



Foundation

Invitation to tender (ITT)

Carbon Innovation Fund 2 (CIF2)

1. Invitation to tender background

1.1 Introduction

This is an invitation to tender (ITT) to commission an expert organisation/partnership or individual to conduct an end of programme evaluation for our [Carbon Innovation Fund Round 2 \(CIF2\)](#). Our three-year, £3.5m [Carbon Innovation Fund](#) is a partnership between the Co-op Foundation and Co-op.

The expert is expected to play a critical role in assessing the impact of the fund as its projects approach their end by reviewing project documentation and relevant literature, visiting our projects' sites, designing methods, collecting and analysing data and writing a report and facilitating a final learning event for our funded partners.

This work requires:

- Research and evaluation expertise, related [to our funded projects focus](#), on the areas of:
 - alternatives to synthetic fertilisers and
 - alternatives to soy-containing feed
- Knowledge of scaling up innovation in farming

We would encourage bidders to form a collaboration/partnership if they don't have all the skills and relevant expertise to evaluate our seven projects or to form an advisory group with the relevant expertise. The advisory board could consist of a range of experts in the focus areas of our projects, who will provide guidance on the evaluation process and outputs to ensure they are relevant and comprehensive (see section 2.6 of the ITT for further details).

At the beginning of this funding programme we had commissioned a consultancy to set up processes and evidence to inform the implementation of this funding programme and track projects' progress. This end-of-programme evaluation will build on data and reports conducted from the commissioned consultancy work that came to an end recently. The end of programme evaluation will also require additional data collection to capture more up-to-date activities.

The budget for this work is £30,000-40,000 including VAT. Proposals up to 8 pages to conduct this work need to be submitted **by 5pm 3rd March, 2025**.

The primary audiences for this piece of work are: funders, investors and the agritech community.

1.2 Who we are and the context for this work

The Co-op Foundation is the [Co-op's charity](#) and we're co-operating for a fairer world. We believe co-operation is at the heart of strong communities and this makes us a different kind of funder. The Carbon Innovation Fund (CIF) is our way of creating sustainable communities as part of our strategy, '[Building communities of the future](#)'



[together](#)' and in partnership with Co-op. It's funded through Co-op donations raised from the sale of compostable carrier bags in the UK and our own [Co-op Foundation funds](#).

CIF supports initiatives that aim to reduce the environmental impact of the food and farming sector. In Round One, we funded a broad range of initiatives working to reduce the environmental impact of the food and farming sector. After review, reflection, and expert advice it was decided that Round 2 of the Carbon Innovation Fund has taken a more focused approach. This allows for deeper impact, better synergy between partners, and the potential to generate a wealth of learning that can be openly shared. As a result of a consultation process to test out different focus areas with a panel of industry experts, it was decided to dedicate CIF2 to innovative projects that aim to reduce the UK's reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers.

We've seen coverage on the [spiralling costs](#) and environmental damage associated with feed and fertiliser for farmers in recent years. As a result, there has been an influx of interest and innovation in affordable and sustainable alternatives to feed and fertiliser, as well as ideas that help reduce our reliance on them altogether. Some demonstrate cutting-edge technology, while others bring back the increasingly well-understood benefits of traditional techniques, for example, regenerative farming approaches. To us, both types of work are innovative as they work against the mainstream approaches of today.

While banning soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers overnight is not viable, these new ideas and alternatives will reduce deforestation rates and greenhouse gas emissions, help farmers' livelihoods and protect biodiversity.

1.2.1 Aim, outcomes of CIF2 and our funded partners

The aim of CIF2 is to investigate and showcase a suite of options that could decrease farmers' reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers through funding projects and trials. It also encourages collaboration to further test and scale up innovative solutions.

In more detail, the fund endeavours to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increased support to projects that may be risky for other funders e.g. because of the size of the organisation or because they have only conducted a pilot so far.
- Increased testing and scaling up of alternative solutions to soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers that reduce farming costs and benefit the environment.
- Increased access to knowledge, techniques and skills in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors.
- Increased farmers' confidence, skills and knowledge to transition successfully into a new era of managing cost, efficiency and sustainability of their inputs.
- Strengthened existing or newly-formed networks and collaborations between farmers and other stakeholders that bring together solutions to common challenges.
- Reduced costs for farmers and consumers and positive environmental impact through adopting alternative solutions to soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers.

1.2.2 Types of projects that the CIF2 looked to support

CIF2 looked to fund a range of different mechanisms that can help to reduce reliance on soy-containing animal feed and/or synthetic fertilisers. Some examples are listed below:

- Alternatives to soy-containing animal or fish feed .
- Alternatives to synthetic fertiliser, or ideas that would reduce their negative impacts.
- On-farm trials of alternative feed or fertiliser, which will measure success and impacts on factors such as yield, costs, biodiversity increases, nitrogen management etc.
- Projects that are thinking laterally to reduce reliance rather than create alternatives. This could include breeding new strains of crops, better nitrate management on farms, building multi-stakeholder networks to tackle issues together or agroecological cluster demonstration projects

Funded projects

CIF2 invited applications across the UK for grants between £75,000 and £100,000 for individual organisations’ projects, while formal partnerships could apply for up to £200,000.

Grant funding could be used on core and capital costs. Projects had to start within six months of receiving the grant, but after that, they could be spent over any period.

CIF2 also offered successful applicants up to £5,000 to support their capacity-building needs, such as training, development and strategic thinking.

Any type of organisation, of any size based in the UK was invited to apply for CIF2. We welcomed applications from organisations working in partnership, including projects joining up with statutory organisations and involving voluntary, public, and private sectors.

In August 2023 we announced our successful applicants which are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Carbon Innovation Fund grants

Lead Organisation and location	Funding duration	Project end date	Total	Project focus
Câr-Y-Môr/For the Love of the Sea (St Davids, Wales)	27 months	30/1/2026	£193,000	Scaling up production of an ocean farm grown seaweed-based biostimulant concentrate to create a product that reduces the need for synthetic fertilisers on land farms. Car-y-Mor is testing their formulations and trial with partner land farms.



Foundation

Farm Carbon Zero NI CIC , Arc Zero (Various locations across Northern Ireland)	37 months	31/12/2026	£102,800	A collective of seven farmers, who are committed to reaching Net Zero, to improve the sustainability of their farms. They are trialling a range of methods to reduce reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertiliser in on-farm conditions and will share their learning with farmers, policy makers and researchers.
Kent Wildlife Trust (East Kent, England)	27 months	30/6/2025	£105,000	Designing field trials testing the efficacy of liquid compost to reduce farmers' reliance on nitrogen-based fertiliser. Also building a network of farmers to promote regenerative farming.
Pontus Research Limited (Rhondda Cynon Taff, Wales)	20 months	30/6/2025	£200,000	Creating low-carbon, soy-free alternatives to aquaculture feed, using sustainable and locally-sourced ingredients.
Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) , (Oban, Scotland)	30 months	01/03/2026	£204,000	Research on how different forms of marine waste, including shellfish, mollusc shells and seaweed can be repurposed to create new fertilisers. This includes working with by-products from the aquaculture/fishery industry. They aim to add value to aquaculture waste streams by using the materials to treat wastewater to reduce the amount of synthetic fertiliser in agriculture.
NPK Recovery (formerly Vandenburg UK) (Bristol, England)	18 months	30/3/2025	£186,000	Developing a nutrient-rich, environmentally sustainable fertiliser from human urine. The team aims to create a system that collects waste from festivals and events and processes it to supply local farming communities with an alternative fertiliser.
WWF-UK (North	22 months	30/6/2025	£105,000	Conducting on-farm trials to replace synthetic fertiliser with seaweed

Norfolk, England)				fertiliser on arable farms. The seaweed is sourced from UK regenerative ocean farms. This will help the team better understand whether seaweed fertiliser could become a commercially viable and environmentally friendly alternative.
-------------------	--	--	--	--

1 CIF2 End of funding programme evaluation

2.1 Overall aim

The Co-op Foundation and Co-op are looking to commission an expert to conduct end of programme evaluation for CIF2. Our learning and evaluation approach at Co-op Foundation is underpinned by our cooperative values. Our expectations of partners are proportionate and set in the context of transparent, open and trusting relationships. The aim, objectives and research questions of this work have been designed through a cooperative approach that included a workshop with our funded partners and our Funding and Partnerships team to look at what evidence we should be producing as our funding programme comes to an end that will be useful to our funded partners and the sectors they are working in.

The programme evaluation will aim to produce evidence of progress of our CIF2 projects to reduce farmers' reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers. We are particularly interested in disseminating good practice and what can be improved at the end point of our funding and as our projects scale up their innovations. As our funded projects cover a wide range of solutions we expect the programme evaluation to focus on the individual projects' impact and learning and where appropriate to draw learning and conclusions about the funding programme as a whole. We would also like the end of programme evaluation to explore the effectiveness of our funding approach and processes.

Objectives:

- To explore the progress made, scalability and impact of the solutions by the end of the funding distributed by Co-op Foundation
- To produce evidence of what worked and what could be improved for the funded projects
- To create learning about Co-op Foundation's funding practices in CIF2

We would like the end of programme evaluation to cover the following research questions:

Progress and Impact

- To what extent and how have the innovations funded contributed to reducing farmers' reliance on synthetic fertilisers and soy-containing feed (farmers engaged in each project or more widely if appropriate)? What key factors influenced the success of the projects?
- What worked well and what could be improved in each project as they approach the end of their funding?
- To what extent have the projects deviated from their original application plans, and what are the key learnings from these project changes?
- What have been the key challenges the projects faced, and how did they overcome these?

Sustainability/scalability

- What is the potential scalability of the solutions at the end of the project funding?
- What needs to happen next following the end of the project funding for the solutions to scale up further? What further support is needed to scale up the solutions?
- What is the future funding potential for the projects?

Dissemination and engagement

- How effective have the funded partners been at engaging their target audiences ?
- How can the projects reach out to wider audiences?

Our approach to funding

- What funding worked well and what could be improved from the Co-op Foundations' funding practices (e.g. did the application timeframe affect partnership applications? Did the pilot requirement at pre-application stage limit innovation? Was the funding level sufficient to progress the solutions)?

2.2 End of programme evaluation audiences

The primary audiences for the end of programme evaluation findings will be:

- **Funders and investors.** As the Co-op Foundation is ending its support in this area of work we would like to share what we learned and what future support is needed from other funders and investors to progress this field.
- **The agritech community:** We want to share what works and what doesn't in approaches to reduce reliance on soy-containing feed and fertiliser with farmers, farming advisors, agronomists, researchers and entrepreneurs.

2.3 Scope of work

We encourage bidding providers to suggest appropriate and innovative ways in their proposals to undertake this work. The approach needs to be proportionate to the level of

funding. We acknowledge that the choice of methodology and level of depth of the end of programme evaluation work is expected to be influenced by the available budget and timeline.

We also expect this work to build on data and evidence collected through already commissioned work that came recently to an end and included:

- [A review of solutions to reduce reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertiliser in the UK](#)
- Notes from two annual events (November 2023 and November 2024) that brought together the funded partners to discuss progress in achieving their objectives, successes and challenges.
- Interview data and draft report on scaling up innovations (not publishable)

In this section, we suggest methodological approaches this work may entail:

- Case study methodology that will enable an in-depth study of each project and focus on their journey of scaling up their innovation.
- Analysis of data across the case studies to identify common themes (if possible) and create learning about the overall funding programme.
- Desk-based review of the data collected through our previously commissioned work (see above) and data collected through our funding processes, i.e. project application and funded partner monitoring.
- Conducting site visits to observe the practices and interview our funded partners face-to-face.
- Adopting a mixed method approach that combines collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data.
- Organise end of programme learning event for our funded partners to come together, reflect on the final report and share learning. This event can be face-to-face or online, depending on our funded partner capacity and the commissioned expert's preference.

Partners have been encouraged to dedicate up to 5% of their funding to learning and evaluation activities as a recognition of the staff time and resources these activities require. As their projects approach their final stages the role of the expert will be to collate existing data from our funded partners rather than create a framework for new data collection.

2.6 Additional requirements

We are looking for a consultant/cy who has the following:

- a good understanding of the literature and current trends related to the focus of [our seven funded partners' projects](#).
- an understanding of funding practices, grant-making and philanthropy.
- expertise in impact assessment and monitoring, learning and evaluation approaches and methods.

If the supplier does not have all the expertise related to the solutions our projects focus on, it is recommended that the supplier creates an advisory group with relevant expertise. The advisory board may include individuals with relevant expertise who will provide guidance and feedback to the evaluation team throughout the end-of-programme

evaluation process. The advisory board’s role will be primarily to consult and advise based on their diverse perspectives and knowledge of the wide range of areas of work of our seven funded projects i.e. review evaluation plan and methodology, feedback on methods and analysis, identification of limitations and biases and contribution to the interpretation of findings and recommendations.

We also expect the supplier’s team to be diverse in membership and inclusive in practice.

3 Deliverables

Co-op Foundation will expect the following deliverables in accordance with the following timetable as a minimum. We are also open to the supplier suggesting other formats and types of outputs.

Deliverable	Deadline
On-site visits to each funded project to collect data and conduct interviews with key project team members.	Between June 2025-October 2026
Short publishable case study reports for each funded project	Based on individual project completion date ranging from December 2025-December 2026
Publishable end of programme evaluation report (max 40 pages) that will compile all the case study reports, produce learnings across the funding programme and include recommendations for our funded partners, other funders and investors and the agritech industry.	December 2026
Conference presentation/panel session e.g. in Groundswell in collaboration with our funded partners to disseminate the findings of the programme evaluation	Summer 2026
Blog in relevant farming sector publication/platform to disseminate the findings of the programme evaluation	April 2026
Learning event for funded partners	November 2025

4 Budget and timelines

The budget for this project is up to £30,000-£40,000 (inclusive of VAT) to between March 2025 to December 2026, depending on the projects' estimated completion time.

The budget should cover all costs associated with quality assurance, proof-reading and design of the final outputs. Co-op Foundation can cover the venue and participation costs for our funded partners if the learning event will be in person. All costs for the site-visits to the projects’ locations should be included (see Table 1 that presents each project’s location). An appropriate allowance for expenses and management time should also be included. In presenting your budget, please indicate how you address VAT requirements.



5 Ethics

We expect the research to adhere to the Social Research Association (SRA) ethical guidelines.

6 Diversity & Inclusion

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is one of Co-op Foundation's strategic priorities and we are committed to cultivating a fair and healthy environment for the people who work here and those we work with. As we learn more about barriers that disadvantage certain groups from progressing in our workplace, we will remove them. We would like to partner with suppliers who share our commitment to DEI. We will ask you questions related to DEI as part of our commissioning processes.

7 Time allocation and parameters

7.1 ITT Timeline

c	Activity	Date
1	ITT issued to Suppliers	31 January 2025
3	Submission of Supplier Q&A to Co-op Foundation Contact	17 February 2025
4	Return of Supplier Q&A to Suppliers	19 February 2025
5	Submission of ITT Response	3 March 2025, 5pm
6	ITT Evaluation Period	5 - 12 March
7	Clarification meetings may be held with shortlisted suppliers	17 March 2025
8	Notification of Contract Award	21 March 2025
9	Contract finalising	24 - 28 March 2025
10	Contract start date	31 March 2025

7.2 Response submission and Format

Please submit your proposal by 5pm on the 25 February 2025 through an email to Co-op Foundation's Head of Learning and Impact Asimina Vergou asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk

We would expect to see in the submitted proposal the following:

1. Description of your understanding of the project's aim and context.
2. Explanation of how the work and output format will fulfil the aim and answer the research questions of this study and complete the deliverables as they are described in the ITT.

3. Detailed methodology for undertaking the study, appropriate to answer the research questions.
4. Description of anticipated risks and challenges and ways to mitigate them and quality assurance for your work.
5. Details of staff allocated to the project, together with experience of the contractor and staff members in carrying out similar projects, expertise in the thematic areas of our funded partner projects, skills and knowledge related to MEL and understanding of philanthropy. The project manager / lead contact should be identified.
6. If the supplier does not have in-house expertise in all the areas of our funded partner projects, please submit a list of relevant experts that could be invited to be part of an advisory group.
7. A detailed budget including all costs, expenses and VAT, specifying all day rates of individuals involved, the allocation of days between members of the team; and the cost of particular activities.
8. A timeline for the work, including key milestones and deliverables against each of these.
9. Contact details of two previous or current clients with direct knowledge or experience of your work relevant to this ITT. Please specify how the referees know your work and if they can be contacted by us straightaway.
10. Examples of similar types of work. These could be sent as a separate document/appendix to the proposal.

A proposal for undertaking the work should be no more than 8 pages. Submitting a proposal more than 8 pages will automatically result in the rejection of the proposal.

We recognise one individual or organisation may not feel equally able to deliver all strands of this work and would therefore be happy to accept applications from a group of individuals or partner organisations. We will want one of these individuals or organisations to be identified as the lead contact.

7.3 Supplier Q&A

Prior to the submission of your ITT response, Suppliers are provided the opportunity to submit any questions they have about the exercise. All questions are to be submitted to the Co-op Foundation by e-mail to Dr Asimina Vergou, asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk in accordance with the ITT timetable (11 February 2025).

7.4 Scoring

Your proposal will be scored out of 100%. 90% of the marks will be awarded to quality and 10% of marks will be awarded for price.

The proposal will be assessed against the following Quality Questions (90% of the total score):

Quality criteria & questions	Weighting
------------------------------	-----------

1. To what extent does the ITT response demonstrate a clear understanding of the aim, research questions, and main issues related to this study?	Weighting 10%
2. To what extent is the proposed methodology robust and appropriate to fulfil the aim of this work and answer the key questions?	Weighting 20%
3. To what extent does the ITT response demonstrate the supplier has research and evaluation skills and expertise in the areas of our funded partner projects' focus and in scaling up innovations in farming?	Weighting 20%
4. To what extent do the suppliers' examples of previous work demonstrate their ability to produce succinct, rigorous and useful outputs?	Weighting 20%
5. To what extent does the tender response demonstrate a clear and realistic project plan, to successfully deliver the work to the budget and timetable required and a well-structured, inclusive membership team with clear roles and responsibilities?	Weighting 20%

The evaluation of price will be carried out on the Schedule of charges you provide in response to Table A. We expect that the budget allocation may change during the project's duration especially in phase 2 after joint agreement between the Learning partner and the Co-op Foundation.

Table A - Schedule of Charges

Please show in your proposal submission, the number of staff and the amount of time that will be scheduled to work on the contract with the daily charging rate.

Please complete the table below providing a detailed breakdown of costs against each description. Suppliers may extend the tables to detail additional elements/costs if required.

If VAT is chargeable on the services to be provided, this should be taken into account in the overall cost of this contract so please make sure to include that clearly in the budget.

Suppliers shall complete the schedule below, estimating the number of days, travel and subsistence costs associated with their proposal submission.

TABLE A: (firm and fixed costs)

Cost	Post 1 cost per day (No of days) e.g. Project Manager/Director @ £2	Post 2 cost per day (No of days) e.g. Senior Consultant/manager/researcher @£1.5	Post 3 cost per day (No of days) Junior Consultant /equivalent e.g. £1	Total days	Total fees
Inception meeting to agree plans and finalise requirements	Example 0.5	1	1.5	3	£4



Foundation

[Add necessary]	as					
-----------------	----	--	--	--	--	--

8 Accessibility

Co-op Foundation is committed to ensuring that our ITT exercises are accessible to everyone. If you have a disability or a chronic health condition, we can offer adjustments to the response format e.g. submitting your response in an alternate format. For support during the ITT exercise, contact Dr Asimina Vergou asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk.

If, within the proposed outputs of this ITT exercise, specific adjustments are required by you or your team which incur additional cost then outline them clearly within your proposal. Co-op Foundation is committed to evaluating all proposals fairly and will ensure any proposed adjustment costs sit outside the assessment.

© Co-op Foundation. All rights reserved. Co-op Foundation is a working name of Co-operative Community Investment Foundation, a charity registered in England and Wales (1093028) and Scotland (SC048102). Registered address: 1 Angel Square, Manchester M60 0AG