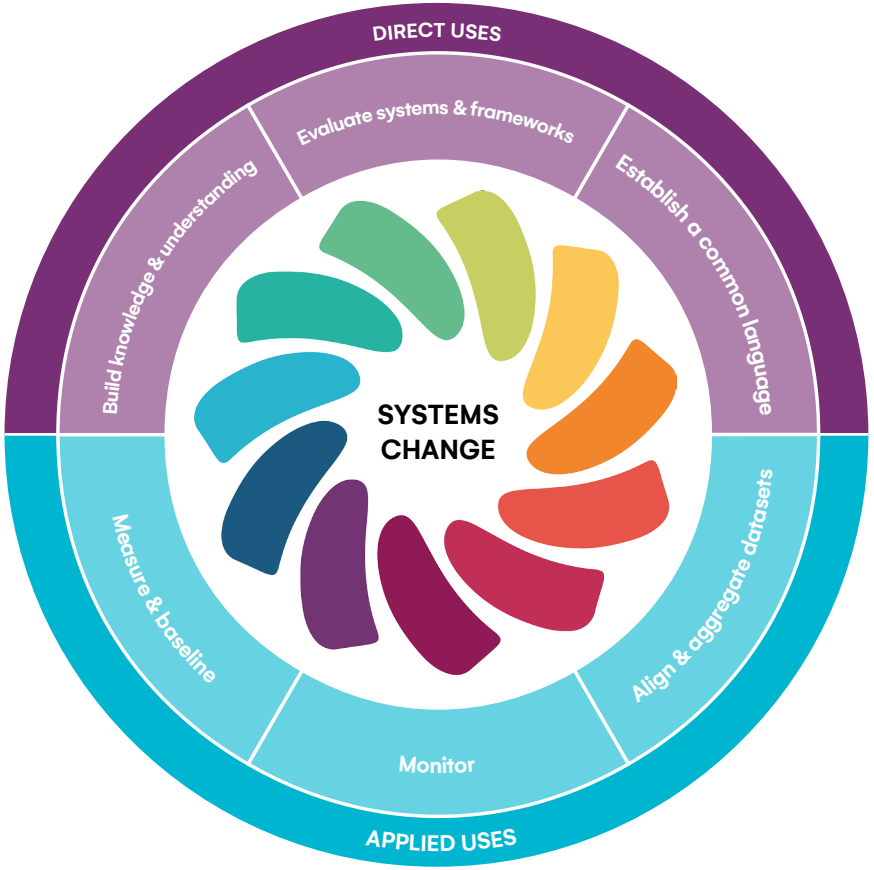
Direct use involves the adoption of GFM principles and guidance to align understanding and establish a common language.

Applied use refers to the integration of the framework into existing systems and tools to enable holistic monitoring of outcomes.

Together, these approaches drive systems change.

Using the GFM

The GFM can be used directly and applied in existing initiatives to drive systems change from the ground up.



Direct use: shaping shared understanding

The GFM defines farm-level sustainability holistically to guide understanding, evaluation and communication.

The GFM framework and principles can be used directly, without the need for formal assessment or tools.

Build knowledge and understanding
A non-prescriptive and globally applicable definition of farm-level sustainability fosters a collective understanding that transcends farming philosophies. It facilitates systems thinking and supports those beginning their sustainability journey.

Evaluate systems and frameworks
A common reference point enables evaluation of existing initiatives against the GFM principles, outcomes, categories and indicators. It can be used to map and compare farm-level and industry-wide initiatives (including assessment tools, impact models, policies, sustainability goals and reporting frameworks) to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement, guiding more outcome-based, farmer-centric and holistic approaches.

Establish shared outcomes
The outcomes in the framework establish shared goals that align aspirations, enable knowledge sharing and inspire action. The framework bridges differences and unites diverse stakeholders, disciplines and agendas, building and directing collective progress toward a more sustainable future.

Case study

Driving alignment and global action for regenerative farming

The Regen10 outcomes-based framework is designed to define and track progress towards regenerative farming systems. It is being co-developed by a diverse coalition of stakeholders – including businesses, farmers, policymakers, research and Indigenous Peoples organisations.

The GFM framework played a key role in supporting this process by providing the foundational structure and principles. It enabled a shared reference point from which to align multiple existing frameworks, methodologies, understandings and approaches to regenerative agriculture. Alignment helped strengthen collaboration between organisations, ensuring the framework was both comprehensive and widely applicable across different contexts. The GFM framework also facilitated a holistic approach to defining regenerative outcomes, while allowing for the integration of diverse perspectives and knowledge systems.

The Regen10 framework was tested in 11 countries across five continents. This identified key impact areas and provided a structure for monitoring environmental, social, and economic progress towards regenerative outcomes across the globe.

Applied use: turning principles into practice

The GFM is designed to be applied to existing initiatives to guide measurement, assessment and monitoring.

It is not a tool, assessment, or audit, but a practical means to guide and enhance our collective impact.

Measure and baseline
The framework can be integrated into assessments to enable holistic data collection and establish a baseline for whole-farm sustainability. While full coverage of the categories and indicators offers maximum insight, it is not always practical. The GFM provides a roadmap for gradual expansion of assessment scope by highlighting gaps in metrics and sign-posting to supplementary areas of assessment.

Monitor
Repeated collection of baseline data monitors short, medium and long-term change. This tracks progress towards sustainability outcomes and goals, identifies trade-offs and detects unintended consequences. Holistic monitoring is future-proofed for evolving sustainability priorities, enabling farmers and stakeholders to stay competitive in a changing global market. Decision making across the industry is enhanced for better risk management, building resilience for a stronger future.

Align and aggregate datasets
The framework guides the alignment and aggregation of primary and secondary data, scalable at local, national and international levels. This can improve transparency and consistency in reporting and labelling, helping to combat greenwashing. Data can flow between tools, reducing the reporting burden for farmers. Evidence-based investments are targeted and effective, fostering a policy and economic environment that empowers positive outcomes.

Case study

UK Government: Underpinning evidence-based policy and investment

The GFM was trialled with the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to explore how it could support the transition to the new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS). Primary data was collected across all categories of the GFM framework by embedding it within a farm assessment, offering valuable insights into on-farm performance. Participating farmers used the findings to identify key areas for improvement. For one farmer, these results informed conversations with farm advisors and helped strengthen their grant application for livestock management equipment.

The application was successful, leading to enhanced operational efficiency and a reduction in environmental impact. Since then, the farmer has continued to collect GFM data at regular intervals, enabling them to track progress against their initial baseline and demonstrate the long-term benefits of investment in meeting sustainability goals. We are now exploring how such insights can be aggregated to monitor social, economic and environmental outcomes across landscapes – feeding into DEFRA's policy development and supporting more effective investment in farming.

Who benefits? Driving change across the industry

When the whole farming system collaborates through a common language, momentum is generated at every level.

From farmers and financiers to businesses and policymakers, every stakeholder benefits by aligning around a more holistic, outcomes-based approach to sustainability. Responsibility is distributed fairly across the system, preventing the burden of change from falling on any one group alone.

From the ground up, a strong and holistic evidence base fuels decision-making on farms and across the industry. Actions are well-informed and impacts are monitored to mitigate unintended consequences.

At the same time, top-down transformation creates the conditions and financial incentives that empower farmers to achieve positive outcomes. Practices that contribute to global crises are disincentivised, while delivery of public goods is rewarded.

This creates effective and lasting change that can reshape entire landscapes and the global farming system, bringing us closer to a truly sustainable future.

Farmers gain the knowledge, data and support needed to navigate sustainability challenges, manage risk and transition to resilient, productive and sustainable farm systems.

Farm advisors provide holistic guidance and enable peer-to-peer learning across diverse systems, supported by robust assessments and baselines for informed decision-making and long-term monitoring.

Researchers and educators collaborate across disciplines and contexts using a common language, enhancing knowledge exchange and activities such as mapping, data aggregation and modelling.

Data experts create aligned, outcomes-based data-sets that evidence farm-level sustainability at scale. Data transferability is optimised, building value to users and encouraging long-term engagement.

Assurance and reporting bodies including certifiers, auditors and labelling schemes, collect outcomes-based data to support transparency and validate sustainability claims, strengthening trust and compliance with evolving regulatory and market demands.

Value chains including processors, wholesalers and retailers, use primary data for traceability and transparency, with holistic sourcing policies that support farmers and create resilient supply chains.

Consumers understand the sustainability of products based on consistent and transparent data, enabling informed choices that drive demand for sustainable produce.

Governments and policymakers support farmers with incentives and evidence-based policies that drive shared outcomes. Aligned assessment monitor the efficacy of interventions and track progress towards local, national and international goals.

Financial institutions integrate outcomes-based sustainability into risk, investment and finance strategies, delivering effective support for sustainable farming based on holistic evidence.

We have a powerful opportunity to transform farming and land use into a force for positive change.

The Global Farm Metric is supported by over 200 organisations across the globe. Together, we can empower every farm to thrive and create a sustainable future for climate, nature and people.

This is the first report in our mini-series exploring the GFM, version 2.0.

Contact us, sign up to the newsletter and follow us on socials for updates and opportunities.

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