

Scotland's Rural College

Integrated farm management for sustainable agriculture: lessons for knowledge exchange and policy

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31 biodiversity, with research noting a particularly severe decline in the populations of specialist
32 farmland birds (Fuller *et al.*, 1995). Research has continued to show the challenges of
33 agricultural intensification, particularly in the areas of biodiversity conservation and the
34 provision of other ecosystem services, such as healthy soils and pollination (Kleijn and
35 Sutherland, 2003; Kremen and Miles, 2012; Pimental, 2006).

36 As research and farming communities became aware of the need to balance productivity with
37 environmental and social outcomes, the concept of sustainable agriculture was increasingly
38 promoted. Garibaldi *et al.* (2017) describe agricultural sustainability as a concept which
39 considers the economic, environmental, and social aspects of farming, while also promoting
40 the resilience and persistence of productive farming landscapes. Sustainable agriculture has
41 not been carried out in a prescriptive manner, with a variety of ideas and farming models
42 aimed at the objective of growing more food (for profit) while also providing environmental
43 and social benefits (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2017; Plumecocq *et al.*, 2018; Pretty, 2008). Garibaldi *et al.*
44 (2017) present a partial list of concepts that have been proposed as a way of achieving
45 agricultural sustainability, and we add to this non-exhaustive list by including others from the
46 wider literature (see Table 1; also Gold *et al.*, 2007 for a longer list of related terms). Many
47 of these ideas, such as integrated pest management, agroforestry, and organic agriculture are
48 now quite familiar, whilst others, such as precision farming and sustainable intensification,
49 are becoming more common. All of these terms have influenced the policy landscape at a
50 variety of scales, as policy-makers constantly look for the best way of communicating and
51 encouraging the adoption of sustainable agriculture in practice.

52 **Table 1 here**

53 Within the context of the different concepts of sustainable agriculture, this paper is focused
54 on the potential contribution of integrated farm management (IFM). Although the definition
55 of IFM is contested (El Titi, 1992; Morris and Winter, 1999; Randall *et al.*, 2012; Wibberley,
56 1995), most would agree it has been promoted as a response to the negative impact of
57 agricultural production on the environment and farming communities, while retaining a focus
58 on the economic viability of the farm (Cook *et al.*, 2009; EISA, 2012). Integrated farm
59 management is supported prominently by the farming organisation Linking Environment and
60 Farming (LEAF), a group that works predominately in the UK, but also increasingly in
61 African countries such as Ghana and Kenya. LEAF (2017) state that integrated farm

62 management involves the use of modern technologies and traditional methods, and
63 encompasses site-specific and continuous improvement across the whole farm. It has been
64 described as a ‘third way’ between conventional and organic agriculture (Morris and Winter,
65 1999) with the guiding principles designed to maintain productivity, whilst improving the
66 environment.

67 The concept is currently supported by various initiatives across Europe. For example, the
68 European Initiative for Sustainable Development in Agriculture (EISA) promotes integrated
69 farming across Europe, describing it as the ‘most efficient way to a productive,
70 environmentally friendly and socially responsible agriculture in the EU’ (EISA, 2012, 1).
71 Both organisations, LEAF and EISA, use similar diagrams to communicate the concept of
72 IFM, the former including nine components (see appendix 1) with the latter adding an
73 additional three (appendix 1 components plus climate change/air quality, human and social
74 capital, and crop nutrition).

75 In England, the potential of IFM for sustainable agriculture has been explored by government
76 for over a decade (Defra, 2004; English Nature, 2005; Cook *et al.*, 2009), and was the subject
77 of renewed interest as part of the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs’
78 (Defra) Sustainable Intensification Platform, which was additionally supported by the Welsh
79 Government. One of the aims of this project was ‘to develop an IFM approach by which
80 farmers can implement management practices to improve performance sustainably within
81 the opportunities presented by their sectors and location’ (Defra’s Sustainable Intensification
82 Platform, 2017). A whole farm, balanced approach was seen by Defra’s project to be one
83 way of achieving ‘sustainable intensification’, defined as improving productivity while
84 enhancing the environment and providing social benefits. IFM is also being promoted in the
85 UK through training schemes offered to farm advisors and farmers (Basis, 2016), and is a
86 requirement for some crop assurance schemes (e.g. LEAF marque).

87 In light of the strong policy interest in England and Wales, and across other parts of Europe,
88 this paper assesses the attitudes of farmers, farm advisors, and industry groups towards IFM.
89 Policies built around concepts ultimately need to be implemented in practice. If the concept is
90 flawed, however, then policies based on it are likely to fail (Kirby and Krone, 2002). As
91 described above, IFM as a concept through which to encourage sustainable agriculture is
92 competing in a contested space.

93 Research on integrated farming in its various guises (e.g. integrated farming systems) has
94 been conducted since at least the late 1970s, building on integrated pest management research
95 dating back to the 1920s (Morris and Winter, 1999). However, it took until the late 1990s
96 before the concept started to be disseminated to farming practitioners in a sustained way
97 (Morris and Winter, 1999). Once the idea began to be disseminated to farmers, Morris and
98 Winter (1999) describe how social scientists started to become interested in how it was being
99 communicated and whether/how practitioners were implementing it on-farm.

100 Previous research has found that IFM has experienced limited uptake in practice in the arable
101 sector in the UK (Cook *et al.*, 2009; Defra, 2009) and further afield, for example in the
102 Netherlands (Proost and Matteson, 1997). Furthermore, research conducted in the last two
103 decades has suggested that it was poorly understood (Morris and Winter, 1999; Langdon,
104 2013) poorly differentiated from similar ideas (Morris and Winter, 1999), and may be
105 mismatched to advisor skills (Park *et al.*, 1997). Morris and Winter (1999), for example,
106 asked farmers in the west of England whether they could define ‘integrated crop
107 management’ and ‘integrated livestock management’ in an attempt to understand knowledge
108 of integrated farming systems. 41% and 48% of farmers contacted by telephone could not
109 define each concept respectively, while significant doubts were expressed about the financial
110 viability of an integrated system.

111 There is also very little published research on the understanding and uptake of IFM in non-
112 arable sectors (Langdon, 2013). An analysis based on Farm Business Survey information, a
113 dataset based on surveys conducted by the government¹ in England, assessed the level of
114 integrated farming uptake in the dairy sector. However, Langdon (2013) note that very few
115 survey respondents responded positively to questions concerning whether IFM had been
116 implemented, although noted that the very few businesses that had practised IFM seemed to
117 perform better than other farm businesses (small sample caution).

¹ ‘The Farm Business Survey (FBS) provides information on the financial, physical and environmental performance of farm businesses in England. Survey results typically give comparisons between groups of businesses’ (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/farm-business-survey>). In the Langdon (2013, 7) analysis, ‘data was taken from the Farm Business Survey of England for 2003-2010. Farms were included in the analyses...if they were classified to ‘robust’ type4 dairy in at least three of these years. 402 farms met this condition, with 87 of these surveyed in all eight years, and 226 providing data in at least five years. Farms were excluded from the analyses if they had less than 20 dairy cows in any year; this avoided including farms that had ceased dairying but remained in the FBS as a different farm type.’

118 In light of this previous research which has suggested that IFM is not well understood, and in
119 the context of relatively few recent social science studies on the topic, we consider that there
120 is a pressing need to understand the contribution that IFM can make to the uptake of
121 sustainable farming across different agricultural sectors, including looking at the role of
122 advisors in this process.

123 We use a theoretical framework outlined by Gerring (1999), which judges the usefulness of a
124 concept against the following criteria – (1) resonance, (2) familiarity, (3) parsimony or degree
125 of simplicity, (4) coherence, (5) depth, (6) differentiation, (7) field utility, and (8) theoretical
126 utility (see ‘Methods’). Using interviews, focus groups, and industry workshops, we interpret
127 our data alongside these criteria to judge how good IFM might be as a concept through which
128 to encourage sustainable agriculture in practice. We reflect on our findings in the context of
129 other ways of encouraging agricultural sustainability. In drawing out the key messages from
130 our case study from England and Wales, we provide recommendations for policy, focusing
131 particularly what makes a good policy concept for knowledge exchange with farmers.

132 **Methods**

133 *Groups of respondents*

134 We were keen to assess attitudes towards IFM across the supply chain. Farmers from
135 different farming sectors across England and Wales were included in the research design, as
136 well as agronomists, businesses, and environmental advisors. It was important to gather the
137 views of farm advisors because they have been shown to play an important role in the
138 adoption of new ideas, not least because they develop close and trusted relationships with
139 farmers (AIC, 2013; Ingram, 2008; Prager and Thomson, 2014; Rose *et al.*, 2018a)². The
140 chance for successful implementation of agricultural policy is enhanced if the advisor
141 community is receptive to the idea. Furthermore, we included industry representatives from
142 the supply chain since we noted that a requirement to practise integrated farming was part of

² In the UK, there are various advisory groups in addition to individual agronomists, vets, and other types of advisor. In the UK, groups include the Farming Advice Service (England and Scotland), Farming Connect (Wales), Rural Payments and Services (England), The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Organic Research Centre, and many more. Elsewhere in Europe there is the Farm Advisory System, and Teagasc Advisory Services in Ireland. In the USA, there are rural extension services such as the Agency for International Development. It is clear that advisory structures in a particular country must be well understood since they are a crucial component of knowledge exchange with farmers.

143 some produce assurance schemes (e.g. LEAF Marque, M&S Field to Fork). Thus, the views
144 of such representatives are also important when considering the usefulness of IFM.

145 *Focus groups*

146 Five focus groups lasting approximately an hour were held across England and Wales with
147 arable farmers (two groups in Norfolk), arable advisors (agronomists based across East
148 Anglia), dairy farmers (based in East Sussex), and sheep/beef farmers (lowland and upland,
149 in Central Wales). The locations of these focus groups were chosen based on known contacts
150 and also to cover a breadth of farming enterprises and environments.

151 Focus groups with farmers formed part of existing knowledge exchange activities performed
152 by various organisations - NIAB-TAG for arable farmers, Farming Connect for red meat
153 farmers, and DairyCo for dairy farmers. Our focus groups represented one of the activities in
154 each outreach workshop run by the aforementioned organisations and were always led by the
155 same lead researcher on our project. The arable advisor focus group was held with advisors
156 based at Agrii. Focus groups were primarily used to inform the content of semi-structured
157 interviews, but primary data from the focus group discussions was also used. They were
158 attended by 10-15 participants, and were recorded and transcribed. As part of a wider
159 discussion of sustainable intensification, respondents were asked to discuss the following two
160 questions; ‘what do you understand by the term integrated farm management?’ and ‘do you
161 practise/encourage integrated farm management?’. The discussion between participants was
162 allowed to flow and develop with little intervention from the facilitator.

163 *Semi-structured interviews*

164 For a more in-depth analysis of attitudes towards IFM, 78 interviews lasting up to an hour
165 were conducted with farmers and advisors across England and Wales (all conducted by same
166 researcher). The sample was drawn from a wider survey undertaken by the Defra and Welsh
167 Government funded Sustainable Intensification Research Platform (see Rose *et al.*, 2016),
168 which had focused on seven study regions across England and Wales, including farmers from
169 six enterprise types (cereals, general cropping, dairy, mixed, lowland livestock, and Less
170 Favoured Area [LFA] livestock)³. These study regions were selected to provide a cross-

³ The sample for this survey was provided by Defra/Welsh Government, and was stratified to reflect the main farm types in each area. Any Robust Farm Types accounting for less than 10% of the case study area population

171 section of agricultural landscapes in England and Wales. From the 243 farmers who
172 responded to this survey, we employed a purposeful sample to target a range of different
173 farming enterprises and farm sizes. Overall, we interviewed 45 of these farmers (14 arable in
174 Norfolk; and 31 with LFA/lowland beef/sheep or dairy enterprises in Devon/ Conwy).

175 Thirty-three advisors who offered technical, business, or environmental advice within the
176 broad study areas (Wensum in Norfolk, Taw in Devon, and Conwy in Wales) were also
177 interviewed. The sample, incorporating a mixture of both commercial and independent
178 advisors, was formed with assistance from ADAS (agricultural consultancy). The list of
179 advisors was identified through existing contacts known to ADAS consultants, as well as
180 web-based searches to capture other smaller organisations or independent advisors. A
181 shortlist of advisors covering each of the three study areas were contacted and invited to
182 participate from each organisation identified. Where the primary contact was not able to
183 attend or unreachable, others within the organisation were approached to ensure all identified
184 organisations had a fair opportunity to contribute.

185 Participants were asked whether they had heard of IFM, whether they understood it, and then
186 to define the idea based on their understanding of the concept (appendix 1). After this, they
187 were provided with a diagram and standard definition of IFM from LEAF (see appendix 1)
188 and asked to consider whether the idea was part of their management strategy. Participants
189 stated which aspects they prioritised, and offered their opinions about the idea, also
190 suggesting areas for improvements. These interviews were transcribed in full by a
191 professional transcription service and coded with Atlas.Ti software. Coding was carried out
192 against pre-selected criteria; relevant quotes were selected under the following headings,
193 ‘level of awareness’, ‘understanding of, and reaction to, the term’, ‘suggestions to improve
194 the concept’, and ‘which of the nine aspects of IFM were prioritised in management?’.
195 Results were then applied post-hoc to the classification used by Gerring (1999) to measure
196 the usefulness of the concept (see footnote 4). Although quantitative statements are made in
197 the subsequent results section, it is noted that sample sizes were low. Such statements are not
198 used to imply representativeness of views towards IFM in any one group, but rather to

were excluded. Farms were selected to give good geographical coverage of each area. In addition, to be included in the sample each holding had to meet the criteria of being a ‘commercial holding’ as well as farming a minimum of 20 ha. A range of farm sizes were included in the sample. Registered holders were sent an opt out letter giving five working days to opt out of being telephoned to be invited to take part in an interview. Overall, 243 farmers responded to the survey and we selected our interviewees from those who agreed to take part in further work.

199 explore possible lessons for policies surrounding knowledge exchange in the context of
200 sustainable agriculture.

201 *Workshops*

202 Three workshops were held as part of the wider Defra project, undertaken between October
203 2014 and March 2015, with separate workshops held for the arable, dairy, and red meat
204 sectors. Several groups were represented at these workshops, including agronomists/advisors,
205 policy-makers, advisory boards, technology firms, and the food industry. The wide spectrum
206 of attendees allowed us to assess the understanding of IFM across the farming food chain (see
207 appendix 2 for attendees and numbers). As part of a one-day programme, delegates were split
208 into groups of 4-5 people (4 separate groups for arable/red meat, 3 groups for dairy) and were
209 asked by a facilitator to discuss what they understood by the term ‘integrated farm
210 management’. Intervention by the facilitator was kept to a minimum with discussion driven
211 by the participants. A rapporteur was elected to capture the key elements of the discussion.
212 All group members were encouraged to provide their definition of IFM and these were
213 recorded by the rapporteur.

214 *Theoretical framework*

215 The framework of Gerring (1999) provides a useful set of criteria through which to judge
216 how good a concept is. This framework has been cited 423 times⁴ in a variety of contexts,
217 including development, politics, and economics.

218 He outlines eight key factors:

- 219 1. Resonance – the extent to which a term is memorable.
- 220 2. Familiarity – the extent to which a concept can be made sense of or is intuitively
221 clear.
- 222 3. Parsimony or degree of simplicity – whether there is a simple, clear definition, or
223 alternatively multiple possible interpretations.
- 224 4. Coherence – the extent to which principles within a concept fit together - arguably the
225 most important factor (Gerring, 1999).

⁴ Google Scholar (30/10/2018)

- 226 5. Depth – the ability of a concept to ‘bundle’ characteristics so that many characteristics
227 of an idea can be communicated in one term (efficient communication).
- 228 6. Differentiation – the ability to set a concept apart from a different concept, avoiding
229 confusion.
- 230 7. Field utility – a concept must fit within a semantic field and thus work alongside
231 different concepts.
- 232 8. Theoretical utility – the ability to form testable theories or hypotheses from a concept.

233 Our data were applied to this theoretical framework post-hoc⁵ as a way of judging whether
234 IFM was a good concept through which to encourage sustainable agriculture in practice.

235 **Results**

236 *Resonance*

237 Resonance related to whether farmers could recall hearing the term before, but did not test
238 understanding of the concept. Awareness of the concept was lower amongst farmers than
239 advisors, although there were differences between farm enterprises. Upland livestock farmers
240 in LFA areas of Conwy and Taw were generally not aware of the concept, with just four out
241 of nineteen being confident to say that they had heard of it. The main sources of awareness
242 were the farming media and farmer networking events. When asked about IFM in a focus
243 group, LFA farmers reacted to the question with silence as the term was not known.

244 Awareness of the concept was also low amongst lowland livestock farmers in Conwy and
245 Taw (including dairy). Only four out of twelve farmers in this group were confident that they
246 had heard of the term, with the farming media and Defra guidance booklets being the main
247 source. Of these four farmers, only one could remember what the term meant with
248 confidence. In the dairy farmer focus group, respondents were unaware of the concept.

249

250 Arable farmers were comparatively more aware of IFM than livestock farmers, including in
251 the two focus groups. In total, eight out of fourteen arable farmers had definitely heard of
252 IFM mainly through crop assurance schemes, Basis training, other farmers, and the farming

⁵ (1) Resonance was addressed with data in the ‘level of awareness’ code, (2) familiarity and (3) simplicity were addressed by data in the ‘understanding of, and reaction to, the term’ code, as was (4) coherence and (5) depth, although ‘suggestions to improve the concept’ and ‘which of the nine aspects of IFM were prioritised’ helped here too. (6) Differentiation and (7) field utility were also addressed by quotes in the ‘understanding of, and reaction to, the term’ code. Finally, (8) theoretical utility was judged by author expertise.

253 media. One farmer, for example, stated that they had heard of it and ‘had been doing it for
254 several years now. Everything that is in [crop assurance] plans has to be written down.’
255 (arable farmer, Wensum, 51050⁶). Many farmers had ‘filled in several integrated farm
256 management questionnaires for crop assurance’ (arable farmer, Wensum, 51007). Another
257 reason for the greater awareness of IFM may be because LEAF (who have developed the
258 most well-known IFM framework in the UK) were perceived as being more focused on
259 arable farmers, rather than the livestock sectors.

260 Arable advisors were aware of the concept of IFM. All respondents said that they had heard
261 of the term (although two were slightly unsure), but there was some confusion over the
262 precise definition (see next section). The most dominant source of knowledge about IFM
263 came from professional training courses (e.g. Basis points), whilst others had learnt about it
264 through ADAS, LEAF, or Defra. The LEAF diagram used in the interview was familiar to
265 respondents because many had been trained with the same framework on training courses (e.g.
266 arable advisor, 5). Many advisors traced the long history of IFM back to the 1980s (e.g. arable
267 advisor, 10).

268 Livestock advisors were more aware of IFM than farmers, but slightly less aware than their
269 arable advisor counterparts. Twelve out of eighteen livestock advisors had definitely heard of
270 the term before, although a further three thought that they probably had, mainly from the
271 farming press, from LEAF, and through research at university or in journals. One advisor
272 thought that it was ‘a bit of a buzzword’ which you ‘hear about in the press’ (livestock advisor,
273 14), whilst another found out about it from ‘reading journals and trade documents’ (livestock
274 advisor, 1). Livestock advisors generally thought it was more ‘arable focused’ (livestock
275 advisor, 17) because organisations like LEAF are ‘more in the arable sector’ (livestock
276 advisor, 12) and there are more crop assurance schemes for arable farmers where IFM is a
277 requirement.

278 Workshop attendees from across the farming industry (including business, policy, and
279 advisor communities) were asked to define IFM. In a similar vein to the variety of definitions
280 provided by farmers, a range of responses was provided to this question, illustrating the
281 widespread ambiguity about the term. The full list of responses is illustrated in Table 2, and
282 the list does include the comment ‘never heard of it!’ which was recorded in all sector
283 workshops.

⁶ This number is a means of identifying separate interviewees and follows the numbering system as used in the project.

284 **Table 2 here**

285 **Familiarity and parsimony**

286 *Familiarity*

287 The general idea that farmers should be aware of the links between different aspects of the
288 farm, how they link together, and the consequences of these interactions for productivity and
289 the environment was well-known. Livestock farmers, who were generally unaware of the
290 term IFM, understood the general principles behind it. In fact, all farmers interviewed across
291 all enterprises claimed to practise some elements of IFM, showing that they recognise the
292 management style but not the banner. This is a notable result given the high proportion of
293 livestock farmers who had never heard of the concept.

294 For example, a lowland livestock farmer (Taw, 10012) said that he had ‘always been doing
295 that’, while a LFA livestock farmer (Taw, 10027) said that ‘we wouldn’t necessarily call it
296 that, but most probably that idea is partly what we try to do’. Furthermore, an arable farmer
297 (Wensum, 51011) thought that it was ‘engrained in everything we are doing, it just happens
298 in a sense’. Other farmers, who had initially reacted negatively towards the concept, said that
299 ‘maybe we do do integrated farm management’ (arable farmer, Wensum 52076) once they
300 had been presented with the principles behind it. Overall it was clear that farmers understood
301 the principles, but ‘wouldn’t necessarily recognise it in those terms’ (arable farmer, Wensum,
302 51003).

303 All advisors were also generally familiar with the principles behind the concept, and the need
304 to think about how different aspects of the farm linked together. As one livestock advisor (16)
305 argued, their clients would be ‘balancing these things all of the time’, and hence so would the
306 advisor. As can be seen from the responses of workshop attendees (table 2), some industry
307 representatives also understood the joined-up mindset of IFM.

308

309 *Parsimony*

310 Farmers and advisors generally felt that the term IFM made the concept appear more
311 complicated than it actually was. Indeed, the term itself caused defensive reactions from many
312 farmers. For example, a lowland livestock farmer (Taw, 10003) reacted by saying that ‘I

313 suspect I do it already, but I don't actually know what you mean by it', whereas a LFA
314 livestock farmer (Conwy, 20020) thought that it sounded 'like a very complicated word'.
315 Others were even less complimentary, saying that it was a 'load of b*****s' written down
316 by someone who 'isn't a farmer'' (LFA livestock, Conwy, 20034). Advisors also reflected on
317 whether the over-complicated term actually masked understanding of the main principles:

318 'It's another one of those things that is a buzz phrase that you
319 know there's lots of jargon that we need to talk in clear
320 language that farmers can relate to. Doesn't need to be a buzz
321 phrase because they don't really understand that. Someone has
322 been paid a fortune to come up with that. If you went to a client
323 and said we need to have some integrated farm management
324 decisions here, you might not be invited back for another day.'
325 (arable advisor, 1)

326
327 'I don't think they'd use it in their everyday language. But if
328 you sit them down and talked about it, yes they do it.'
329 (livestock advisor, 7)

330
331 Thus, from the term itself, respondents did not feel that the principles were communicated in
332 a simple way. There was, however, generally a more positive reaction upon seeing the
333 diagram in the interview, which visualised nine aspects of IFM. After seeing this diagram, for
334 example, all farmers were happy to say that they practised some elements of IFM.

335 336 **Coherence and depth**

337 *Coherence*

338 Unsurprisingly, prioritised aspects reflected the main objectives of the farm enterprise. Livestock
339 farmers and advisors, for example, prioritised animal husbandry, soil management and fertility
340 (for grazing), and some mentioned pollution by-product management (slurry), and organisation
341 and planning. As one farmer stated 'animals are top of the list. Then your soil management
342 because if you ain't got the soil management and your grass right, your cattle don't do well'
343 (lowland livestock, Taw, 10012). Arable farmers and advisors tended to prioritise thinking

344 about the links between crop health and protection, soil management, pollution, and organisation
345 and planning. Landscape and nature conservation was also commonly mentioned by respondents.

346 Overall, water management and energy efficiency were seldom mentioned as priorities, and lack
347 of water was not a significant problem in two of the study areas (Conwy and Taw). Respondents
348 generally considered the aspects in the diagram to be part of good farming practice, and thus felt
349 that they worked together. There was one major exception, however. Amongst all respondent
350 groups, community engagement was highlighted as being superfluous to farm management, and
351 unrelated to the other aspects. A lowland livestock farmer (Taw, 10019) struggled to see how
352 community engagement ‘helps the business’, and an arable advisor (3) also could not work out
353 ‘where community engagement quite fits into all of this’. Many other similar reactions were
354 gained across groups; in fact, if respondents raised a query about the usefulness of an IFM
355 component, it was often about community engagement.

356 In terms of whether the concept could be coherently encouraged in practice, advisors raised
357 concerns over the breadth of advice given to their clients. Agronomists argued, for example,
358 that they wanted to ‘grow the best crops possible’ because that is how their ‘reputation was
359 enhanced’ (arable advisor, 2). As a result, an agronomist’s training and skill set was targeted
360 towards getting the best out of crops. Since they were mainly asked to advise on specific
361 areas, arable advisors typically argued that they would ‘talk about specific things’ (arable
362 advisor, 3) and so the ‘overall umbrella’ of IFM would not ‘figure in the thinking’ (arable
363 advisor, 3). Some agronomists argued that giving advice on how aspects of the farm linked
364 together is ‘not something that we do’ (arable advisor, 1), partially because they were hired to
365 advise on specific things. Similarly, environmental advisors stated that they were only
366 qualified to give environmental advice. Thus, although all advisors felt that they encouraged
367 IFM in general terms, they could rarely offer integrated advice across the nine aspects. The
368 lack of complete IFM knowledge from a single advisor, therefore, meant that one person
369 could not offer holistic advice, echoing the findings of Park *et al.* (1997).

370 In a similar vein to arable advisors, livestock advisors argued that they had to encourage an
371 IFM mindset, but could not provide advice on a whole farm approach as an individual. As
372 one advisor stated:

373 ‘There are some people within the advice community who wouldn’t understand
374 parts of it, and would only look at one area of it. And there are some people who

375 wouldn't give advice on one area without understanding the implications on the
376 others. There is a huge range of skills needed? for that.' (livestock advisor, 1)

377 Other livestock advisors agreed, making statements such as 'I don't see how you can be an
378 expert in that and an expert in that' (livestock advisor, 3). Again, since farmers were often
379 paying for a particular piece of specialist advice, advisors would have to build the skills
380 needed to maximise the quality of their specialism. As such, most livestock advisors had only
381 a 'thinnish layer' (livestock advisor, 18) of knowledge of some aspects of IFM.

382 *Depth*

383 Based on our interpretation of IFM from definition and diagrams by LEAF and EISA, the main
384 components would seem to cover economic, environmental, and social aspects of farm
385 management. Yet, the LEAF version of the diagram stresses only nine aspects of integrated
386 farming, as compared to EISA, which adds three further components – climate change/air quality,
387 human and social capital, and crop nutrition.

388 Across all groups (except lowland livestock farmers who suggested no additions), several
389 respondents suggested that the concept missed out 'profitability'. While IFM is designed to
390 improve productivity, farmers argued that this was useless if production was not profitable.
391 One arable farmer argued that the aspects in the diagram were 'all great but there is little
392 around the financial side and the crop marketing which is what you are in business for' (arable
393 farmer, Wensum, 52076). He went on to argue that if IFM could be better linked to financial
394 benefits, then it would be a more attractive idea. This point was supported by an arable
395 advisor who argued that a 'profitable farm business needs to be around the outside of that
396 diagram because you can't have any of that if the bank pulls the plug on you' (arable advisor,
397 1). Furthermore, livestock advisors argued that 'most people wouldn't get excited about the
398 whole integrated side of things' unless it related to the 'fundamentals of the business', which
399 includes profitability (livestock advisor, 7). Supporting this view, another livestock advisor
400 suggested that 'there ought to be a big pound sign' in the middle of the diagram and the
401 monetary? benefits of doing IFM needed to be better articulated.

402 **Differentiation and field utility**

403 Since many farmers were unaware of the concept of IFM and did not use similar terms to label
404 their practice, there was little confusion with other terms (e.g. those in Table 1). One LFA
405 livestock farmer (Conwy, 20031), however, did think that IFM was ‘the same thing as sustainable
406 agriculture’.

407 The most significant confusion surrounding IFM was highlighted by arable advisors, who widely
408 struggled to differentiate it from Integrated Pest Management (IPM). While IPM may be a part of
409 the holistic concept of IFM, they are differently defined. For example, IPM has been very
410 clearly defined (Kovács-Hostyánszki *et al.*, 2017) by the Food and Agriculture Organisation
411 (FAO) of the United Nations ([http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/core-
412 themes/theme/pests/ipm/en/](http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/core-themes/theme/pests/ipm/en/)) and the European Commission (Directive 2009/128/EC). In
413 contrast to the holistic nature of IFM, IPM is entirely focused on one part of the farming
414 system - crop health and protection. Integrated pest management is defined as an ‘ecosystem
415 approach to crop production’, in which all available measures are used to discourage the
416 development of pest populations, with an emphasis on non-chemical practices such as crop
417 rotation, crop variety selection, hygiene, habitat management for natural enemies and
418 biological control. Chemical pesticides should only be used as a last resort, in response to
419 threshold pest densities identified by monitoring.

420 When asked about IFM, many arable advisors conflated the concept with IPM. In response to
421 a question about IFM practice, an arable advisor (4) said that ‘we have to do that now, under
422 the new directive that has come from Europe, we have to concentrate on integrated farm
423 management, or integrated pest management to be precise.’ Others (e.g. arable advisor 7)
424 thought that they were qualified to offer advice on IFM because they had an ‘IPM certificate’.

425 **Theoretical utility**

426 This section is based on our own scientific judgment and treats IFM as a theory (see
427 discussion for caveat). When considering an integrated systemic approach to farm
428 management as a concept, the most basic scientific question is: does the approach improve
429 environmental, social or economic outcomes from a farm, when compared to a farm not
430 following the approach? It is relatively straightforward to define specific outcomes to test, to
431 formulate hypotheses. For example, for an environmental outcome you might state the null
432 hypothesis H_0 : IFM farms do not have more bird species than non-IFM farms, with the

433 alternative hypothesis H₁ that IFM farms have more bird species than non-IFM farms. One
434 can imagine many similar hypotheses for a range of possible measurable outcomes.

435 For these hypotheses to be testable, it has to be possible to implement IFM on experimental
436 farms, and to retain control farms that are not doing IFM. Here the IFM concept falls down,
437 because, as explained above, a majority of farmers would claim to be doing IFM, or at least
438 elements of it, already. It is very hard to imagine what a non-IFM farm looks like. It would
439 have to be managed in a way that did not take account of different elements of the business at
440 the same time, which seems unachievable, or extremely artificial. This is in contrast to the
441 'IPM' concept that was confused with IFM in our study. In this concept, different biological
442 and chemical approaches to controlling pests are combined together (Birch *et al.*, 2011), and
443 used in a hierarchical manner with the least environmentally damaging first. Non-IPM farms
444 are easily defined as those that only employ chemical pest control methods.

445 **Discussion**

446 When measured against Gerring's (1999) framework for judging the strength of a concept,
447 IFM performs well in some areas, but poorly in others. Although there were differences
448 between farming types and roles, our respondents generally found IFM to be a *coherent*,
449 *familiar* concept. In other words, both farmers and advisors recognised the general principles
450 of IFM, namely more sustainable methods of agricultural production by thinking about how
451 different aspects of the farm business link together. Overall, respondents felt that the
452 components within the IFM diagram used worked together, with the notable exception of
453 community engagement in many cases, and accounting for the irrelevance of some aspects
454 for specific farm enterprises (e.g. animal husbandry not relevant for an arable enterprise). If
455 we take the claims of farmers at face value, there does appear to be significant
456 implementation of integrated practices across the study areas. The *depth* of the concept was
457 sometimes criticised by participants, many of whom wondered whether profitability should
458 be more obviously associated with IFM. Furthermore, if we compare the commonly used
459 IFM diagram in the UK (the one used by LEAF) with EISA's version, we see that 'climate
460 change' is not highlighted as a key consideration in the former case, nor is 'human and social
461 capital' nor 'crop nutrition'.

462 The concept of IFM performed poorly against Gerring's (1999) framework in terms of
463 *resonance*, *parsimony*, *differentiation/field utility*, and *theoretical utility*. These failings have

464 considerable implications for research and policy on IFM. Clearly, the label ‘integrated farm
465 management’ was not well-recognised by many farmers, particularly in the livestock sectors,
466 and workshop representatives were not widely aware of it. As illustrated by a number of the
467 quotes, several farmers found the concept to be unnecessarily complicated; in essence, some
468 respondents felt that it was just an overcomplicated name for something that all farmers did
469 without thinking in IFM terms. Advisors had generally heard of the concept, although arable
470 advisors struggled to differentiate it from IPM, which is a different concept. Furthermore,
471 there do not appear to be standard practices, or a set of indicators, associated with IFM,
472 which makes it difficult to judge whether farmers are actually doing it. In its current form, it
473 seems difficult to form testable hypotheses for IFM, which presents challenges to those who
474 seek to monitor its adoption. If IFM is to be interpreted as a set of guiding principles only,
475 this will have implications for monitoring.

476 In light of these findings, it is important to consider the implications for policy, particularly
477 since integrated farming is the subject of policy attention in England and Wales (through
478 Defra/Welsh Government), and in Europe (through EISA). We discuss four substantive areas
479 – (1) appropriate agricultural policy extension, (2) economic incentives, (3) training advisors,
480 and (4) designating practices and indicators. In our concluding remarks, we also consider
481 whether there are better alternative concepts through which to encourage sustainable
482 agriculture. One potentially concerning conclusion from our research is the apparent lack of
483 progress made on adapting the concept of IFM in light of previous recommendations. While
484 some progress has been made, our findings echo many of the same themes as those identified
485 by Park *et al.* (1997), Morris and Winter (1999), Pacini *et al.* (2003), Cook *et al.* (2009), and
486 Langdon (2013), which we now explore in more detail.

487 *Appropriate agricultural extension*

488 Morris and Winter (1999) and Cook *et al.* (2009) found limited awareness of integrated
489 farming amongst UK arable farmers. One of the key recommendations of the former paper
490 was to invest in a system of agricultural extension (a system where high-level advice can be
491 communicated to farmers in a more personal way, for example, with farm visits,
492 demonstration events, or tailored information) which communicates the concept clearly and
493 effectively to farmers. Through training exercises, farm advisors have already widely heard

494 of the concept, which suggests that some progress has been made in communicating the idea
495 to this audience (notwithstanding the problems of differentiation).

496 The fact that, at the time of our fieldwork, IFM is still not widely resonant with many farmers
497 suggests that there are some problems in the chain of communication. This could be due to a
498 number of reasons; firstly, our wider research from this project suggested that many farmers
499 were not regularly using paid professional advice, and it is advisors that are often influential
500 in bringing knowledge of new ideas (see Rose *et al.*, 2016). This was particularly true in the
501 upland livestock sector where it was deemed less cost-effective to use paid professional
502 advice. Thus, in many cases it is immaterial if advisors know about IFM, if those advisors are
503 not regularly engaging with all farmers.

504 Good dissemination of IFM principles is further complicated if some advisors are confusing
505 it with IPM. Morris and Winter (1999) found semantic confusion between similar terms two
506 decades ago, and thus there appears to have been little progress. This is a concern because
507 Rose *et al.* (2016), amongst many other studies (e.g. AIC, 2013; Prager and Thomson, 2014;
508 Ingram, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2018a), have identified advisors as a key trusted source of
509 information for farmers. In fact, they are a key component in the adoption of practices and
510 technologies (Knowler and Bradshaw, 2007; Rahm and Huffman, 1984) if the dissemination
511 is effective, accurate, and appropriate (Agbamu, 1995).

512 Certainly in England, farmers no longer have the same level of free advice available to them
513 as in the past (Murphy, 2007). This undoubtedly makes it harder for policy ideas to be
514 communicated across the farming community. Other countries who similarly do not support
515 agricultural extension could also reflect on the value offered by advisors, while those
516 countries who do support such activities should try to maintain them.

517 It is also important to support other ways in which farmers learn about new ideas. Usually,
518 concepts are best communicated in a face-to-face fashion as this builds trust (Rose *et al.*,
519 2018). In addition to the role of trusted advisors, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange makes the
520 most of face-to-face discussion. Many studies have found that peer-to-peer learning is often
521 the best way for farmers to discover and try out new innovations (see review by Rose *et al.*,
522 2018). Many of these spaces already exist, either formally through farmer clusters or
523 demonstration test catchments (England – similar versions elsewhere), or informally as
524 farmers network and socialise at markets, in the pub, and in other social spaces. Studies have

525 also shown that knowledge exchange is most effective when there is two-way dialogue, and
526 where there is co-design of concepts (e.g. Moschitz *et al.*, 2015). The experience of IFM,
527 which is not widely resonant across farming businesses, suggests that policy concepts would
528 be best designed in a bottom-up, participatory fashion, instead of conducting knowledge
529 transfer after policy-makers have already determined what the concept looks like.

530 This would be antithetical to the commonly adopted approach of developing policy concepts
531 and then consulting users at a later stage. As Macmillan (2018) argues, while farmers,
532 advisors, and other agricultural practitioners generally take part in policy-making at some
533 point, this often occurs at the implementation phase, once the policy itself has been shaped.
534 But, as argued by many articles in the academic and grey literature, upstream, sustained, and
535 equitable stakeholder engagement in producing policy is important, sometimes known as co-
536 production or co-design (Barrett and Rose, 2018). Such articles suggest a number of common
537 factors of successful co-design, including early, sustained engagement, the inclusion of all
538 relevant stakeholders, reflexivity on the part of policy-makers, the provision of suitable time
539 and resources to support engagement, mutual trust and the use of knowledge brokers, and the
540 encouragement of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange (see Barrett and Rose, 2018). In the UK
541 and Ireland, for example, there are research initiatives underway that seek to co-design
542 knowledge with farmers and advisors (see Barrett and Rose, 2018).

543 Thus in policy, we might re-think agricultural extension as a process that starts with farmers
544 or advisors, rather than with policy-makers, and one which involves all relevant end users
545 (Klerkx *et al.*, 2013; Leeuwis, 2004; Parker and Sinclair, 2001; Rose *et al.* 2018b). This also
546 means including industry representatives from across the supply chain. Bottom-up co-design
547 of concepts, particularly of the language used, might prevent a significant problem that our
548 research highlighted. Several advisors quoted here argued that they would not use IFM as a
549 concept when talking to farmers, since it was not part of their client's everyday language.
550 This may suggest that knowledge exchange activities have not always listened to practitioner
551 communities in an effort to communicate the concept in more familiar language.

552 *Economic incentives*

553 One of Morris and Winter's (1999) other key recommendations was to provide economic
554 incentives for practising integrated farming. In one sense, economic incentives related to
555 certification schemes do exist (e.g. LEAF marque and organic certification), and these allow

556 farmers to charge a premium for their products. Such schemes, however, tend not to be as
557 widely applicable outside of the arable and horticultural sectors, and the fact that workshop
558 representatives from across the supply chain were unsure about IFM suggests that there is not
559 currently wider industry support. Involving these industry representatives is important in
560 building the business case for IFM.

561 One recommendation made by our respondents was to prioritise profitability within the
562 concept of IFM, a suggestion made by respondents to previous research (Morris and Winter,
563 1999; Langdon, 2013). Some farmers in our study suggested adding a large pound sign in the
564 middle of the IFM diagram, whilst other farmers and advisors said that integrated farming
565 could only be practised if the farm was making money. The contribution of some aspects of
566 IFM, particularly ‘community engagement’, was doubted by respondents. Such feedback
567 suggests that IFM would be more resonant if profitability was more central to knowledge
568 exchange activities. This recommendation is equally applicable to integrated farming
569 elsewhere, including the work of EISA. Their version of the IFM diagram, and working
570 definition, similarly does not highlight profitability in a prominent way. It is feasible that an
571 economic case could be made for this, as well as for other components. To do this, however,
572 would require controlled experiments to isolate the impacts of making improvements in
573 various aspects of IFM, such as community engagement, and/or in determining the impact of
574 joining IFM-based market schemes on a farmer’s bottom line.

575 *Training advisors*

576 In the UK, current agricultural advisory systems tend to be specialist; in other words, advisors
577 will generally offer specialist advice tailored to one particular aspect of the farm, perhaps
578 crop health, animal husbandry, or landscape and nature conservation. Although advisors do
579 consider the effects of their advice on other aspects of the farm business, our findings suggest
580 that there is a lack of truly integrated advice being provided to farmers. A similar conclusion
581 was reached by Park *et al.* (1997) over twenty years ago. Since we know that farmers are
582 generally not able to pay for multiple advisors, it is not practical to think that integrated
583 advice will result from the amalgamation of individual expertise. While IFM does seem to be
584 part of the training of many current advisors, one recommendation is to ensure that advisors
585 are encouraged to gain the skills and experience needed to think and communicate in an
586 integrated way.

587 *Designating practices and indicators*

588 Monitoring the uptake and impact of policy ideas is important, otherwise little knowledge is
589 gained about whether practice is improving. If IFM is to be used as a concept through which
590 to encourage sustainable agriculture, researchers, industry members, and policy-makers need
591 to know whether it is making a difference on the ground. A similar point has been made by
592 Dicks *et al.* (2018) about the related concept of ‘sustainable intensification’. The authors
593 argue that much research on sustainable intensification has concerned itself with concept
594 definition, rather than developing practices for how to do it. In identifying a series of
595 practices through which to achieve sustainable intensification, Dicks *et al.* (2018) take a
596 major step towards operationalising the concept. It is now possible to investigate whether
597 farmers are adopting these practices, and to monitor their impacts on productivity, the
598 environment, and agricultural society. For IFM, however, we have raised concerns over its
599 theoretical utility and whether it can be operationalised in a way that means the uptake of
600 standard practices can be monitored. It may be possible to identify a list of such practices,
601 and this should be a priority for those interested in promoting IFM. If it is to be promoted
602 more as a set of guiding principles, then it may not be possible to monitor implementation
603 robustly.

604 **Concluding remarks: would other concepts be better for sustainable agriculture?**

605 Throughout this article, we have not directly addressed the question of whether the key issue
606 about whether IFM is a useful concept for sustainable agriculture, instead choosing to provide
607 recommendations about how to improve knowledge exchange if it were to attract sustained
608 policy support. Our results, however, suggest that the utility of IFM as a concept for
609 sustainable agriculture could be questioned. In our study, the concept did not resonate well in
610 practice with farmers, while livestock farmers and advisors considered it to be less relevant
611 for them, and arable advisors struggled to differentiate it from IPM. A number of concluding
612 comments can be made.

613 Firstly, if farmers and advisors generally consider integrated farming to be a core component
614 of good farming practice, then what is the concept of IFM adding? As illustrated by Kirby
615 and Krone (2002), there is a cost associated with pursuing all policy ideas. If a policy idea
616 does not resonate well in practice, and furthermore if it does not necessarily add anything to
617 existing knowledge, then it may be considered superfluous.

618 This point links well with an important second point. We have illustrated that the conceptual
619 space of sustainable agriculture is congested with many different ideas existing through
620 which to achieve sustainability (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2017). It could be argued that a potentially
621 superfluous concept, such as IFM, adds unnecessary complexity, and seeks to confuse
622 matters further for farmers and advisors by making differentiation harder (although we have
623 no data to make a judgement about whether other concepts are better or worse). If IFM is
624 going to attract sustained policy support in the England, Wales, and elsewhere, then its value
625 should be better articulated. Does the practise of IFM, for example, achieve more tangible
626 benefits than pursuing other ideas such as agroforestry, sustainable intensification, IPM, or
627 sustainable agriculture? A key step in identifying the unique selling point of IFM (if there is
628 one) would be to identify specific practices (if possible), the contribution of which could be
629 measured. Research and policy communities could also consider the direction of travel for
630 sustainable agriculture, considering whether concepts need to be more integrated, or rather
631 certain ones prioritised, in order to limit the problems of lack of differentiation.

632 Lastly, policy-makers or organisations keen to support IFM should consider whether it is
633 applicable to all sectors, or rather if it should be targeted towards particular ones (e.g. arable).
634 If it is to be targeted towards multiple agricultural sectors, then the components of IFM, as
635 well as the definition and associated practices, will need to vary between different sectors.
636 Above all, for any concept designed at communicating new management practices to farmers,
637 it would be prudent to consider how projects can be co-designed and led from the bottom-up,
638 making the most of trusted advisor and peer networks.

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Table 1: Concepts related to sustainable agriculture (partially from Garibaldi et al., 2017)

Concept	Suggested definition (may vary between sources)
Agroecology	The study of ecological processes, particularly functional biodiversity and their impacts (Garibaldi <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Agroforestry	A strategy of land management that incorporates trees or shrubs into the agricultural landscape (Leakey, 2014)
Conservation tillage	A soil management approach with the aim of limited soil manipulation (Lai, 1989)
Diversified farming	Farms that integrate several crops or animals into the production system (Garibaldi <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Ecological intensification	Emphasises ecological processes that support production, such as nutrient cycling, biotic pest management, and pollination (Garibaldi <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Integrated Crop Management	A whole farm approach to crop management, balancing profitability, productivity, and the environment (Lançon <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Integrated Farm Management	A whole farm approach that makes use of traditional and modern methods to increase productivity, but limit environmental impact (LEAF, 2017)
9791 Integrated Pest Management	An ecosystem approach to crop production, in which all available measures are used to discourage the development of pest populations, with an emphasis on non-chemical practices such as crop rotation, crop variety selection, hygiene, habitat management for natural enemies and biological control. (Kovács-Hostyánszki <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Organic farming	A holistic system for enhancing soil fertility, water management, and natural control of crop pests and diseases, usually associated with low-input, small, diverse farms (Garibaldi <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Precision farming	Farming that makes use of information technology to ensure targeted and efficient management (Blackmore, 1994)
Sustainable Intensification	Improving crop yield whilst improving environmental and social

	conditions (Garibaldi <i>et al.</i> 2017)
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776 **Table 2: Definitions of IFM provided by workshop attendees** (*ticked box means definition*
 777 *was given in specific workshop*)

Theme	Definition of IFM	Red Meat	Dairy	Arable
Non specific	Never heard of it	✓	✓	✓
	Difficult to define	✓	✓	✓
	An arable thing!	✓	✓	
	Not monoculture			✓
Efficiency, resource management	Efficiency	✓	✓	✓
	Making the most of your resources	✓	✓	✓
	Linking enterprise types and joining resources	✓	✓	
	Integration of supply chain			✓
Knowledge, organisation and planning	Forward planning	✓	✓	✓
	Joined-up thinking	✓	✓	✓
	Best practice			✓
	Resilient management			✓
	Data management system			✓
	Better use of technology		✓	
	Intensification of farmer/farm manager knowledge		✓	

Sustainability, environmental management	Farm-level sustainable intensification	✓		
	Linking productivity and the environment	✓	✓	✓
	Mix of conventional and organic to maximise production		✓	
	Minimising negative trade-offs within farm boundary		✓	

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