

**RES-224-25-0107, Dr C Watson, Scottish Agricultural College**  
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**Soils – The Foundation of the Rural Economy?**

The soil beneath our feet is something most of us take for granted. However, it is a precious resource that governs agricultural sustainability and environmental quality both locally and globally. It is the foundation for all rural land use and, through the industries and businesses directly and indirectly dependent on it, affects the viability of the rural economy.

The aim of the study was, through a series of regional meetings, to determine a range of stakeholder perceptions of the value of soil in a regional context across the UK, with an inclusion of socio-economic effects.

Approximately 720 invitations were sent out to stakeholders in England, Scotland and Wales. The resulting 131 delegates represented a wide spectrum of stakeholders and interests. There was considerable similarity in the distribution of interests by delegates at the six regional meetings. Across all meetings, the top interests were Agriculture, Habitat and Wildlife, Forestry, and Planning and Infrastructure. The meetings were held at Aberdeen, Ayr, Newcastle, Harper Adams, Rothamsted and Okehampton.

A number of key issues were raised that were of practical concern:

- What role does soil management have in the conservation of farmland birds?
- Will we have enough land and/or the right type for graveyards in the future?
- How can soil management help maintain a landscape that people want to see?

The project report, to be published March 2006, will inform soil land use research and be used to support the development of regional soil protection policies.