AFRI SAS
SOIL TO SOCIETY

# YEAR 3 ANNUAL PROGRESS AND COLLABORATION REPORT

DEC 2023

This document provides an overview of the results of the AFRI SAS Soil to Society Progress and Collaboration Survey Report. OEIE received responses from 36 of 55 team members, with 31 complete and 5 partial responses: **a 65.5% response rate.**

### Progress and Satisfaction

Respondents assessed the progress made toward each objective, and the mean ratings indicate that the the majority of objectives, with the exception of Objective 2, are above the 'somewhat behind schedule' level but haven't quite reached the 'on schedule' level. Despite indicating that most objectives are lagging, over 95% of respondents express confidence that the Soil to Society project will successfully achieve its goals. Furthermore, all respondents expressed that they are at least satisfied with the implementation of the project.

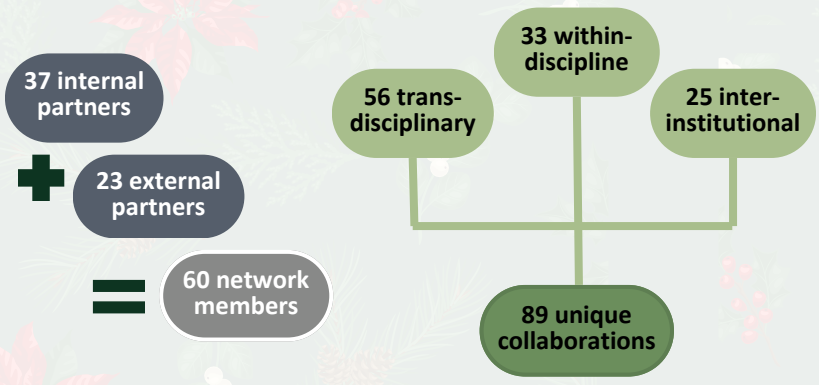
### Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Researchers

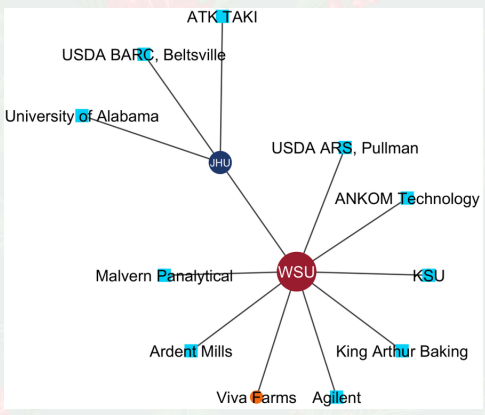
Graduate students and postdoctoral researchers (n = 9) assessed the impact of their participation in the AFRI SAS Soil to Society project on professional outcomes. Respondents felt that their participation in the project has had a lot of impact on two of the five outcomes: increasing knowledge of project-related research outcomes and increasing skills for working as an integrated member of a research team.

*"I am able to learn different skills including teamwork, better communication, and presentation skills in addition to fulfilling my academic goals."*

### Collaboration Network

The Soil to Society social network is based on the responses of 28 survey participants who shared a total of 89 unique collaborative relationships between 60 individuals across 14 institutions. Just under half of the relationships in the Soil to Society social network were newly established as a result of participating in the project (n = 40; 44.9%). Nearly two-thirds of relationships are transdisciplinary in nature (n = 56; 62.9%).




Sociogram of network institutions

### Overall Collaboration

Respondents reported that they most frequently collaborate monthly with others on the project (n = 12 of 30; 40.0%), with the same number of respondents collaborating several times a month (when combining weekly and daily responses, n = 12 of 30; 40.0%), for a total of 80.0% of project members collaborating at least monthly, and the primary means of communication to do so have been primarily via email (n = 31) and videoconferences (n = 20).

*"The comprehensive nature of the project calls for collaboration, which the project team has successfully achieved. This is a major strength of the project."*

### Sustainability

Project leadership (n = 10) at least agreed that the project has successfully achieved four of eight sustainability domains: environmental support, organizational capacity, partnerships, and strategic planning. The remaining sustainability domains—program adaptation, communications, program evaluation, and funding stability—have not been fully realized. Additionally, respondents identified the top sustainability domains for each component and it was found that the organizational capacity sustainability domain was rated as the top choice for most components.

*"Focus on additional funding opportunities and collaborations that expand the team."*

### Suggestions and Final Thoughts

When asked for final thoughts regarding the most significant benefits or impacts of being part of the Soil to Society project, respondents most frequently reported benefits were teamwork experience; research opportunities, experience, and advancement; and benefits from the interdisciplinary nature of the project. Two individuals left suggestions for leadership including:

- to improve collaboration with others on methods and analysis techniques
- to provide professional development opportunities for students

*"I got to know about lots of people working in different disciplines in this project and identified my potential collaborators for the future."*

*"We need to think a lot about dissemination of findings beyond just peer reviewed papers… planning events in different parts of the country/online to disseminate findings to different groups, for example. "*

*"This project has been instrumental in my academic and professional progress. I am making new connections, learning new skills, and gaining in-depth knowledge about my discipline."*

## OBSERVATIONS

### Objectives (6 of 7) are identified as behind schedule

*"For the Food Science team, we need to be doing a better job of engaging with our invested parties....The Human Health and Nutrition team is ahead of schedule in methods but is waiting on material which will come this year....I think [the project] hasn't progressed much this last year on farm to school and farmer education workshops. I don't believe anything has specifically been done for outreach and extension."*

### There is a high degree of transdisciplinary collaboration within the project

*"I feel that the leadership team and each of the researchers are working hard to address the objectives and to coordinate among the teams to enhance cross-disciplinary understanding and work."*

*"The communication and integration of the ideas from various collaborators has been great."*

### The project had four out of eight (50%) sustainability features

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enact mitigation plans identified by the respondents.
- Improve inter-team communication and awareness of the project progress toward goals.

- Continue to support and facilitate transdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaboration via hosting meetings, conferences, seminars, and the like.
- Encourage team members to facilitate their external connections with other team members.

- Consider reviewing and tailoring sustainability efforts according to the importance of each domain type respondents identified as most important for each objective.