

Farming for Carbon & Nature

Agriculture accounts for 11% of UK greenhouse gas emissions and is a leading driver of nature loss.

SOS UK's Farming for Carbon & Nature (FCN) programme tackles both challenges for the tertiary education sector, offering student engagement opportunities and a credible pathway to address Scope 3 emissions.



Programme overview

FCN enables universities and colleges to be sector leaders by inspiring and supporting them to adopt more regenerative farming practices on farmland they own - reducing emissions, sequestering carbon, improving biodiversity, and upskilling students and staff.



Aligned with Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) guidance for Net Zero and Nature

Wide-ranging co-benefits for climate, nature and people. Can be used as a BVCM pledge to address unabated value chain emissions by contributing to global climate mitigation efforts



Enriching student experience through green skills and access to nature

Hands-on learning through farm soil sampling and biodiversity surveys, alongside online training and on-campus engagement activities linking food, farming, climate and nature.



Strengthening the resilience and viability of university and college farmland

Reduce emissions, increase crop and flood resilience, and improve water quality. Support for farmers through Knowledge Exchange sessions, guest speakers, farm tours, and peer-to-peer learning



Pioneering multi-institution research into soil carbon storage and stability

Opportunities to analyse and co-publish papers on soil carbon in relation to farming methods, soil type, and aggregate size. Verified scientifically robust soil sampling and testing protocols

Grounded in evidence

FCN's approach is underpinned by a rigorous four year pilot and sector input.

1

Developed a scientifically robust methodology for farm soil sampling and testing with a team of recognised soil academics and industry experts.

2

We commissioned Farm Carbon Toolkit to produce an independent report on the 'Financial and climate impacts of regenerative farming practices'.

3

Freedom of Information requests were used to map farmland ownership across the tertiary education sector – giving us a clear picture of the opportunity at scale.



Measuring impact

Sector targets for 2030



15,000 ha of university and college owned land regeneratively farmed



12,000 farm soil samples tested for carbon



1,500 students engaged with FCN sustainable food production activities



150 farm biodiversity surveys completed



The business case

FCN was designed in collaboration with senior sustainability staff to directly support institutions' strategic plans. The programme contributes to common goals across the sector, providing a clear and compelling way to demonstrate university and college commitments to achieving strategic aims.

Environmental sustainability

Delivering significant benefits across **ecosystem services** and strengthening national **biodiversity datasets**.

Social and civic responsibility

Demonstrating good practice through **long-term positive, social and environmental change**, while supporting food security by building farm resilience.

Research impact

Advancing understanding of different farming practice impacts on soil carbon, helping inform approaches to **key environmental challenges**.

Student experience

Improving **accessibility** to agricultural landscapes and the **wellbeing** benefits of green spaces through immersive, **outdoor learning**.

Graduate employability

Equipping students with **technical and transferable skills**, recognised with digital badges, that have real-world applications **across disciplines**.

Leadership and partnership

Collaborations between universities, industry and government to foster **innovation and entrepreneurial approaches to tertiary sector decarbonisation and farming**.

Addressing the Scope 3 challenge

Credible carbon credits remain insufficient for all UK universities and colleges to offset their Scope 3 emissions. SBTi, Gold Standard, UN and WWF recommend adopting Beyond Value Chain Mitigation to fund impactful programmes like FCN alongside purchasing credible offsets - we recommend the UK Carbon Coalition.

Supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:



Endorsements

“As a Farm Manager of a Land Based College farm...I feel that this project fits perfectly with our college’s sustainability strategy. It will open networking channels for me as a farm manger to enable me to gain knowledge and firsthand experience in reducing our carbon emissions on the farm further. It will allow me to take the farm further down the regen ag route with peers advice and knowledge sharing at the heart. It will also enable the students to understand and see firsthand that farming with nature in mind is possible and profitable. Farming is changing and colleges are at the forefront of being able to show that this kind of farming can work for everyone. I am excited to undertake this challenge and work with [FCN] to achieve the college’s sustainability targets.”

Josh Wright, Farm Manager, Bishop Burton Farm

“Farming for Carbon and Nature is exactly the sort of concept and programme that can assist operational sustainability teams across the higher education sector.”
Dr Roddy Yarr, Director of Sustainability, University of Glasgow

“It was a great opportunity for me to work in the lab for the first time and learn more about the testing process. It has inspired me to dig into lab work and soil science.”

Student after testing farm soil samples

“I learned a lot of plant species, pollinator species and they were totally new to me as I came to the UK recently. I found it really interesting. POMS was awesome and it made me understand the importance of the pollinators. It made me feel like we should protect them in order to make this world beautiful.”

Student after doing a farm biodiversity survey

“I feel I have a better understanding of soil, how it stores carbon and practices which promote soil health. The group leaders and volunteers alike were wonderful...I felt very connected to them and to the land.”

Student after doing farm soil sampling

“...the Programme represents a hugely valuable means of creating and sharing knowledge and best practice around sustainable land management, whilst delivering real benefits for student learning and experience.”

Dr Andy Suggitt, Assistant Professor of Ecology, Northumbria University

“This programme tackles a much-forgotten area of farming in the higher and further education sector and is driving critical innovation, research and science.”

Fiona Goodwin, Deputy CEO, EAUC

Programme costs are half price this year!

Annual membership

Thanks to grant funding, there is a 50% discount for 2026-27 making it £4,850 +VAT (usually £9,700 +VAT).

What's included

- **Soil sampling** A fully supported, student-led soil sampling day on your farm. We provide advance online training, student recruitment support, all equipment, and lead the on-farm day. Impact is assessed via surveys, and digital badges awarded to students. Our methodology follows verified, scientifically robust protocols. Soil samples can be tested in your own labs or at Loughbough University for an additional fee.
- **Farmer Knowledge Exchange sessions** Online peer learning sessions connecting farmers on university and college land to share experiences, challenges and opportunities - alongside guest speakers with in-depth knowledge of regenerative farming practices.
- **Student engagement activities** Bespoke support to help your institution engage students with the links between food, farming, climate and nature – through events, training, resources or whatever best suits your needs.
- **Leadership Council** A forum for farm and sustainability managers to shape the sector's direction and drive progress towards ambitious targets for regenerative farming in the tertiary education sector.



Optional biodiversity surveys

Farmland birds, hedgerows, pollinators and earthworms - £760 +VAT each with the 2026-27 discount (usually £1,520 +VAT).

Each survey follows the same model as soil sampling: we provide student training, recruitment support and all equipment, lead the on-farm day, and award digital badges to participants. Biodiversity data is shared with your institution and uploaded to the relevant national dataset.

Soil sampling is also available as a standalone activity at the same price.



Beyond Value Chain Mitigation (BVCM)



For some institutions, BVCM could fund FCN participation. It works by charging an internal carbon fee and directing funds towards credible emissions reduction activities - such as FCN. BVCM is not an offset, but can enable institutions to take responsibility for unabated Scope 3 emissions. It sends a strong signal to students, staff and other stakeholders that carbon reduction is being taken seriously with visible, funded action. The University of Oxford flight levy is a good example of this approach in practice.

Resources

- [SBTi guidance on Beyond Value Chain Mitigation \(BVCM\)](#), [SBTi BVCM report](#)
- [Gold Standard BVCM Report](#)
- [Understanding the financial and climate impacts of regenerative farming practices](#)
- [IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#)

Thank you to the following organisations for their support in developing the Farming for Carbon & Nature programme



With particular thanks to our funder:



Contact us

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**Students Organising
for Sustainability
United Kingdom**

