

Interactive comment on “Knowledge needs, available actions and future challenges in agricultural soils” by G. Key et al.

G. Key et al.

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Dear Barry,

Thank you for your comment, which raises an important point about framing the work in the context of ‘soil health’. We felt that ‘soil health’ rather than ‘soil condition’ was appropriate as practitioners tend to view the latter as being just the physical condition of the soil, without taking into account the biological elements and the overall properties which emerge from the physical and biological elements interacting (Romig et al, 1996; Kibblewhite et al, 2008). Hence, we chose to use soil health because it portrays the soil as a dynamic, living system (Doran and Zeiss 2000), and we wanted to ensure that the living, biological element of soil was not excluded when the Expert Panel assessed the practices/actions. We accept that the phrase ‘soil health’ is often used loosely,

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but it is being used in recent literature regarding best practices for soil management, including some that we cover in our paper (Han et al, 2016), and the term is used by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Soils, and by the UK Government in their recently published Soil Health report (HC 180). Given this we feel that this term will resonate with a wider audience of practitioners and policy makers, which is a target audience of our paper.

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Romig, D. E., Garlynd, M. J. & Harris, R. F.: Farmer-based assessment of soil quality: a soil health scorecard *Soil Science Society of America*, 677 S (1996).

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