



## PRESS RELEASE

### **DO YOU KNOW YOUR SOILS?**

First ever **[UK Soils Awareness Week](#)**: 10 -16th October 2022 **#UKSAW** looks to kickstart **Public Understanding and Appreciation of Soils**

- UK Soils face a host of **challenges** – carbon loss, compaction, erosion and microplastic contamination – all of which threaten their ability to meet the country's long-term needs – producing our food and delivering critical environmental services
  - The Summer **heatwave** laid bare the potential crisis facing our soils, raising new questions about their long-term resilience in the face of intensive farming and **climate change**
  - Yet public **awareness and understanding** of soil, and issues around it, is **low**, reflecting low priority in the media, national curriculum, and even environmental campaigning

*"Of all the environmental issues, soil is one of the most misunderstood and the most neglected. This is a huge problem, given its vital importance - for food security, safe water supply, carbon storage and indeed for all life on earth! I want people to be fascinated by soil - curious, inspired, connected - and yes, urgently concerned. Only when soil is established at the top table of public consciousness will we start to see true progress on more sustainable food production and meaningful climate action."*

**Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall**, Celebrity Chef & Campaigner

6th October 2022 **[LONDON]** Soil is life. It is immeasurably complex and varied, supports most life on earth, brings us food, clothes, housing, antibiotics, and stores twice as much carbon as is found in the atmosphere, and three times as much carbon as in the planet's plants and trees. Yet, the British public knows microscopically little about the value of what lies below our feet – especially when compared with other pillars of the environment – air, water and biodiversity.

This has to change, say the organisations behind the first ever nationwide soils awareness week. "Across the dashboard, the warning lights are flashing for our soils – whether it's carbon loss, the increase in microplastics, soil's ability to store and filter water, or provide a home for biodiversity," says Matthew Orman, Co-Director at the Sustainable Soils Alliance, "Yet, despite this – even at a time of heightened environmental awareness - we as a society understand so little about our soil: what it is, the functions it performs, the threats it faces – and above all, what we can do ourselves to protect and improve it.'

**[UK Soils Awareness Week](#)** – the first ever week dedicated to soils in the UK – is a step towards improving our understanding and interest in soil. It consists of **3 eye-catching, interactive and downloadable elements** designed to **inform and inspire curiosity** about soils:

1. **Soils Quiz:** 11 fun, informative and thought-provoking questions about the scientific, agricultural, cultural and environmental aspects of soil, to take and share with your friends.
2. **Soils Lexicon:** A list of the critical terminology you need at your fingertips to understand and explain soil, accompanied by helpful graphs and diagrams.
3. **Top Tips to Take Action:** A list of straight-forward, easy tasks that anyone can introduce into their daily lives to protect and improve the nation's soil.

At the heart of soils appreciation is the complex, but vital, relationship between soil and **climate change**. Soils contain twice as much carbon as is found in the atmosphere – and three times as much as is found in above-ground biodiversity. However **degraded soils lose carbon** – and are less and less resilient to climate change - meaning their ability to provide long-term **food supply** is under threat, especially in the event of continued extreme weather. Professor Bridget Emmett, Head of Soils and Land Use at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, a Founding Member of [uksoils](#), explains, 'This Summer's images of scorched landscapes and cracked earth followed by muddy floods provided a powerful image of the stresses our soils are under. In fact, many of the headline issues of the Summer - drought, climate change resilience, polluted waterways, the cost of fertilisers, the price of food, I have soil at their heart. These might seem like isolated issues, but soil provides a common thread between them. By taking concrete steps to protect and improve our soils, we will go a long way to addressing these other challenges.'

Caring for our soil depends on understanding our soil, and this is where the awareness week steps in: "Whether it's the national curriculum, national investment in monitoring, media coverage or even other environmental campaigns, soil is the 'Cinderella' environmental issue when compared with the other pillars of our environment - air, water and biodiversity - despite its importance, in of itself, and as a factor in these other environmental indicators," says Ellen Fay, Co-Director at the SSA.

'Limited interest in soil has always meant a limited understanding of it, limited emotional investment, limited awareness of the challenges it faces, and limited urgency to address soil issues - by both government and business. This campaign is an attempt to break that cycle by embedding soil in the public consciousness, so it starts being reflected in our day-to-day activities – gardening, consuming, volunteering, voting etc. Yet, it must also be reflected in the real drivers of soil management: policy makers, food and drink companies, and above all, farmers, foresters, urban planners and construction companies. Together they have the greatest responsibility for protecting and regenerating our soil, with our support.'

'Taking farming as one example, there is currently a wave of renewed interest among farmers in sustainable soil management – often referred to as **regenerative farming** – driven by Brexit-related policy changes, increased energy and input costs, and the desire of farmers to reach Net Zero. We hope that UK Soils Awareness Week gives this transition momentum - demonstrating to farmers that the public is fully behind them, and wants to see soils receive the necessary support in the form of government policies, retailer purchasing, advice, incentives and guidance.'

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

**Additional Info** about soil and soil health [HERE](#)

**Campaign Press Pack:** images, infographics, logos etc: <https://uksoils.org/uksa22/press>

## **AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW**

**Prof Bridget Emmett**, Soil Scientist, UKCEH | Founding Member, uksoils | Original member of the EU Mission Board for Soil Health and Food [Biography](#) | [Headshot](#)

**Matthew Orman**, Founding Member, uksoils | Executive Director, Sustainable Soils Alliance [Biography + Headshot](#)

**Ellen Fay**, Director, Sustainable Soils Alliance [Biography](#) | [Headshot](#)

## **UKSOILS**

uksoils is an ambitious initiative and community hub that brings together information to inspire us to learn more about soil, and take action to improve soil health. uksoils is kickstarting a nationwide appreciation and understanding of the economic, societal and ecological importance of soil health. Following its foundation in 2020, it is now supported and managed as a not-for-profit community initiative by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the Sustainable Soils Alliance. uksoils continually seeks new partners to expand its reach and engagement, share information, generate knowledge and support the formation of new proactive communities aimed at increasing awareness and action, thereby improving soil health in farmland, woodland, conservation areas, towns and cities.



**Website:** <https://uksoils.org> | [LinkedIn](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

## **THE UK CENTRE FOR ECOLOGY & HYDROLOGY**

The UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology is an independent, not-for-profit research institute carrying out excellent environmental science with impact.



UK Centre for  
Ecology & Hydrology

Our research spans physical, biological and chemical soil processes. We predict how soils may change under future land use and climate change. Our science provides the evidence that enables integrated approaches for healthy soils.

**Website** <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/> | **Twitter** [https://twitter.com/UK\\_CEH](https://twitter.com/UK_CEH)

**LinkedIn** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/uk-centre-for-ecology-hydrology/>

## **THE SUSTAINABLE SOILS ALLIANCE**

The Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) was launched in 2017 to address the current crisis in UK soils. Its aim is to campaign for political and corporate policies that will restore our soils to health, within the space of one generation, by seeing soil health elevated to where it belongs as a priority alongside biodiversity, clean air and clean water.



**Website** <https://sustainablesoils.org> **Twitter** [www./twitter.com/SoilsAlliance](http://twitter.com/SoilsAlliance)

**LinkedIn** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sustainablesoilsalliance/?originalSubdomain=uk>

## **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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