

# INNOVATIVE FARMERS: GIVING THE TOOLS AND EMPOWERING FARMERS TO INNOVATIONS THROUGH 'FIELD LABS'

Dr. Tom MacMillan

## INNOVATION

Many of the best ideas in farming come from the ground up, often with a simple organic method. Innovative Farmers is a network that puts farmers in the driving seat.

This is the first time an innovative network like this has achieved such momentum in the UK, and it is going global. There are now more than 400 members involved in groups around the UK, plus a new group with members from New Zealand, Mozambique, India, Germany and Sweden amongst others.

### DR. TOM MACMILLAN



Dr. MacMillan is the Director of Innovation at the Soil Association, a British non-profit organisation promoting organic and better food and farming. The Soil Association is best known for campaigns on issues like pesticides and the overuse of antibiotics in agriculture, and as UK's leading certifier of organic food.

Tom has a PhD investigating the use and abuse of science in food regulation. Before joining the Soil Association in 2011, Tom was Executive Director of the Food Ethics Council.

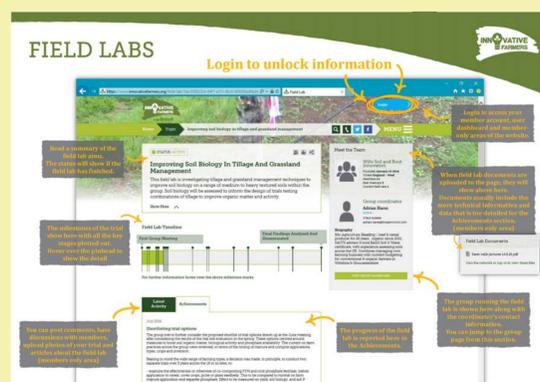
**CONTACT:** Tom Macmillan, Soil Association, South Plaza, Bristol, BS1 3NX, UK.

**Email:** [tmacmillan@soilassociation.org](mailto:tmacmillan@soilassociation.org)

## DESCRIPTION

Innovative Farmers network grew from a desire to find more sustainable, environmentally friendly and organic farming techniques that are practical and can help improve a farm's viability. Through the network, relevant topics are investigated and field labs are set up to investigate things like protecting the soil, improving the health of crops through ideas like 'compost tea' at scale, looking for alternative composts, fighting pernicious weeds without chemicals and improving livestock health naturally.

A researcher or expert is matched with a group of farmers, and together they discuss the best way to set up on-farm trials. Techniques and members include organic and non-organic farmers and together members are sharing the best right across the farming industry. By building an even bigger network we can work towards more farmers embracing organic and sustainable farming.



A page from the user guide for Innovative Farmers

## RELEVANCE

So far, Innovative Farmers has helped farmers find the value of producing cheap and reliable, peat-free compost from woodchip, radically reducing the use of antibiotics in dairy farming, sprouting grains and pulses to see if they make better chicken and pig feed and seen an increase in grain yield through the use of a microbiological inoculants.



A farmer member of the network

As the network grows, it has the potential to effect real change from the ground up. By gaining support from various high profile businesses, like Produce World Group who have committed to sponsorship, Innovative Farmers will gain a wider profile and subsequently impact more people, giving organic farming the profile it needs to effect change.

Encouraging research and learning in this way not only empowers farmers to take solutions into their own hands but means change can take place much more quickly, sustainably and effectively.