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INTRODUCTION

In many countries, the results of long-term field experiments and long-term monitoring at known sites have been essential in the development of our contemporary knowledge base informing sustainable land use and management. The questions that can be addressed through data collected in existing long-term experiments and sites have often changed through their history and many have had to endure periods under threat. Such experiments can be expensive to maintain and often in politics and research only current problems drive the rhetoric that informs funding decisions. Perhaps, the needs of future generations are not, or not sufficiently, considered. Hence few new long-term experiments are currently being considered. Long-term field experiments will continue to be indispensable in future, as they cannot be replaced by new analytical techniques or models; on the contrary, they are an indispensable basis for the calibration and validation of these techniques.

We look forward to a good set of discussions about the value of long-term sites and experiments for agriculture and ecology and would welcome contributions for all involved in the running of long-term experiments across Europe and the users of such long-term datasets in the development of policy and practice.

Dr Elizabeth A Stockdale
Member of the AAB Cropping and Environment Group

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