

PREPARE TO INNOVATE!

This month, Professor Val Braybrooks, Dean of the National Centre for Food Manufacturing at the University of Lincoln, and the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone, welcomes in the New Year with some positive news on new funding opportunities and exciting developments made possible through innovation.

With innovation one of the UK government's latest buzzwords and focus for 2023, we are pleased to report that we continue to position the UK Food Valley ahead of the curve to bring you this New Year Innovation Edition.

The last three years have seen extraordinary change in the food chain, bringing enormous challenge but also opening up incredible opportunity. We've had disruption created by the Covid pandemic, trade difficulties as a result of the war in Ukraine, and changes in our trading relationship with Europe after Brexit. Arguably, despite, or because of this, we have seen our food chain businesses investing more than ever in innovation.

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The UK Food Valley is an industry-academic powerhouse at the forefront of these changes, with our businesses investing in new technology and new production facilities. Innovative companies like OAL, Saga Robotics, Horizon Agriculture, Branston Potatoes and BHive, Naylor Nutrition, Elsoms and Househam Sprayers, amongst many others, are developing new technologies to produce healthy foods, reduce carbon emissions from food and farming and drive the uptake of new automation technologies.

We are therefore delighted to see UKRI launching calls for three new innovation programmes this spring which align with our own three themes for the UK Food Valley:

- **Naturally Good For You Food** - with UKRI launching a £20m call for projects focused on better food for all.
- **Low Carbon Food Chains** - with UKRI launching a £16m call for projects focused on low emission food production systems.
- **Automation and Digitalisation** - with UKRI launching a £12.5m call for projects focused on food chain automation and robotics.

£48.5m is available through these new calls which have closing dates between March and April 2023 and the UK Food Valley welcomes strong bids to lead all three calls.

DEFRA is also planning to launch two more calls under the Farming Innovation Programme, and another round of the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) is expected this spring.

As reported last month, in December DEFRA also announced the next round of the UK Seafood Fund; a

further £30m is available for projects in the seafood supply chain and bids close on 3rd February. Seafood businesses can find full details of the fund [here](#).

This month also saw government recommit to the roll-out of the new [Environmental Land Management schemes](#) (ELMs) and the continuation of Countryside Stewardship, with new higher rates under these schemes announced at the Oxford Farming Conference.

We continue to see new policies, such as the recently announced plans to ban many types of [single use plastic](#) which impact the food chain and require new innovation building on much R&D already under way in the way we package food.

At the University of Lincoln, two new innovation vouchers have been launched to help businesses create successful bids for innovation projects and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs). The innovation vouchers provide free support to help you develop an innovation project and apply for funding.

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PREPARE TO INNOVATE!

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As this article demonstrates, there is currently much funding support available for innovation and investment in new technology, but we are also aware many businesses face real barriers in applying for these grants and need help to navigate this process. It is important that we work together across the UK Food Valley to ensure we continue to put in strong bids to all these new funding calls. If your business has a fantastic project but needs some assistance in navigating this space, the UK Food Valley team and University of Lincoln agrifood teams are on hand to help, so please do get in touch and we will guide you through the process.

By working together, we know we can continue to secure the relevant innovation funding available, building on the £75m of collaborative innovation projects led from the UK Food Valley over the last five years.

So, make your New Year's Resolution to open up your business innovation opportunities.

To find out more email Val Braybrooks at VBraybrooks@lincoln.ac.uk.

STOP PRESS!

FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT!

DCMS has announced a new national funding programme covering all sectors with £12.09 million to boost regional growth of tech start-ups and scale-ups over two years from April 2023 with Barclays Eagle Labs chosen to help turbocharge the next generation of UK tech stars. Click [here](#) to read the press release.



INNOVATION

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES INCREASE IN SEASONAL WORKER NUMBERS

On 19th December the government announced that the number of migrant seasonal workers to be allowed to come to the UK to work in agriculture was increasing to 45,000.

Full details of the announcement are available [here](#).

The allocation will allow businesses to recruit foreign workers to come to the UK for up to six months through the Seasonal Worker Visa route – an uplift of 15,000 compared to availability to businesses at the start of 2022. This number will be kept under review with the potential to increase by a further 10,000 if necessary, and contingent on sponsors and growers improving and abiding by worker welfare standards, including ensuring workers are guaranteed a minimum number of paid hours each week.

The UK Food Valley welcomes this announcement, which will help to address the challenges across the agrifood industry which are being felt by many businesses.

But long term, the answer also must include further automation and we also welcome the announcement of further investment in applied R&D to develop and commercialise new automation technologies. The pragmatic step of allowing seasonal workers to come to the UK helps us compete internationally and while we expect the numbers needed to fall in the medium to long term as new technology is developed and deployed in horticulture, it will help to meet the workforce challenges facing the industry until new technology comes on stream.

As reported in [this article](#), the Government is working to boost automation in the food sector, with £12.5 million recently announced to boost the development of automation and robotic technologies on farms, part of the wider £270 million Farming Innovation Programme to support research and development in agriculture and horticulture.

DEFRA will also respond shortly to the recommendations of the review of automation in horticulture which was published earlier this year and co-chaired by Professor Simon Pearson of the University of Lincoln, a leading automation ambassador for the UK Food Valley.

Professor Janet Bellamy of the University of Lincoln's National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) is also on the panel for a European event on robotics for the food chain on 24th January. To register for this event, which features experts from across Europe, please click [here](#).



INNOVATION

INNOVATION FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES - PROFESSOR SIMON PEARSON

At the University of Lincoln we are delighted to share with you a number of innovation funding opportunities announced by Innovate UK, UKRI and the University of Lincoln in the New Year:

These packages include starter innovation vouchers for businesses announced by the University of Lincoln across two themes, with up to 20 days of free support to develop innovative ideas and projects.

- Three Innovate UK business-led agri-food innovation calls: a £20M Better Food for All call; a £16M Low Emission Food Systems call; and a £12M Agri-Food Robotics and Automation call.
- The £5M EPSRC Place Based Impact Acceleration Call. The University and the Greater Lincolnshire LEP aims to apply for this programme with a package of measures focusing on driving innovation in the regional agrifood sector. The university will be consulting with the LEP business sector in the next two months to help focus and prioritise the bid.
- New rounds of the Farming Innovation Programme will open in January 2023.

If any businesses are interesting in working with the university on any of these initiatives, please contact Simon Pearson (SPearson@lincoln.ac.uk), Val Braybrooks (VBraybrooks@lincoln.ac.uk) or Martin Collison (MCollison@lincoln.ac.uk) for further information.

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN INNOVATION VOUCHERS

The University has further launched two new innovation voucher programmes.

Firstly, up to ten days of fully funded academic support to develop a business based project that will lead on to a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) application. Support is available to both SMEs and large businesses as well as private and third-sector organisations. This must be delivered by 31st March 2023, so you are advised to contact the university as soon as possible.

Secondly, a business-based project that will lead to further collaboration between the partner and the university (eg consultancy, Innovate UK bid, or fully funded PhDs) can provide:

- Funding for up to 20 days of academic time to work with you
- Support to both SMEs and large businesses
- Support to public, private and third-sector organisations
- Support for projects which will evolve into further collaborative activity
- Funding for work delivered by 31st July 2023

INNOVATION

INNOVATE UK CALLS

As we've heard in our headline blog, Innovate UK is launching three new calls in January 2023 which are directly relevant to the Greater Lincolnshire food chain. The three themes Innovate UK is focusing on mirror the three core themes for the UK Food Valley:

Naturally Good For
You Food



Low Carbon Food Chains

Automation and
Digitisation

1. Better Food for All: Innovation for improved nutrition: Early-stage

The aim of this new competition, which will award up to £20m, is to support UK-registered businesses in the development of innovative solutions to address significant nutrition challenges.

The scope covers:

- Enhancing food quality: innovative technologies and processes to improve the nutritional quality of foods and ingredients
- Functional foods: foods with specific health benefits
- Stratified nutrition: products aimed at particular demographics or groups
- Fortified and biofortified foods: including processed foods, convenience foods and raw materials produced at farm level
- Plant-based and alternative proteins: alternative protein sources for healthier and more sustainable diets, and processes that are accepted by consumers to incorporate these alternative protein sources into food products
- Preservation, packaging and storage technologies: to increase shelf life including for healthy convenient foods and nutritious perishable foods

This call opened on 11th January and closes on 29th March, and full details are available [here](#).

INNOVATION

2. Novel, low-emission food production systems: Industrial research

This new competition will award grants totalling £16m to support the development of novel food production systems that create new sources of resource-efficient, low-emission foods, particularly proteins to deliver healthy and sustainable diets.

The scope covers:

- Develop the UK alternative protein industry sector to meet domestic consumer demands for alternative proteins and export opportunities for the technologies, products and services developed
- Establish world-leading Total Controlled Environment Agriculture (TCEA) capacity, reducing horticulture imports and developing technology exports
- Establish sustainable, resilient and healthy local food supply chains, which can decarbonise other sectors through circular economy approaches and co-location of food production adjacent to other industries
- Realise unmet consumer demand for healthier, more sustainable alternative food products through the creation of new UK products
- Establish new alternative protein sources that address the UK's reliance on imports and deliver against government net zero and environment targets; this can include work on functional groups such as lipids for food product formulation
- Enable academic researchers to collaborate with businesses to help further develop and translate research towards commercially relevant impact and wider societal outcomes

This competition opens on 18th January and closes on 19th April 2023, and is available [here](#).

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INNOVATION

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3. Farming Futures: automation and robotics, industrial research and experimental development

This new competition will award grants totalling £12.5m to support the development of innovative solutions for automation and robotics. The call is running under two strands:

- Strand 1 for industrial research - you must accelerate collaborative R&D to develop innovations for robotics and automation in agriculture and horticulture.
- In strand 2 for experimental development - you must accelerate the deployment and uptake of innovation for robotics and automation in agriculture and horticulture that is almost at commercial stage.

For both strands 1 and 2 the scope is:

- Robotic and automated machines and systems for static or mobile operation
- Imaging, sensing and monitoring devices and systems to collect and store data and associated systems to process data for management records and to drive management decisions and automated actions
- Systems for on-farm processing and packing operations

These calls opened on 9th January and close on 15th March, and can be found [here](#).

Farming Innovation Programme

The [Farming Innovation Programme](#) is also planning to open new calls in January and February 2023 for:

- Round 3 of the Research Starter programme - this provides funding for farmers, growers and foresters who have an ambitious, early-stage idea to increase productivity and environmental sustainability in agriculture or horticulture. Round 3 will provide grants of £28k to £56k for one-year projects and will close in March 2023.
- Round 2 of the Large R&D Partnerships programme - this provides funding for large scale research, development and demonstration of solutions that will improve farming methods and help the environment in England. Round 3 will provide grants of £3m to £5m for projects of up to four years. Round 2 will open in February and closes in April 2023.

OTHER NEWS

LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) are being developed across the country in spring 2023 to help identify areas of skills provision in which further investment is needed. LSIPs are a government-funded initiative to gather views of business about training and skills.

The LSIP will be used by government to target the types of training it funds with colleges, universities and private providers based on the feedback from employers. Given the importance of the agrifood technology sector in Lincolnshire, it is important we have as much input as possible from the agriculture, food and agritech industry to make the case for investment in the industry's future skills needs.

Views to inform Greater Lincolnshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan are being collected now. Have your say in local focus groups, an online survey, or via a one-to-one telephone session. All views collected will be anonymous but will be used to inform the plan.

It is important to have views from employers from all parts of Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland, from every sector and from every size of business large and small, so that this plan and voice to government is a balanced one.

To help inform the plan, the Federation of Small Business (FSB), which is leading the Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland LSIP process, is working with partners to host events for businesses in:

- Sleaford 17th January
- Grimsby 20th January
- Rutland 24th January
- Boston 26th January
- Scunthorpe 2nd February
- Spalding 7th February
- Stamford 10th February
- Skegness 13th February
- Online session 15th February

Further information is available at: [Local Skills Improvement Plans | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](#)



OTHER NEWS

UK FOOD VALLEY SEAFOOD SECTOR TEAM VISIT BRIXHAM

Members of the Seafood Grimsby and Humber Alliance visited Brixham in Devon in early January to help strengthen the partnership between the Grimsby Seafood Cluster and Brixham's seafood businesses.

A round-table meeting hosted by Brixham trader, restaurateur and celebrity chef Mitch Tonks involving the businesses and other key stakeholders, including representatives from Fishmongers' Guild, the Department for International Trade (DIT) and officials from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), confirmed a strong commitment by all parties to building collaboration.

Representatives from the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (The TEC Partnership) and the University of Lincoln's National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) joined the visit to discuss how the college and the university can extend their reach in support of the South West Seafood Cluster and the shared ambition of establishing seafood schools in Grimsby and Brixham.

In the flagship Rockfish restaurant Simon Dwyer from the Seafood Grimsby and Humber Alliance, Professor Val Braybrooks and Janet Bellamy from the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) and Vice Principal Paul Robinson from the Grimsby Institute discussed strengthening educational and research opportunities between the Grimsby and South West Seafood Clusters.



OTHER NEWS

FOOD FROM ENGLAND

Food from England, whose members represent over 5,000 smaller food producers from across England, have called on the government to recognise that a thriving local and specialist food sector is an important part of the food chain.

These smaller producers are often the source of new innovation and bring colour and distinctiveness to local areas. The experience of Covid also showed that consumers have interest in local and regional foods.

In the UK Food Valley we are pleased to have a diversity of food businesses, from some of the largest food companies in the world to many distinctive local products and producers who bring pleasure to our visitors and local residents.

For further information please visit [Food from England](#)



[Home](#) [News](#) [Regional Groups](#) [Contact Us](#)



EVENTS

LINCOLNSHIRE CO-OP AND LINCOLNSHIRE FOOD PARTNERSHIP LINK UP WITH FARESHARE

The Lincolnshire Co-Operative and Lincolnshire Food Partnership have linked up with FareShare to run an event on 3rd February in Lincoln to look at how Lincolnshire companies can help families struggling with the cost of living.

Mark Finn, Chief Retail Officer at Lincolnshire Co-Op and Greater Lincolnshire Food Board member, said:

"The current cost of living crisis is driving more and more Lincolnshire families into food poverty and is making it more and more difficult for charities to get the support they badly need."

"The purpose of the networking event is to share ideas on what we, as leaders, can do to ensure as much support as possible gets to the right communities. FareShare and others are in desperate need of food to redistribute, volunteers and charitable donations."

"FareShare is using this event to leverage support and develop plans to help those in need. All of us in the business community have an opportunity to support them by volunteering and raising funds."

You can register to attend by writing to communications@faresharemidlands.org.uk



90% of charities have seen an increase in demand since the cost of living crisis began.

FareShare 2022 Member Survey

FareShare Midlands, Lincolnshire Co-op and Greater Lincolnshire Food Partnership invite you to

Help Tackle Poverty in Lincolnshire

Reduce Food Waste and Feed Local Families

Friday 3 February 2023
11:00am - 3:00pm

FareShare Midlands, Unit 6, Vulcan Park, George Street,
Great Northern Terrace, Lincoln, LN5 8LG

The day will include a tour of FareShare Midlands, visits to community food organisations working in local communities, lunch and networking opportunities

  

Please RSVP to communications@faresharemidlands.org.uk
by Thursday 26th January 2023

EVENTS

AGRI-FOOD CAREERS EVENT

On 7th February 2023 a major event to showcase the careers in the agrifood supply chain will be held at the Lincolnshire Showground. For both employers and young people this event will provide an opportunity to meet and discuss the many fantastic career opportunities in a sector which employs 75,000 people in the UK Food Valley.

The Greater Lincolnshire LEP Careers Hub is also hosting an employers and schools event to raise the profile of the sector amongst schools with a briefing to be given by our UK Food Valley lead and Chair of the LEP Food Board, Sarah Louise Fairburn.

To register for the event contact rcrust@lincolnshireshowground.co.uk and for information on the Careers Hub event contact Lee.douglas@lincolnshire.gov.uk



AGRI-FOOD CAREERS EVENT | TUESDAY 7TH FEB 2023

FREE TO EXHIBIT

Inspire the younger generation to consider a career within the Agri-Food industry, whilst raising the profile of your organisation to employees of the future.

- Reach Year 9 students and upwards from Greater Lincolnshire schools
- Engage with young people to develop apprenticeship and graduate opportunities
- Show support and strengthen relationships with the next generation
- Access the talent pool for the future workforce
- Improve employer brand

BOOK YOUR EXHIBITOR SPACE

Rosie Crust
01522 585521 / 07720 740213
rcrust@lincolnshireshowground.co.uk

 **LINCOLNSHIRE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY**

  

Tuesday 7th February 2023 • 09:30 – 14:30
EPIC & EXO Centre, Lincolnshire Showground, Lincoln, LN2 2NA
lincolnshireshowground.co.uk/education

EVENTS

LINCOLNSHIRE FARMING CONFERENCE: HEALTHY SOILS AND HEALTHY MINDS

The Lincolnshire Farming Conference on 9th February 2023 at the Lincolnshire Showground is focusing on two very topical issues: healthy soils and healthy minds. The event is chaired by NFU National Water Specialist Kelly Hewson Fisher with speakers including:

- George Sly - Lincolnshire farmer, agronomist and owner of Horizon Agricultural Machinery
- Rob Shepherd - Chairman of the Allenford Farmers Cluster Group
- Paul Davey – seventh-generation Lincolnshire farmer
- Heather Wildman - Managing Director, Saviour Associates Ltd
- Will Evans - mixed farmer, podcaster, Oxford Farming Conference Chairman and Farmer's Weekly columnist
- David Exwood - NFU Vice President



For more information and to book your place please click [here](#).

FPC FUTURE AND FPC CAREERS

The UK Food Valley will be supporting FPC Future and FPC Careers at the Peterborough Showground on 16th March. Combining a focus on innovation and skills, these events with over 65 exhibitors and a conference programme are now established as leading industry occasions.

The UK Food Valley will be running a conference session at FPC Future on how to finance horticultural businesses, whether you are looking to replace old equipment or invest in the latest technology. The University of Lincoln will also be running a session to report on a recent project funded by the Gatsby Foundation to look at the skills needed in fresh produce packhouses of the future as the industry embraces automation.

For more information and to book a free place please click [here](#).



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THROUGH INNOVATION**

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