POLICY LAB 1 Final Report

Introduction

On 13th March 2023, a co-design workshop, using creative practices to facilitate contributions from a range of voices involved in agri-food policy making was held in Edinburgh and online. SRUC hosted the hybrid policy lab which drew together key food and drink sector actors UK-wide, industry bodies, policy makers and government officials. It explored the policy landscape to discover shared interests in what a trusted infrastructure for transparent sustainability data would look like, and how it could be framed by (and operate within) the wider environmental, social and economic context.

The policy lab was part of a collaborative EPSRC funded project called EATS (Enhanced Agri-food Transparent Sustainability, a research project developed together with the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee and Nottingham). The vision for EATS is to develop an actionable information (analysed data) ecosystem whose purpose is to deliver transparent sustainability. We are considering the role of sensors and carbon reporting tools in capturing data about agri-food processes; developing a trusted digital platform able to manage sustainability data and report it across supply chain actors; and utilising data-analytics and machine learning to support decision-making and action. Leading to decision-making and actionable insights that promote environmental sustainability at supply chain scale.

The agenda can be found in Annexe 1, and list of invitees in Annexe 2. The session can be watched on demand at https://vimeo.com/818061159.

EATS: The challenge

The agriculture food system produces nearly a quarter of the UK's carbon emissions, and the journey from farm to fork has to be made more sustainable to help to meet the UK government's strategy for achieving net zero by 2050.

The Policy Lab discussions

Following the welcome, introduction and background to EATS, participants were presented with the results of the work to date. The project has designed Sustainability Stories, learning from case studies with Angus Growers (soft fruits) and ABInBev (brewing); mapping the data ecosystem required; and exploring what attributes, measures and metrics are important and what existing technology do agri-food businesses use.

In response, two groups in the room and another online considered, from their perspectives, what transparent sustainability data we need. In the room, participants worked with flip charts and sticky notes. The online group convened activity through an online interactive whiteboard. All groups' thoughts were eventually collated onto the whiteboard[1], with duplicates removed.

The range of responses included:

- **descriptions of measurements and metrics that would be needed – see the light green notes** – including tCO2e per unit of production; water and waste pollution; biodiversity impact; transport; energy; circular economy and nature positive actions; P and N run off; fertiliser use.

- **technical and operational reflections – see yellow notes** – including questions about how consistently different sectors are measured as there are common metrics and those specific to sectors, standardisation and harmonisation is critical. Nuanced data governance mechanisms are needed for credible data sharing, standards are required for comparability and interoperability.

- **practical reflections on data collection issues – see purple notes** – including product identifiers and linked identifiers needed for traceability, a lack of available activity data to calculate some metrics, requirement for non-commercial oversight and management to ensure co-operation with installing and using data capture and analysis tools.

- **reasons for collecting the data – see the light blue notes** – including defining net zero and sustainability for a business and considering what that means to different interested parties; tracking produce and product journeys through the

[1] See https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVPleBgjE=/

supply chain; considering potential trade-offs including socio-economic impacts; understanding the financial impact of improving sustainability; finding causal relationships between data such as how sustainable suppliers are through sharing top level data such as basic sustainability.

- **beneficial outcomes from data collection – see pink notes** – including making it easier to see how sustainable suppliers are; giving consumers an indication of which businesses contribute public goods such as health impacts and community benefit, potentially leading to competitive advantage. A report card of environmental, social and economic evidence, which companies could use as an ESG value-add.

Participants then considered what they, as policy makers, are currently planning, with the following intelligence shared:

- UK Government Food Data Transparency Partnership - need to ensure metrics designed in this project align with this. There is thinking underway on metrics for GHGs and consistent approaches for scope 3 emissions.
- More encouragement with uptake of new technologies (from natural capital financiers / stakeholders etc.)
- Scottish Government's Good Food Nation Act[2], headlines from it:

[2] See https://www.gov.scot/policies/food-and-drink/good-food-nation/

1. Contribute to rural development and change through Just Transition
2. High quality food production farming standards
3. Biodiversity on agricultural land has been increased and sustained
4. Reduced Green House Gas emissions from the agriculture sector

- ESG - what are government targets, therefore policy drivers and the trusted methods for regulating ESG reporting - Soil Association Exchange, Rebalanced Earth, Trade Associations, SBTI, TNFD all currently providing guidance
- Trust marks/ certifications that exist - LEAF, organic, Forestmind
- Food standards data - for quality assurance, food safety, clarity on chemicals used, clear labelling on packaging
- Some electronic passports
- Protocols for cross-sector macro-effects e.g. of microbial usage/impacts; integrated pest management;
- Dynamic decision making in demand vs production - predicted yield and trade flows (measure to manage)
- ELMS adherence monitoring
- Better access to existing data informing policy decisions through existing and emerging data

We then held critical discussions in the small groups, again, all groups' thoughts were eventually collated onto the whiteboard[3], with duplicates removed. The conversations discussed:

1. What might a trusted infrastructure for *transparent sustainability data* look like? How would it be framed by (and operate within) the wider environmental, social and economic context?

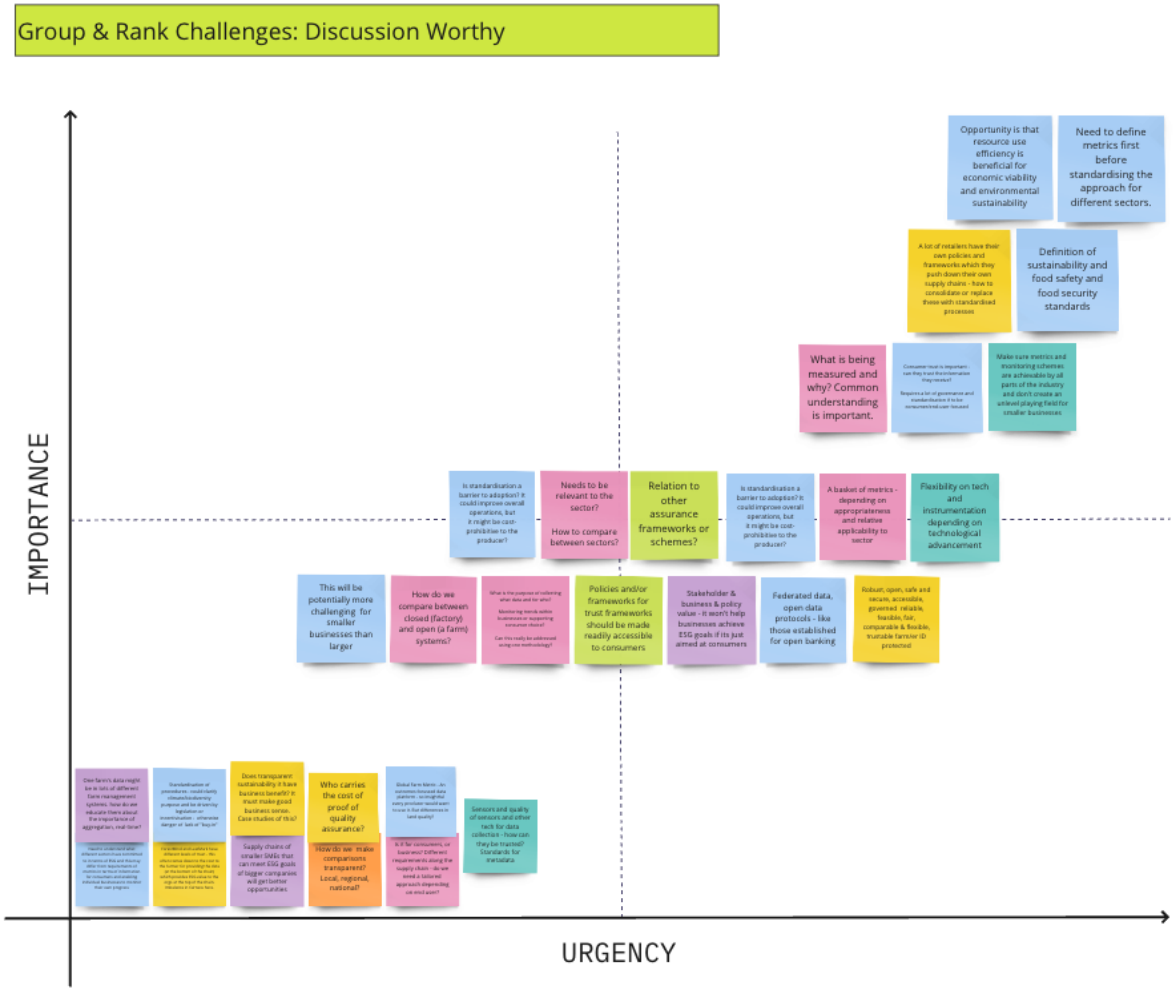
As reflective work after the event, participants added dots to the themes they considered the most important. See below:

[3] See https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVPleBgjE=/

2. Could it help sectors and businesses with their Environmental Social Governance (ESG) commitments?

As reflective work after the event, participants were invited to added dots to the themes they considered the most important. See below:

The themes from both discussions deemed as important from the “dotocracy” exercise were then grouped and ranked into an importance and urgency matrix. The top-right quadrant is both urgent and important, the bottom-left quadrant is neither urgent nor important. See below:



Most urgent and important discussions were:

- A great opportunity is that resource use efficiency is beneficial for economic viability and environmental sustainability (5 votes).
- Need to define metrics first before standardising the approach for different sectors (5).
- A lot of retailers have their own policies and frameworks which they push down their own supply chains - how to consolidate or replace these with standardised processes? (4).
- Definition of sustainability and food safety and food security standards (4).
- What is being measured and why? Common understanding is important (3).
- Consumer trust is important - can they trust the information they receive? This requires a lot of governance and standardisation if to be consumer/end-user focused (3).
- Make sure metrics and monitoring schemes are achievable by all parts of the industry and don't create an unlevel playing field for smaller businesses (3).

The following discussions were rated as being of medium urgency and importance:

- Is standardisation a barrier to adoption? It could improve overall operations, but
- it might be cost-prohibitive to the producer? (2 votes)
- Needs to be relevant to the sector. How to compare between sectors? (2)
- Relation to other assurance frameworks or schemes? (2)
- Is standardisation a barrier to adoption? It could improve overall operations, but
- it might be cost-prohibitive to the producer? (2)
- A basket of metrics - depending on appropriateness and relative applicability to sector (2).
- Flexibility on tech and instrumentation depending on technological advancement (2).
- This will be potentially more challenging for smaller businesses than larger (1).
- How do we compare between closed (factory) and open (a farm) systems? (1).
- What is the purpose of collecting what data and for who? Monitoring trends within businesses or supporting consumer choice? Can this really be addressed using one methodology? (1).
- Policies and/or frameworks for trust frameworks should be made readily accessible to consumers (1).
- Stakeholder & business & policy value - it won't help businesses achieve ESG goals if its just aimed at consumers (1).
- Robust, open, safe and secure, accessible, governed, reliable, feasible, fair, comparable & flexible, trustable farm/er ID protected (1).
- Federated data, open data protocols - like those established for open banking (1).

The following discussions were not rated, but were still mentioned as critical reflections:

- One farm's data might be in lots of different farm management systems. how do we educate them about the importance of aggregation, real-time?
- Need to understand what different sectors have committed to in terms of ESG. This may differ from requirements of metrics in terms of information for consumers and enabling individual businesses to monitor their own progress.
- Standardisation of procedures important. It could clarify climate/biodiversity purpose and be driven by legislation or incentivisation - otherwise there is a danger of lack of "buy-in".
- ForestMind and LeafMark have different levels of trust - this often comes down to the cost to the farmer for providing the data (at the bottom of the chain) which provides ESG value to the organisations at the top of the chain. Imbalance in fairness here. Who carries the cost of proof of quality assurance? Supply chains of smaller SMEs that can meet ESG goals of bigger companies will get better opportunities.
- Is it for consumers, or business? Different requirements along the supply chain - do we need a tailored approach depending on end user?
- How do we make comparisons transparent? Local, regional, national?

- Idea: "Global Farm Metric" - An outcomes focussed data platform - so insightful every producer would want to use it. But differences in land quality?
- Does transparent sustainability have business benefit? It must make good business sense. Are there case studies of this?
- Sensors and quality of sensors and other tech for data collection - how can they be trusted? There needs to be standards for metadata too.

Finally, the priorities identified by dotocracy as the most urgent and important topics have been converted into tangible recommendations for outputs:

- A great opportunity is that resource use efficiency is beneficial for economic viability and environmental sustainability (5 votes).
    - For government, this would mean incentivising resource use efficiency.
    - For business, this would mean telling those stories as case studies.

- Need to define metrics first before standardising the approach for different sectors (5).
    - For government, this would mean defining the standardised approaches/processes/principles.
    - For business, this would mean trialling and iterating standardised processes.

- A lot of retailers have their own policies and frameworks which they push down their own supply chains - how to consolidate or replace these with standardised processes? (4).
    - For government, this would mean defining the standardised approaches/processes/principles which retailers could use.
    - For business, this would mean comfort that that what they were doing for retailers was what government advised too.

- Definition of sustainability and food safety and food security standards (4).
    - For government, this would mean defining the standards.
    - For business, this would mean trialling and iterating standards.

Next Steps

1. The afternoon's agenda had been tightly packed, so participants were asked to send any post-event reflections by email. The dotocracy rating exercise was done as homework later.

2. The group will come together again in 2024 with international colleagues to share further reflections on EATS progress by then and to discuss PESTLE factors' influence on the state of transparent sustainability in the food sector at that point.

3. In the meantime, send any new and emerging policy developments around transparency of sustainability through to the team.

Hannah, Susannah, Mel, Stephanie, Paul and Rachael. 25th May 2023.

Annexe 1 – Agenda

Running order	Activity
13.00 *Arrivals*	Doors to the venue open. Coffee, tea, water and lunch served. Networking
14.00 – 14.05 (*5 mins*) *Welcome*	Setting the Scene: Introduction and welcome from SRUC host Dr Susannah Bolton.
14.05 – 14.25 (*20 mins*) *Introduction & background*	Professor Mel Woods: Sustainability Stories from 2 case studies
14.30 – 15.15 (*45 mins*) *Facilitated session by Susannah Bolton*	Co-design session 1 Small group facilitators: Hannah, Mel, Stephanie; Rachael and Paul (online) • What transparent sustainability data do we need (government, sector-wide, business level)? What are policy makers currently planning? • Group and rank challenges (meta-plan in person and Miro board online, then prioritise the top challenges to discuss) – which themes link most strongly to trustable and transparent sustainable supply chains, and are most worthy of discussion?
15.15 – 15.30 (*15 mins*) *Break*	Coffee, tea, water served.
15.30 – 16.15 (*45 mins*) *Facilitated session by Susannah Bolton*	Co-design session 2 Small group facilitators: Susannah, Mel, Stephanie; Rachael and Paul (online) • Critical discussion 1: what might a trusted infrastructure for *transparent sustainability data* look like? How would it be framed by (and operate within) the wider environmental, social and economic context? • Share potential ideas from small groups

	• Critical discussion 2: could it help sectors and businesses with their Environmental Social Governance (ESG) commitments?
16.15 – 16.40 (25 mins) *Group discussion*	Reporting back and group discussion on how could this project's technical developments support emerging policy? Small group facilitators: Mel, Susannah, Stephanie; Rachael and Paul and Hannah (online). Susannah to chair group discussion.
16.40 – 16.45 *Next steps*	Actions, thanks and goodbyes: Dr Hannah Rudman

Annexe 2 – Invited Participants

Hannah	Rudman	Co-director of the Thriving Natural Capital Centre & Reader, SRUC
Mel	Woods	Professor, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee
Rachael	Ramsey	Senior Scientific Lead, Agrecalc
Paul	Mayfield	Principal Consultant, SAC Consulting
Julie	Pierce	Director of Openness, Data and Digital, Food Standards Agency (Apologies)
Sid	Kalita	Data and Digital Delivery, Food Standards Agency
Jesus	Alvarez-Pinera	Head of Data, Food Standards Agency
Benjamin	Turner	COO, Agrimetrics
Angus	Yarwood	Food Farming and Countryside Commission, Scotland
Stephanie	Crowe	Research Assistant, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee

Alan	Elder	Scottish Government
David	Matthewson	Scottish Government
Iain	Clunie	Net Zero Programme Director, Food and Drink Scotland
Nick	Davies	Agriculture Director 2 Sisters Food Group
Susannah	Bolton	Vice Principal Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange SRUC
Harley	Stoddart	Head of Climate Mitigation Science, DEFRA
Katrina	Hayter	Interim Executive Director Healthy Living & Agriculture, Innovate UK
Peter	Phillips	Head of Natural Capital Land Management Policy, Scottish Government
Becky	Dodds	Director of Communities Agri-TechE
Lamine	Lachhab	Chief Technology Officer, Scottish Government

Jacqui	McElhiney	Head of Science Division, Food Standards Scotland
Sarah	Baker	Senior Strategic Insight Manager, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
Eddie	Turnbull	Head of Digital Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate Scottish Government

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