

AFi case study

# UK Roundtable on Sustainable Soya

Creating an umbrella for sustainable sourcing goals across the soy sector

*7-minute read*



Accountability  
Framework

Delivering on  
ethical supply chain  
commitments

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This case study was produced by the Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) and Sofia Perez ([www.sofia-perez.com](http://www.sofia-perez.com)).

**ABOUT THE AFI:** The Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) is a collaborative effort to build and scale up ethical supply chains for agricultural and forestry products. Led by a diverse global coalition of environmental and human rights organizations, the AFi works to create a “new normal” where commodity production and trade are fully protective of forests, other natural ecosystems, and human rights. To pursue this goal, the coalition supports companies and other stakeholders in setting strong supply chain goals, taking effective action, and tracking progress to create clear accountability and incentivize rapid improvement.

**ABOUT THE AFI CASE STUDIES:** The AFi case study series features examples of companies and industry groups that have adopted policies and practices for ethical supply chains in alignment with the Accountability Framework. The cases illustrate some of the ways that organizations can apply the Framework to achieve or support ethical supply chains. While the case studies highlight specific policies and practices of interest, ***they do not imply an endorsement of the organizations featured in the case studies, nor their products or services, by the AFi or its coalition members.***

The case studies make reference to norms and guidelines for ethical supply chains contained in the Accountability Framework, which was created through a consultative process following applicable good practices for multi-stakeholder initiatives and which represents the consensus of the AFi Steering Group members that participated in its development.

**DISCLAIMER:** This work product is intended to be informational only and is not intended to serve as a legal opinion or legal advice on the matters treated. The reader is encouraged to engage counsel to the extent required.

**SEE WHO'S INVOLVED:**

For more information on the AFi's governance and a full list of partners, please visit [www.accountability-framework.org/who-is-involved](http://www.accountability-framework.org/who-is-involved).

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The AFi is funded by:

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# Summary

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The UK Roundtable on Sustainable Soya brings together a wide range of companies and associations that want to source soy sustainably. The Roundtable relied on the Accountability Framework to establish an overarching sourcing goal that all of its members can work towards. It also encouraged members to follow the Framework when setting their individual policies and time-bound plans.

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<b>Company:</b>	UK Roundtable on Sustainable Soya
<b>Commodity:</b>	Soybeans (meal, oil, and whole beans)
<b>Geography:</b>	Global
<b>Scope:</b>	The UK Roundtable represents 94% of the UK retail market share of soy.
<b>Challenge:</b>	Facilitate effective collaboration among a diverse group of UK businesses that want to source soy sustainably and send producers a strong market signal.
<b>Solution:</b>	Used the Framework to set no-deforestation and no-conversion goals for the entire soy supply chain and promote collaboration with the soy sector across Europe.

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## Accountability Framework sections applied:

- Core Principles    
- Self-assessment tool for company goals
- Definitions
- Operational Guidance on numerous topics, including: Applying the Definitions, Cutoff Dates, and Achieving Commitments Through Collaboration

# Challenge

An inexpensive source of protein, soybeans are used for livestock feed, processed into oil and products like tofu and soy sauce, and consumed directly. To meet the intense demand for this crop, soy production has increased 1500% since the 1950s, becoming the second biggest agricultural driver of deforestation.

Together, Brazil, Argentina, and the United States produce about 80% of the world's soy. South America's Cerrado and Gran Chaco landscapes — the continent's largest savannah and dry forest, respectively — are particularly threatened by the commodity's expansion.

A variety of efforts have been made to stem deforestation in tropical soy-producing regions, including legislation (such as Brazil's Forest Code); industry- and NGO-led collaborations (such as the Amazon Soy Moratorium, the Cerrado Manifesto, and the Consumer Goods Forum's "zero-net deforestation" commitment); and pledges by individual companies. Despite some success, the agricultural conversion of these biodiverse tropical ecosystems continues.

In the United Kingdom, the consumption of soybeans, soy-based products, and meat from animals raised on soymeal has grown steadily. In 2018, a group of UK companies and industry groups joined forces to work towards the shared goal of a secure, resilient, and sustainable soy supply. Together, they decided to create a pre-competitive initiative to boost their collective impact within and beyond their individual supply chains, and accelerate positive change throughout the sector through collective goals and their individual implementation, monitoring, and reporting systems.

With UK government funding through the Partnerships for Forests programme, Efeca (a UK-based consultancy) established the [UK Roundtable on Sustainable Soya](#), which comprises soy traders, manufacturers, feed producers, foodservice companies, the nine major national UK supermarket retailers, and the largest meat and dairy suppliers in the country. The Roundtable is supported by the wider UK Sustainable Soya Initiative through which Efeca engages with other soy-importing countries and with producers in key sourcing countries.

To achieve the Roundtable's aims, Efeca needed to develop consistent guidance and promote effective collaboration for the Roundtable's diverse group of members, each one operating in its own particular context. The dairy industry, for example, is less integrated than the poultry industry and less able to make rapid changes in its supply chain. The Roundtable was also needed to speed up the normally slow-moving multi-stakeholder process, helping participants build trust and consensus on key objectives and ways of working. Finally, Efeca needed an approach that could be applied throughout the entire UK supply chain and replicated across Europe through collaboration with other national initiatives.

# Solution

When the Roundtable was first convened in March 2018, its founding members created a steering group with representatives from all types of member businesses. At monthly face-to-face meetings, the steering group tackled the first order of business: setting a clear and consistent soy sourcing goal.

The group debated a variety of options but struggled to finalize a commitment. “Roundtable members were concerned about signing up to a goal only to find that the goal’s wording might not be clear enough or align with other soya users’ definitions,” says Rose McCulloch, Efeca senior consultant.

Although the Accountability Framework was still in the consultation phase at the time, the steering group reviewed a draft version of the Framework, which proved pivotal — in particular, the definitions of terms such as “natural forest” and “ecosystem conversion.” Knowing that the Framework was the consensus-based product of a coalition of environmental and social NGOs — the Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) — and that it was being consulted with a range of civil society and industry experts gave Roundtable members confidence and allowed their goal-setting discussions to move forward quickly. “It meant that we didn’t have to hash out all of the definitions right then and there, and could focus instead on key principles, because we knew that the Framework was coming,” says McCulloch. “It was that powerful.”

Given the diversity of the businesses involved in the Roundtable, it was important that the overall goal remain broad enough to allow members to create plans that were appropriate to their organization and supply chain position. “We wanted to give everyone an umbrella under which they could fit,” explains McCulloch. “It was a way of not letting perfect get in the way of good — of saying, ‘There are principles with which we all agree, so let’s make a start.’ This allowed us to keep taking steps forward.” By July 2018, the Roundtable’s signatories committed to sourcing soy that is legal and cultivated in a way that protects against the conversion of forests and valuable native vegetation, a pledge that is in keeping with the Framework’s Core Principle 1 and cites its definitions of the various terms.

In its role as a convener of these companies, Efeca also encouraged Roundtable members to use the Framework’s guidance when writing their individual commitments and policies. This included setting cutoff dates after which conversion would not be allowed, and developing time-bound plans with specific targets, in keeping with Core

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**Rose McCulloch,**  
Senior Consultant, Efeca



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Protection of forests and other natural ecosystems

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“The Roundtable and the AFi definitions helped to bring industry together in the same room and move forward, confident that we were taking an approach consistent with other global actors and markets.”

**Laura Falk,**  
Group Sustainable Sourcing Manager,  
Sainsbury's

Principle 3. To assist members in this process, Efeca invited the AFi team to give presentations on relevant sections of the Framework.

Sainsbury's, one of the UK's biggest supermarkets and a member of the Roundtable, developed its “[Transformational Plan for Sustainable Soy](#)” and aims to work with suppliers to help move the industry towards deforestation- and conversion-free soybean meal in animal feed. The company aims to achieve 100% physically certified sustainable soy meal by 2025. Laura Falk, Sainsbury's group sustainable sourcing manager, says that the Roundtable and the AFi definitions “helped to bring industry together in the same room and move forward, confident that we were taking an approach consistent with other global actors and markets.”

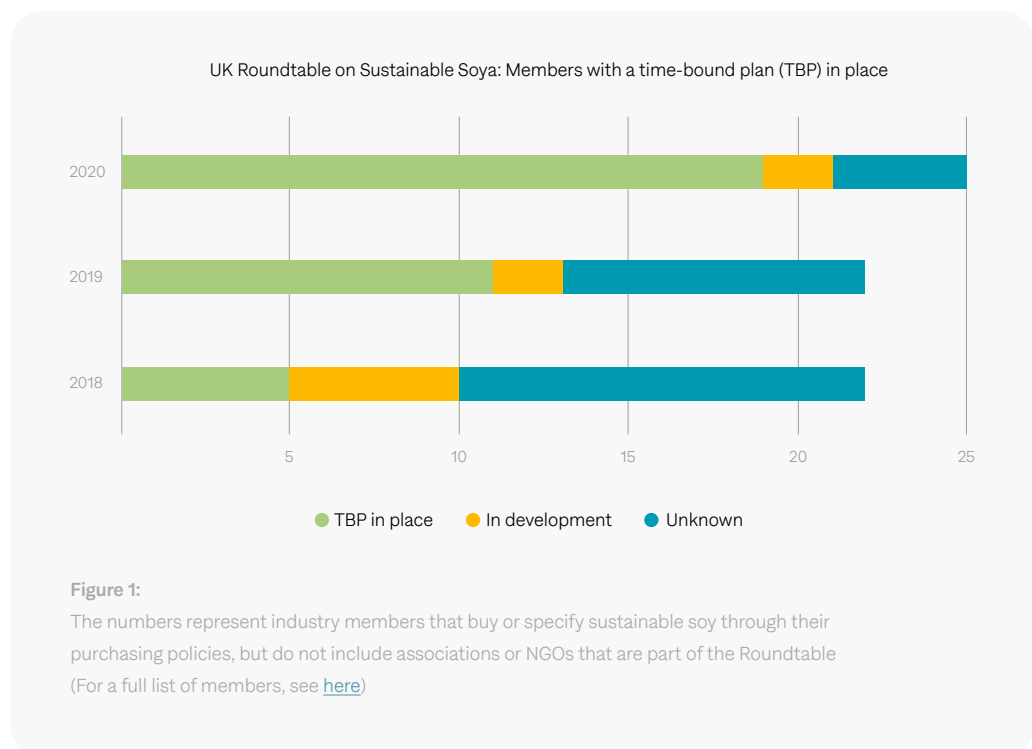


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Specification of commitments

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Roundtable members also committed to achieving meaningful and demonstrable progress by the end of 2020. To monitor improvements, Efeca created a “Matrix of Progress” — an annual questionnaire for all members to provide updates on their policies, risk assessment processes, and time-bound plans. The latest Roundtable annual report, published in November 2020, showed that 19 members (70%) had established a sourcing policy, two others had created policies that were pending signoff before the report's publication, and four members were still without a policy (see Figure 1). In the two years since the Roundtable began meeting regularly, the volume of certified sustainable soy used in the UK has more than doubled, increasing to 32% of total imports.



Among those members that did not yet have a plan in place, all were buying responsible soy credits (i.e., “book-and-claim” certificates), to cover part (or in some cases all) of the soy used within their business. While these certificates do not have a physical link to the soy in a buyer’s supply chain, they help to support producers of responsible soy and signal market demand for this product during the time it takes companies to transition to a supply chain comprising physical flows of sustainable soy. Going forward, Efeca intends to use the Framework to assist Roundtable members in making this transition effectively and efficiently.

# Insights

## Related Core Principles



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Respect for human rights

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Collaboration for landscape and sectoral sustainability

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The greatest benefit of the Framework thus far has been to provide a consistent and practical approach to facilitating sector-wide progress across a diverse group of companies.

According to McCulloch, “Our founding Roundtable members were an informed group. It wasn’t that they didn’t want to act; the challenge was how.” They needed a “how” that could be applied across the entire soy supply chain. “Our members have joined at different starting points — from companies with a policy that they were struggling to implement, to those that were unsure of how much soya was in their supply chain.” Despite these varied profiles, the Framework provided common principles with which all members could align and advance towards a shared goal.

By signaling their willingness to act now, Roundtable members have been driving change and opportunities for collaboration both inside and outside of the UK. For instance, the UK produces only about 50% of the pork that it consumes, so to source only pork from pigs raised on sustainable soy feed, UK companies must engage with producers in other countries to implement comparably high standards of responsibility. To foster this consistency, the UK Roundtable has been collaborating with sustainable soy initiatives in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden — a move that aligns with Core Principle 10, which calls for collaboration to address key social and environmental challenges across sectors, landscapes, and jurisdictions.

Together, these national initiatives issued a joint statement in support of conversion-free soy, as a way of reinforcing a strong and clear market signal that reassures producers within each country’s borders that the same standard will hold across Europe. The statement cites the Accountability Framework’s definitions and acknowledges that sustainable production and trade also needs to respect human rights, in keeping with Core Principle 2 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“By having an agreed set of definitions and principles, we are able to more easily collaborate, align, and communicate with a broad range of stakeholders.”

**Bas Geerts,**

Head of Sustainability, Cefetra

Roundtable members understand that consistency and joint action are vital to realizing the goal of sustainable soy production and sourcing. “It requires coordination and collaboration along supply chains, and across the industry, government, and civil society, both locally and globally,” says Sam Lee-Gammage, the sustainability coordinator for UK supermarket Waitrose. The Framework has facilitated this process, according to Bas Geerts, the head of sustainability for Cefetra, one of the four largest traders of soy to the UK. “By having an agreed set of definitions and principles,” says Geerts, “we are able to more easily collaborate, align, and communicate with a broad range of stakeholders.”





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