May 2025

Global Farm Metric

A holistic framework for sustainable farm systems

Framework – detail and development

GLOBAL FARM METRIC

www.globalfarmmetric.org

What is the Global Farm Metric?

Our mission is to drive systems change and enable farming systems that deliver positive outcomes for climate, nature and people.

The GFM is a holistic framework to establish a shared understanding of whole-farm sustainability. It builds knowledge and facilitates holistic measurement, driving alignment and informed action across all farming stakeholders.

The GFM was born out of the Sustainable Food Trust's (SFT) mission to expose the hidden costs of unsustainable food systems, and to champion farming that benefits people and planet.

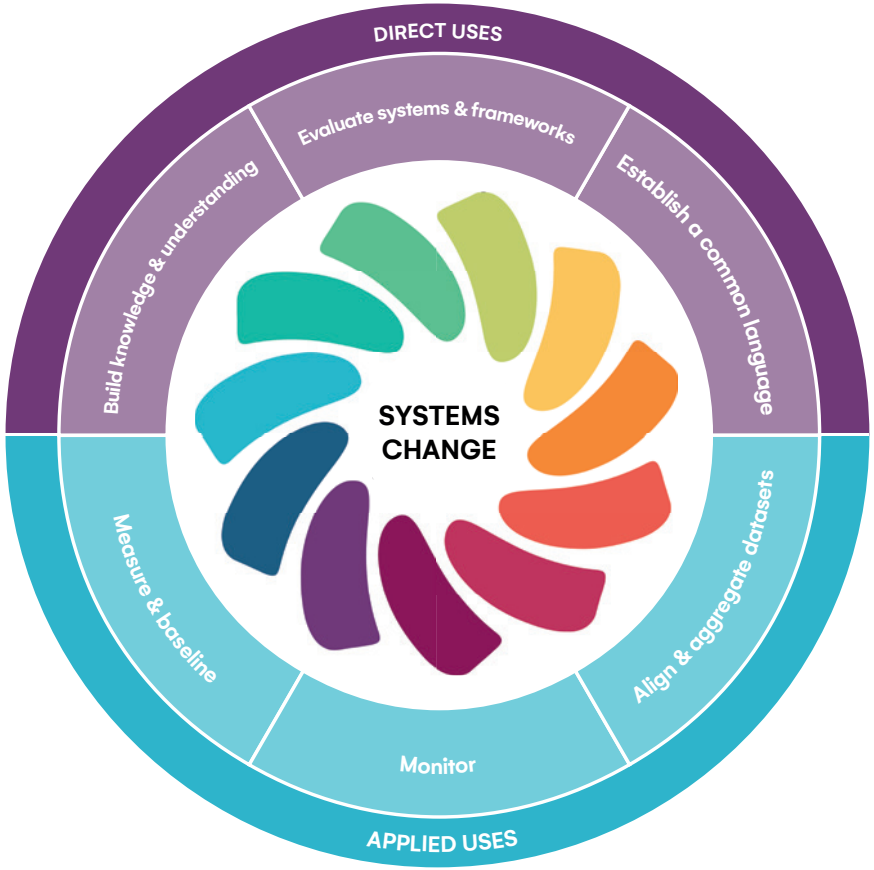
To tackle the barriers holding back progress — from multiple definitions of sustainability and siloed assessments to economic disincentives — the SFT brought together farmers and food system experts to form a dedicated coalition, sparking the creation of the GFM.

Since 2018, we have tested the GFM with over 500 farmers across 23 countries. The framework is being used to monitor sustainability,enable peer-to-peer learning and guide farm, policy and investment decisions. This work is beginning to make visible the true costs and value of production, while accelerating the shift to sustainable farming.

Read more about the GFM in our 2025 report: An overview – from principles to practice: **globalfarmmetric.org/reports/overview2025**

Using the framework

The GFM is an outcomes-based framework, co-designed with farmers and stakeholders. It can be used directly to support learning by identifying key dimensions of the farm and defining shared outcomes to be achieved. It can also be applied within existing initiatives to measure sustainability, promote alignment and drive systems change from the ground up.



What has informed development?

Collaboration, trials and research have informed the next iteration of the framework, 'GFM2.0'.

Academic research

The framework is built on over a decade of research, expert consultation and development, building scientific credibility and rigour.

Over the past three years, over 75 farm assessments and 1,700 sustainability indicators have been analysed by GFM researchers, including a Delphi review of biodiversity indicators. This builds on previous work and reinforces the need for harmonised, outcomes-based and holistic sustainability measurement.

We have mapped and evaluated existing frameworks, contributed to research and will publish peer-reviewed papers on biodiversity indicators and the academic development of the framework (under review, expected 2025).

This has resulted in stronger alignment with international sustainability initiatives (including Sustainable Development Goals) and other impact measurement methodologies (such as Life Cycle Analysis).

The GFM has now been cited in over 50 publications, including the UK National Food Strategy (2021), and is a leading voice in holistic agricultural sustainability.

Education and knowledge building

The GFM guides sustainability education, helping all learners build a clear understanding of whole-farm systems and sustainability.

The framework offers a structured way to explore the complex, interconnected nature of sustainability. It is adaptable, enabling content to be tailored to different audiences.

It has successfully been used to develop an online course for farm advisors in collaboration with BASIS, as well as educational resources for schools.

We are continuing to collaborate with agricultural colleges and universities to create the learning materials needed to equip the next generation of farmers and farm advisors, including the development of post-graduate courses.

This will help unlock the full potential of the GFM in advancing holistic understandings of sustainable farming systems.

Assessing farm sustainability

Farm sustainability assessments test the framework's effectiveness in data collection and its potential to drive change from the ground up.

From smallholders in South America to large-scale farms in Australia, the trials proved that the framework can be applied across diverse farming systems and geographies. While assessments are adapted to local contexts, the GFM keeps them grounded in a consistent, outcome-focused approach.

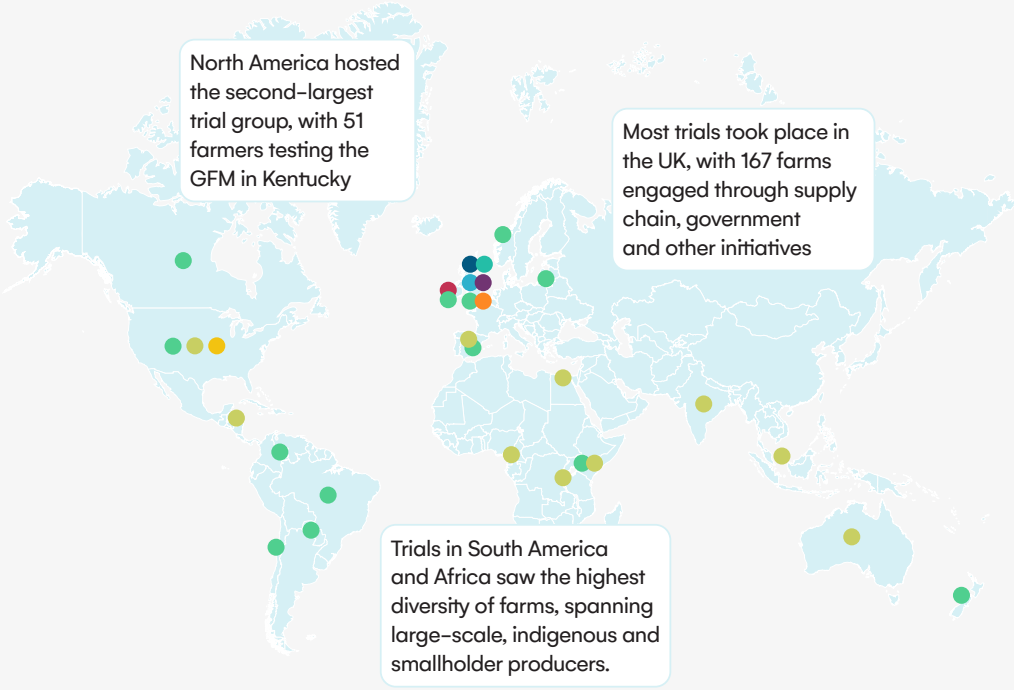
The trials also highlighted real-world barriers. Time, cost and complexity challenged data collection and practice change, especially without advisor support or financial incentives.

On the ground, the assessments created action. They helped farmers start their sustainability journey: sparking conversations, establishing baselines, making changes and tracking progress.

The data is now being used to guide investment, shape advice and highlight where positive outcomes are being delivered. Early analysis is already revealing powerful insights into what's working — and where the trade-offs lie.

Tested across diverse farms worldwide, the GFM proves its value in driving on-the-ground change.

Farm trials have put the GFM to the test on over 300 farms across 23 countries and six continents.



Trials key

- Climate smart farming and marketing
- Communication in the supply chain
- Farm clusters
- Defra ELM TEST & TRIAL 022A
- Big food redesign challenge
- Supply chain transparency and communication
- Sustainability in the dairy sector
- Defra ELM TEST & TRIAL 070A
- Regen 10

Mapping and alignment

The framework can be used to map, evaluate and align diverse sustainability initiatives across the farming system.

As a common reference point, it helps structure comparisons between tools, audits and certification schemes, cutting through the noise of a fragmented sustainability landscape. Its holistic approach makes it useful for spotting data gaps, identifying blind spots and opportunities for improvement across existing initiatives.

It has guided high-level vision setting in projects like Regen10 and supported internal sustainability conversations in small supply chains, proving its value in fostering collaboration.

While turning shared goals into common metrics can be challenging, the framework offers a strong foundation—and now includes clearer guidance and defined outcomes to support deeper harmonisation and collective progress.

Find more case-studies in the 2025 trials report: **globalfarmmetric.org/reports**

Case study

Strengthening supply chains

The GFM provided a shared framework for Natoora and their partner farms to explore both sustainability challenges and opportunities. A holistic assessment was used to gather farm-level data and reflect on the overall sustainability of the supply chain.

By sharing outcome-based data, farmers were better able to demonstrate their sustainability efforts, while Natoora gained valuable insights into how to support progress on the ground. This exchange of information opened up constructive conversations around long-term goals, fostering mutual understanding and laying the groundwork for more aligned decision-making across the supply chain.

Looking ahead, we are exploring how this approach can be scaled—using transparent, farm-level data to deepen trust and drive meaningful change across the wider food system.

GFM development

Three years of trials, testing and research with farmers and stakeholders across the globe have shaped the development of the GFM. While underlying principles remain unchanged, developments focus on structural and conceptual refinements to improve the framework's integrity, coherence and usability.

Clarity

The framework has been refined to improve logic, clarity and accessibility, with simplification at the heart of its evolution. Redundant elements have been removed, language streamlined and guidance strengthened to boost usability without compromising rigour. For example, several categories have been renamed or reorganised to better reflect their focus and impact, while subcategories have been made more targeted and aligned with outcomes and other impact assessment methodologies (such as LifeCycle Analysis). Recognising the complexity of farm sustainability, the goal has been to make the framework easier to understand and apply – supporting deeper engagement and more meaningful action.

Context

The GFM now includes key contextual factors—like weather, soil type and socio-political influences—that influence what is possible on a farm but lie outside a farmer's direct control.

Context adds depth to sustainability insights by helping to explain why farm outcomes may differ. For instance, a dry-region farm may use more water than one in a temperate climate, but context reveals how efficiently it's used, given the conditions.

This enables a clearer understanding of performance across different systems and landscapes and more meaningful benchmarks. This is critical for supporting fair, grounded and evidence-based interventions.

Social

The social aspects of the framework have been strengthened to better capture the lived experiences of farmers and workers, as well issues of equity, inclusion and wellbeing. The relationships that shape community resilience and wellbeing are central, recognising the vital roles farms can play in knowledge, skills and resource exchange.

Outcomes and values

Each category in the GFM is now anchored by a clear outcome—a concise statement that defines a shared goal for each part of the farm system. Informed by research and collaboration, these outcomes bring greater clarity and purpose to the framework. Outcome-based indicators support monitoring of progress towards these goals.

The GFM framework has been strengthened by recognising the diverse values across global farming systems and designing outcomes that align broad goals while supporting locally relevant priorities. By encouraging adaptation to local contexts, it enables stakeholders to pursue shared sustainability outcomes in ways that reflect their unique values and realities—recognising that sustainability is not a one-size-fits-all approach. This flexibility fosters engagement, aligns goals and supports collective action across the system.

Considerations and limitations

The GFM offers a holistic, farm-focused approach to sustainability—but no single framework captures the full complexity of farming. Key considerations include:

A starting point, not finish line:
The framework helps build shared goals, but applying it still needs adaptation and research.

Sustainability is subjective:
Outcomes guide focus, but decisions are affected by different values and perspectives — transparency is key.

Context is critical:
Farmers face barriers to sustainability, and change requires action from all stakeholders. Application of the framework (e.g. in assessment) must account for factors beyond the farmers control to avoid unfairly placing responsibility on farmers.

Farm-focused by design:
The framework captures what happens on farm – not all downstream impacts. This may evolve, but farm-level clarity remains a focus.

Communication counts:
Making the GFM useful for learning and advice needs accessible, audience-specific materials.

Keep it practical:
Collecting data can be burdensome – advisor support, a modular/step by step approach and streamlined guidance are essential.

Evolve through collaboration:
Continuous evolution and testing will help the GFM remain fair, relevant and effective.

Components of the framework

The GFM provides a holistic structure for understanding and advancing sustainability on farms. It is comprised of categories, outcomes, subcategories, context and indicators.

Categories
12 interconnected categories represent key parts of the farm system where sustainability impacts occur. They span environmental, social and economic dimensions – none can be considered in isolation.

Outcomes
Each category includes a shared outcome to be achieved in a truly sustainable farm system. The outcomes complement local priorities and serve as a guiding star– not a rulebook.

Subcategories
These unpack each category into key focus areas that influence the delivery of shared outcomes.

Context
Every farm is unique. Contextual factors highlight areas beyond the farmers control that affect achievement of sustainability outcomes.

Indicators
Measurable data points to understand the sustainability of a farm system, helping track progress towards outcomes.

The framework

Explore the categories, outcomes and subcategories of GFM2.0.

Category and outcome	Subcategories
CONTEXT Contextual factors consider the barriers and enablers that are beyond the control of the farmer and affect the farm's ability to deliver sustainability outcomes.	Geology and topography
	Environment and ecology
	Climate and meteorological
	Agricultural supplies
	Society and culture
	Regulation, law and policy
	Economics and finance
GOVERNANCE Farm governance is equitable, inclusive and respects traditional knowledge. Decision-making – whether formal or informal, hierarchical or cooperative – prioritises transparency, fairness and shared responsibility, empowering all stakeholders to contribute to social, environmental and economic outcomes.	Decision making
	Farm priorities and values
	Management structure
AIR & CLIMATE Greenhouse gas emissions are minimal and carbon removal is maximised, contributing towards climate change mitigation efforts. Air is good quality and free of pollutants, supporting the health of people, livestock and the environment.	Greenhouse gas emissions
	Carbon sequestration and storage
	Pollutants

Category and outcome	Subcategories
SOIL Soils are healthy, fertile and store water and carbon. They support biodiversity and the production of high-quality food, fuel and fibre and contribute to flood prevention and water quality. Soils are free from pollution and resilient to erosion.	Structure
	Chemistry
	Pollutants
WATER Water is clean and abundant in natural and agricultural systems, supporting wildlife and a diversity of aquatic species. Water is sustainably sourced and used efficiently, with no wastage.	Source
	Usage
	Pollutants
BIODIVERSITY Biodiversity is rich in both abundance and genetic diversity. From micro- to macro-organisms, across wild, domesticated and cultivated species, life thrives in healthy and resilient habitats and ecosystems.	Wildlife
	Aquatic life
	Soil
	Crops and pasture
	Livestock
LAND USE The natural and built features established and maintained by the farm are well-suited, well-configured and adapted to meet changing conditions and the needs of the landscape. Habitats are healthy, interconnected and support thriving ecosystems, while infrastructure is well-functioning and fit for purpose.	Type and size of features
	Configuration of features
	Condition of features

The framework (cont.)

Category and outcome	Subcategories
CROPS & PASTURE Crops and pasture are healthy, robust and resilient to disease and climate shocks and stresses. There are secure yields of high quality and nutritious products, with no waste.	Plant health Yield Loss and waste Product quality
LIVESTOCK Farmed and working animals on the farm are healthy, enjoy a high quality of life and are resilient to disease and climate shocks and stresses. This supports secure yields of high quality and nutritious products while eliminating waste.	Health Wellbeing Yield Loss and waste Product quality
FARMERS & WORKERS People on the farm enjoy a high quality of life, equitable treatment and opportunities to learn and develop new skills. All workers are respected, receive fair remuneration, have good well-being and receive positive recognition for their role on the farm.	Demographic Health Wellbeing Work environment Knowledge and skills
AGRICULTURAL SUPPLIES Agricultural supplies, including agricultural inputs, materials and equipment, are sustainably sourced, pose no risk and cause no harm to environmental or human health. Equipment is well-maintained and supplies are used efficiently, with all waste repurposed within a circular system.	Type and source of agricultural supplies Usage End of life
COMMUNITY Farms contribute to and foster a mutually supportive relationship with their local communities. They share knowledge and resources and actively contribute to local wellbeing.	Employment opportunities Knowledge and skills exchange Resource sharing Cultural assets and activities
ECONOMICS Farms are economically viable, They have sufficient funds and diverse income streams to withstand shocks and stresses and are able to make investments to deliver farm sustainability outcomes. Farms actively contribute towards a thriving local economy and strong market connections that meet the needs of the farm.	Finances Income sources Investment Business, markets and services

Future collaboration and action

The GFM 2.0 represents a significant step forward in defining, measuring and advancing on-farm sustainability.

Building on years of research, consultation and real-world testing, the GFM now offers a clearer, more holistic and practical framework to support farmers, supply chains, researchers and policymakers. By integrating outcomes, values and context, it connects local action to global goals—while staying rooted in the realities of farming.

The next phase will deepen its use in areas such as sustainable finance, impact labelling and procurement. Focus includes cutting data burdens for farmers, linking farm outcomes to wider impacts and supporting evidence-based investment in public goods.

This work will continue through open collaboration—uniting farmers, researchers and decision-makers to build a food system that truly works for people, nature and climate.

Find the full series launching GFM2.0 and the extended version of this report on our website: **globalfarmmetric.org/reports**

“From education to sustainable finance and impact labelling, the GFM is working to align and transform the whole farm system”

This is part 2 of our mini-series launching the latest iteration of the framework, summarising its evolution and technical grounding.

With huge thanks to all the farmers and partners who have collaborated and contributed to our shared mission.

Find the full GFM2.0 series on our website:
globalfarmmetric.org/reports

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

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