New Release

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*For immediate use*

*Millions of metres of hedgerow and extensive soil testing demonstrates the commitment of UK farmers to improving biodiversity*

A recent survey conducted as part of a combined ABP and ASDA initiative, highlights the beneficial work that British farmers are accomplishing to boost farmland biodiversity.

In total, 250 farmers from a wide geographical spread and farm size responded to the voluntary survey which found that the combined length of hedgerow managed by respondents totals 1.92 million metres, which is the equivalent distance (as the crow flies) from John O’Groats to Lands’ End, and back.

One farmer reported having more than 50 miles (80,500 metres) of hedgerow on his farm, with the average farm supporting 8,003 metres of this important habitat.  More than 50 percent of those surveyed had recently planted an average of 869 metres of hedgerow each.

Forty-one percent of the farmers said they carry out wildlife surveys to monitor populations and species of birds, bees, news, bats, butterflies, and others.

Liz Ford, Agricultural Projects Manager at ABP says:

“The joint venture was designed to gain a topline understanding of how farmers are managing and improving biodiversity.  The results illustrate well that farmers are acutely aware of the importance of balanced soil nutrients and livestock farmers are embracing opportunities for grassland soil testing, to understand the nutrient balance within their soil, including organic matter content and soil carbon indices.”

Nearly 90 percent of respondents undertake some form of soil assessment, with 78 percent of those using three or more methods and six percent using six or more methods.  The most popular soil testing was conducted to quantify phosphate, potassium, magnesium, and pH, but over 17 per cent of the respondents said they test for organic matter, 16 percent undertake visual evaluation of soil structure (VESS) assessments, eight percent conduct earthworm counts and six percent measure soil carbon.

Liz added:

“Looking after soil correctly can minimise nutrient input requirements and extend the grazing season by improving the pasture’s resilience to drought and reducing flood risk.  Earthworm populations are indicative of soil health and can be monitored by digging small field pits and counting the species of worms at different depths, we are pleased to see that some farmers are already doing this.”

 Chris Brown, Senior Director Farming at ASDA says:

“These results are a great demonstration of how British farmers are supporting the environment while producing nutritious, healthy food.  The farmers’ data in the survey highlights their enthusiasm to demonstrate their environmental achievements, their attitude to biodiversity and its value to their farms.  The important connection of food production and the environment is very clear, as these survey results show.”

Farmers were also asked to rate the importance of biodiversity to their farm using a score of one to ten, with one not important and ten very important.  The average score was 7.63, with nearly 20 percent of farmers scoring it a 10.  Opportunities for farmers to engage further in biodiversity improvements are available through new environmental schemes, supporting farm businesses as area subsidies are phased down.

WORD COUNT: 506

For further information please contact Helen Cork 07751138438

**Notes to editors:**

ABP Food Group works with a network of over 35,000 farmers and is renowned for paying its suppliers on the day of delivery at strategically located local abattoirs that minimise animal transport distances. ABP Food Group contributes an estimated €1.3bn each year into the rural economies in which it operates. We recognise that the farmers who supply meat to us are vital partners in ensuring that the quality of our product is maintained.