

Farm Facilitator Forum: Briefing Note

Agricology hosted a Farmer Group Facilitators Forum event in November 2025 which brought together 40 farmer group facilitators from across the country, representing different funding sources, geographies, objectives and stages of development. The aim was to foster a network of facilitators so that they can share experiences, advice and activities, and strengthen their collective role in providing farmer support to adopt climate and nature friendly farming practices.

Facilitated farmer groups have become one of the most effective and trusted mechanisms for delivering nature recovery, improving water and soil health, and strengthening rural economies across the UK. They are formed by and for farmers and play a vital role in local farming communities to reduce isolation, and through peer learning, build confidence to test and adopt more sustainable farming practices suited to their local landscapes. These voluntary groups create the social and organisational infrastructure needed to plan, deliver, and coordinate activity to achieve landscape scale improvements. Most operate in partnerships with nature conservation and landscape recovery organisations and are leading positive change.

Yet the system that supports them remains fragile. Fragmented funding, inconsistent governance, and the absence of shared tools or standards all limit their ability to deliver the environmental and economic outcomes that national policy and emerging markets increasingly rely on. Recognition of facilitated farmer groups in funding, policy and farm advisory programmes would strengthen their effectiveness as intermediary with the farmers those programmes seek to target.

A central theme emerging from discussions across regions, funders, and practitioners is the need to **professionalise the facilitator workforce**. Facilitators are the key delivery agents for farmer groups, yet their roles are often insecure, under-recognised, and supported only by short-term, piecemeal grants. This affects recruitment, retention, and the quality of support available to farmers. Professionalisation would mean establishing consistent competency frameworks, providing structured training and mentoring, and creating long-term career pathways. It would also mean securing multi-year facilitation funding so that farmer groups can invest in relationships, governance, and long-term land management change rather than surviving from project to project.

Alongside the need for a stronger workforce sits the challenge of knowledge and **data sharing, and system-wide coherence**. At present, each farmer cluster must identify tools, learn mapping systems, and search for funding independently. This leads to duplication, inconsistent quality of data, and growing administrative pressure on facilitators. A shared national resource hub—co-created with farmer groups and trusted intermediaries—would reduce these inefficiencies by providing templates for governance, legal structures, partnership agreements, monitoring methods, and procurement. It could also host a live funding database, training materials, and a national map of farmer groups, enabling groups to collaborate, co-bid, and coordinate across landscapes. Crucially, this must be underpinned by data systems that allow farmers to retain control of their information while contributing anonymised insights to regional and national datasets—strengthening both trust and value.

A third area highlighted consistently is the need for **robust, streamlined monitoring and evaluation**. Funders, policy makers, and emerging natural capital markets all require credible evidence of impact. However, monitoring expectations vary widely, and many farmer groups lack the tools or training to collect data consistently. Standardised metrics for biodiversity, soil, water, carbon, and socio-economic value—combined with practical guidance and accessible training—would help ensure that outcomes can be compared and aggregated. Strengthening participatory approaches, such as farmer-led or citizen-science monitoring, would build local ownership and reduce costs. Clear, accessible reporting using dashboards, maps, and concise summaries is essential for communicating progress to communities, funders, and policy bodies, and for demonstrating the value of investment in cluster-based delivery.

What ties these issues together is the need for **a more coordinated, confident, and investment-ready network infrastructure**. When facilitators are supported and recognised, when data is easier to manage and share, and when outcomes can be measured consistently and clearly, farmer groups become significantly more effective—able to plan long-term, attract external finance, and contribute meaningfully to national environmental targets. Strengthening these foundations would yield benefits far beyond the farmer groups themselves: it would underpin local collaborations which play a central role in nature recovery, provide reliable pipelines for public and private investment, and create a more coherent, efficient delivery system for landscape-scale change.

