Soil Observatory lets researchers dig deep

The UK Soil Observatory (UKSO), launched last month in London, provides a global web-based platform for the easier acquisition and dissemination of soil data (www.ukso.org). Driven by the United Nations Global Soil Partnership, soil security is rising rapidly on government agendas (see Nature 492, 186; 2012), so researchers need to be able to predict how soils will respond to changing climate, vegetation, erosion and pollution (M. W. Schmidt et al. Nature 478, 49–56; 2011). The UKSO offers a step change in meeting this challenge. Expanding on the success of the mySoil crowd-sourcing app (see W. Shelley et al. Nature 496, 300; 2013), the UKSO is a community initiative funded by the Natural Environment Research Council that offers live data streaming and pioneers a route to big data resources. It is comprehensively linked to other sources of soil data, covering free and commercial information, and to real-time data from the COSMOS national soil moisture network. The UKSO interactive map viewer provides access to a huge range of information, from local soil biodiversity to metal concentrations in topsoil.

Data from the UKSO will underpin such major government projects as the £160-million (US$268-million) strategy for agricultural technologies (go. nature.com/6oqmxh), and catalyse associated industrial and commercial enterprises.

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