



## ISSUE 9

### GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE LEP FOOD SECURITY

#### Reflection on 100+ Days of Lockdown

7<sup>th</sup> July 2020

As our LEP Deputy Chair and lead for the food sector, Sarah Louise Fairburn, is poised to give an interview update to ITV Calendar next week, we thought this was the perfect opportunity to reflect on the first three months of the Covid-19 pandemic impact on the industry and to extend thanks and acknowledgement to all those involved in the food chain who have worked tirelessly to keep the nation fed. Please continue to feed your experiences and insights in and to circulate to your networks and colleagues.

(Sarah Louise Fairburn is Brand & Sales Director at LJ Fairburn & Son, one of the largest producers and packers of fresh eggs in the UK.)

### Sector Progress & Highlights

#### National Food Security

Firstly we want to acknowledge and thank our sector and its dedicated staff from field pickers, to engineers, programmers, the factory workers, delivery drivers and our shopkeepers, for responding to COVID. We also welcome the socially distanced re-opening of significant parts of food service on 4<sup>th</sup> July and will be working to help rebuild this sector locally.

Farmers and food producers have kept the country fed, and COVID has significantly highlighted the importance and value of the work that our global agriculture and food community plays. Our work as an industry and our “hidden heroes”, was acknowledged by the Environment Secretary George Eustice for delivering an absolutely vital service in a time of need.

The LEP has recently developed a detailed Agri-Food Recovery Plan to develop the end to end food chain post COVID to build on the increased demand in some areas, and mitigate the impacts to other parts of the supply chain where demand has fallen.

#### Investment

Lincolnshire is leading the way globally with one of the world's largest agri-tech research groups in the world with over 50 engineers and scientists working on robotics, autonomous and digital technology across the supply chain.

The University of Lincoln Riseholme campus trains PhD students in agri-robotics with a £15m investment in place to develop new facilities and programmes.

There are also some exciting private sector partnership projects evolving. Beeswax Dyson has announced that it will construct a six hectare glasshouse near Boston to grow strawberries year round

from spring 2019 for the UK market, using technology to minimise environmental impacts. Using heat and light generated by an anaerobic digester to grow the fruit, the same digester will convert farm waste into an organic fertiliser that provides nutrition for the glasshouse crops.

Transformational LEP partner funded projects also include:

- **University of Lincoln's Agri-Food Centre of Excellence** - a bespoke agri-food research and development facility at the new Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ) in Holbeach at the heart of the UK's £100bn food and drink sector.
- The Centre will be the linchpin of the FEZ, delivering innovation support services, pioneering research, skills provision and knowledge exchange for agri-food businesses across Lincolnshire and beyond.
- The Centre will build on the success of the University of Lincoln's Holbeach campus to include microbiology and chemistry laboratories, a high-tech test kitchen and sensory suite, breakout space, and seminar rooms, and will act as an innovation hub promoting the rapid uptake of advanced technologies such as robotics and automation and ensuring the UK's agri-food industry remains competitive
- **Food Enterprise Zones** The development of our Food Enterprise Zones will support both existing agri-food businesses as well as those looking to invest and relocate. Food Enterprise Zones (FEZs) will unleash food entrepreneurs, bringing together researchers, farmers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers so they can improve productivity. **Europarc III** is focusing on supporting growth of the existing seafood and value-added food processing cluster on the Humber and **Holbeach** is focusing on creating a UK leading technology cluster to support the food chain.

These investments are attracting additional inward investment and COVID has demonstrated:

1. The importance of robotics to up-skill existing workforces and drive labour productivity and;
2. The growing role of digitalisation in business, including new online marketing channels and more efficient systems to control the flow of food in the supply chain

We are also feeding intelligence from our businesses into government to help shape the Agricultural Bill and other key strategic plans including the UK Food Strategy which is due to be published in 2021.

### **Pick for Britain**

Throughout May and June we've been running a #StudentLandArmy campaign across social media, signposting workers to the [Pick for Britain](#) website and supporting the national #[FeedTheNation](#) campaign. The national campaign was given a boost in May when HRH The Prince of Wales posted a [video](#) address on the website endorsing the campaign and urging people to sign up for harvest duty.

Worldwide Fruit in Spalding commented that the campaign has provided the additional back up that was needed and within 48 hours of calling for students they had 30 applications.

Willows Farm near the Lincolnshire coast who would normally employ Lithuanian and Bulgarian workers to bring in the harvest on the 15-acre farm has also benefited from an influx of student workers. This year they sought more local labour to pick the fruit and the #StudentLandArmy campaign has boosted this workforce with both 6<sup>th</sup> form students from Alford Grammar School and other local schools and colleges, and university students on gap years. Read the full story [here](#).

The UK harvest is now in full swing in Lincolnshire and farms and the DEFRA [Pick for Britain](#) website reports a fantastic response stating that many vacancies for the next few weeks are now filled, but that the harvest season continues all summer and links will regularly be updated as new roles become available.

## Covid Adaptation

### Food Business Adaptation

Our food processors who supply food retailers who are generally reporting sales have risen by 15-30% since early March, with some products seeing even larger growth. Food retail sales are up nearly 20% overall with online deliveries increasing by 80% since early March.

The iconic Brown's Pie Shop in Lincoln innovated their business model and within 3 weeks launched an online ordering system and now have higher sales than pre-COVID.

COVID prompted the Lincoln Food Partnership to integrate all the Lincoln City Food Banks into a single operational 'food poverty' unit. Working together, they have negotiated a lease to open a membership supermarket and are working to secure surplus food and are now looking to source farm produce.

### Call for food surplus supporting food poverty

Coronavirus has pushed many people into food poverty and in Lincoln, the combined Foodbanks (Lincoln Food Bank, Lincoln Community Larder and Lincoln Mosque), have joined forces working with the Mint Lane 'waste food' café to respond to this need. Demand for the food banks rose by 70% in the year before the pandemic. Demand doubled again during the pandemic peak.

Coordinated by the Lincoln Food Partnership (LFP) this group is now opening a membership supermarket for those who qualify for food support and is seeking stock at as low a cost as possible to allow access to cheap food.

The LFP wants to source food for the supermarket and is calling for farm surpluses that would otherwise be ploughed back or composted, or processed food that might not be suitable for full retail, and retail food that has not been sold.

If you can offer any of the above or can help in this important intervention, please contact Amy Colley at [amy@lincolnfoodbank.org.uk](mailto:amy@lincolnfoodbank.org.uk)



Across the food sector we have seen companies and their workers respond fantastically quickly and rise to the challenges which COVID has created.

Lincolnshire is also a major producer of ornamental crops, with nearly 20% of UK production. This sector was hit hard by the closure of garden centres in March, but many businesses have focused on online sales, with for example:

- The owner of Country Herbs near Spalding joined forces with a friend to start selling online for the first time and rebuilding turnover through this work.
- You Garden near Spalding is a very rapidly growing online only garden centre who has also seen sales accelerate due to Covid-19.
- We also supported the re-opening of garden centres in May and this is helping consumers access the supplies they need to support the gardening boom we have seen as people have stayed at home during COVID.

Companies who have adopted new online business models for the first time during lockdown will we believe keep these services permanently and help the industry to accelerate the move to a digital economy.

## Key Future Focus

In the last four months UK online sales jumped from 19% to 33.4% of all retail sales and we are seeing unprecedented rates of change in how retail operates, which we expect to see continue.

Our food industry has responded to these changes and this is why we are supporting the transition to online sales.

We will continue to face labour challenges and Lincolnshire is working hard to accelerate the adoption of robotics and automation with government to address this. This will also be good for workers as we create higher skilled and better paid jobs in the food chain.

The UK is also keen to promote exports of our world class food and drink post Brexit and we are supporting groups such as the Humber Seafood Cluster which is actively pursuing export sales and promotion.

## Key Messages

- Agriculture and the food chain has potential to shape the future of several of the most significant issues our planet faces – climate change, nutrition, human and animal well-being, and the preservation of natural resources.
  - Greater Lincolnshire has the potential to grow its food sector significantly, and to sell more food grown in the UK post Brexit and post COVID.
  - We can offer our customers shorter and more resilient food chains.
  - We are actively innovating our digital and automation agendas to create better, more skilled and higher paid jobs.
  - Lincolnshire is uniquely placed and equipped to lead this challenge.
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## Industry Updates

**The Farm Work Welfare App (FWWA)** The Safer Lincolnshire Partnerships response to tackling Modern Slavery across the County are working alongside the Clewer Initiative to develop Lincolnshire specific resource to raise awareness of Modern Slavery and are launching a new App developed in conjunction with the National Crime Agency, Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority, Modern Slavery Helpline, Church Commissioners, Fresca Group and others. This tool is designed to help support rural employers, promote workforce welfare and tackle rural labour exploitation and Modern Slavery. This is due to be launched nationally on 8<sup>th</sup> July and businesses are encouraged to support this and engage. To find out how to get involved contact [Jonny.Goldsmith@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jonny.Goldsmith@lincolnshire.gov.uk) and view the Clewer Initiative for rural communities [here](#).

### Food Sector Infection Prevention Guidance

Updated guidance for food businesses to include new section on prevention of infection and revised section on management of outbreaks including contact details for health protection teams can be found [here](#).

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The Greater Lincolnshire LEP continues to work closely with businesses, facilitators, and government to address the impact of Covid19 on the food chain and support the food sector to continue feeding the nation and to plan the recovery phase and interventions. Please follow the latest updates on our website [www.greaterlincolnshirelep.co.uk](http://www.greaterlincolnshirelep.co.uk) and follow us on [@GreaterLincsLEP](#) and through [LinkedIn](#)

### Coronavirus

- Visit [Business Lincolnshire](#) or call 01522 782189 for continued support to your Greater Lincolnshire or Rutland business
- As lockdown eases many more businesses can open subject to being Covid-secure. Guidance is updated [here](#) and the full list of businesses eligible to open is published [here](#).
- The government wants help from businesses to increase COVID-19 testing capacity in the UK. Click [here](#) if you can help and to find out more.
- Feed business impacts into our [Business Intelligence](#) platform to help us continue to develop solutions with Government.