



## GROWTH THROUGH INNOVATION

After 2021 and all the challenges it presented for the food chain, from Covid to getting used to new rules for food exports to the EU and COP26, which challenged the food chain to adopt net zero, it would be easy to conclude that the speed of change may slow in 2022.

But as we start the New Year, many in the industry know that change will be constant and as Peter Drucker, the great Austrian-American management consultant, educator, and author once said: “The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic.”

Throughout 2021 the food sector in the UK Food Valley has shown itself to be adaptable, flexible and focused on innovation. Rather than batten down the hatches and pausing all investment until the storm passes, we saw a wave of innovation, and new investments, and have been approached by more investors keen to invest in our food chain than we have ever seen before.

*Continued...*

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# GROWTH THROUGH INNOVATION

## *Continued...*

The UK Food Valley is committed to innovation and in this edition of our newsletter, as well as looking at some of the successes we saw at the end of 2021, we report on some exciting new developments for 2022.

In Grimsby, the launch of the pilot Community Renewal Fund (CRF) programme to support skills and innovation is just the precursor to major plans to create a new skills and innovation centre for the food chain in North Lincolnshire. 2022 will also see opening of the Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics, a Boston Town Deal project, backed by industry, Boston College, and the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM). The focus on skills and new recruitment to the industry is essential to our future and will be a major theme for the UK Food Valley in 2022.

Our businesses continue to invest in innovation, with Saga Robotics, B-Hive, OAL, Jones Food Company all being leaders in their field. We can expect to see further spinouts from the university and as shown later in this newsletter, Branston's new potato varieties, Worldwide Fruit's soft ripe system, Terrafarmer's new advisory services on regenerative agriculture and many other industry led developments demonstrate the breadth of industry innovation we are seeing. The industry in Lincolnshire is truly leading the way in developing the UK food market at the same time as we reduce our environmental impact.

If you are in agriculture, I would also urge you to look at what is on offer to support the agricultural transition, including the story below about support AHDB can provide to farmers. As a Non-Executive Director in the RPA, I know that the next few years will see major change in the industry, but I also know that with the right support and Lincolnshire's can-do attitude, we can emerge from the agriculture transition with a growing and more sustainable industry.

We are keen to support your growth and if you have a good story to tell about new developments or product launches, please get in touch as we want to help promote your success.

***Mark Suthern, UK Food Valley team***



## YOUR NEWS

### £25 MILLION FUNDING FOR HIGH TECH MACHINERY ON FARMS

Applications opened on 19<sup>th</sup> January for the improving farm productivity theme of the Farming Investment Fund.

Grants ranging from £35,000 up to £500,000 are available to invest in productivity-boosting equipment such as driverless tractors, robots that harvest, spray crops and weed, and automated milking systems.

The new scheme, worth £25 million in total, is the latest instalment of the [Farming Investment Fund](#) – an umbrella fund which opened in November and is designed to increase productivity on farms. It's part of the government's Agricultural Transition Plan which will reward farmers and landowners for actions which benefit the environment, supporting sustainable food production alongside vital nature recovery and work towards net zero.

The [Improving Farm Productivity theme](#) was outlined by Farming Minister Victoria Prentis who said: "We know how important it is for farmers to identify opportunities that maximise productivity and yields. These grants are aimed at contributing towards the purchase of new and green equipment that can bring a positive change to the day-to-day operation of a farm, as well as the wider environment."

"This specific fund has a two-month application window, and I encourage everyone in the sector to take a look at eligibility and fund details."

Rural Payments Agency Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said: "There is a wide variety of equipment and systems farmers can apply for through the farming investment fund, and our new online eligibility checker is designed to make your application process even faster and easier."

The application window for the fund is open from 19<sup>th</sup> January to 16<sup>th</sup> March. Further information on the Farming Investment Fund is available below:

- [Farming Investment Fund guidance](#)
- [Improving Farm Productivity](#)
- [Eligibility checker](#)





# YOUR NEWS

## UK FOOD VALLEY PILOT PROGRAMME FOR THE SEAFOOD SECTOR LAUNCH EVENT

On 13th January, the Grimsby Seafood Cluster and Hospitality Sector Funding Opportunity was launched at Grimsby Town FC with 50 guests. The UK Food Valley Pilot Programme, funded by the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), is now open to eligible North East Lincolnshire-based seafood manufacturing and trading businesses of all sizes. The programme also provides support to immediate supply-chain and hospitality businesses that support the local seafood industry.

This is a successful collaboration between Grimsby Seafood Cluster organisations including Grimsby FMA and Seafood Grimsby and Humber Alliance and the University of Lincoln's National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM).

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# YOUR NEWS

## *Continued...*

The pilot programme, which runs from January to June 2022, provides:

- Grant funding with an emphasis on capital equipment, supporting innovation and employee upskilling. Grants are provided on a 50:50 match funding basis from £3,000-£9,000.
- Expert advice to encourage business improvements that enhance competitiveness and profit, including for example:
  - Specialist advice on innovation, automation and developing new products and processes plus support for running practical trials. Additionally, support can cover new product development (NPD), carbon reduction and digitisation.
  - Business planning advice and guidance from seafood experts.
- Access to training specifically designed for the seafood sector.

The programme also seeks to support hospitality businesses to have fish and seafood on their menus, by helping them source from seafood businesses in North East Lincolnshire through new product development and improved knowledge of fish and seafood ranges.

For more information, contact Mathew Thompson at NCFM ([mathompson@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:mathompson@lincoln.ac.uk)) or Simon Dwyer at Seafox ([simon@seafox.no](mailto:simon@seafox.no)).

## HUGE STRIDES MADE DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR OUR UK FOOD VALLEY

This month the Greater Lincolnshire LEP's e-newsletter will shine a spotlight on employment and skills. Here we give you a preview of the article on skills developments and plans. In the meantime, click [here](#) to register to receive your monthly LEP priority and sector themed e-news.

With over 75,000 employees in agriculture, food processing and food distribution the LEP has the largest concentration of food chain employment in the UK.

The sector continues to see substantial growth, with over 7,000 jobs created and over £2 billion invested in the last 5 years. The aim is to grow the sector's GVA by a further 50% by 2030 by embracing technology to deliver enhanced productivity, taking a leadership role on net zero food chains, and by meeting the growing demand for naturally good for you foods.

But growing the sector faster than the workforce means that we must focus on higher skilled, higher productivity, and higher paid jobs. Continued growth can only be delivered if we secure the workforce needed and ensure the workforce has the skills to lead technological development and deployment in industry, and we will need new skilled recruits, as well as training and upskilling our existing workforce.

## *Continued...*

# YOUR NEWS

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On 24<sup>th</sup> December 2021, the government announced that the seasonal workers visa route will be extended to 2024, allowing 30,000 seasonal workers to come to the UK in 2022, but alongside this, want industry to focus on reducing the number of migrants with a planned taper off the programme from 2023. This focus on higher skilled roles filled by UK workers puts further pressure on the industry to increase its development training, with over 20% of UK horticulture on the frontline of rising to this challenge.

### **So, what are we doing about it?**

Greater Lincolnshire has not been slow to embrace this challenge with over £100m already invested in new skills facilities, applied research, and investment in new courses over the last five years.

The National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) in Holbeach is the UK leader in food chain skills and has led major initiatives such as the National Development of Food Engineering Apprenticeships and local projects such as the creation of the Lincolnshire Institute of Technology (IoT). The IoT was opened in 2021, with an investment of over £15 million and is led by a board chaired by industry leaders Bakkavor and OAL. The IoT brings together colleges across Greater Lincolnshire with an aim to have 1,500 students focused on engineering and digital technology for the food chain within five years.

Bishop Burton, a partner in the IoT, has created a new Showground Campus and now has over 500 students based at this cutting edge £30 million investment, which specialises in technology for agriculture. Meanwhile Boston College and NCFM are working with industry through the Boston Town Deal to open a new £3 million Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics in Boston in 2022, to meet the growing need for skills in food trade and logistics.

The University has also created the Lincoln Institute for AgriFood Technology (LIAT), now established as the European leader in agrifood automation and digital supply chains. LIAT leads both major PhD programmes, including the world's first Centre for

Doctoral Training in agri-robotics which started recruiting 50 fully funded PhDs in 2019, as well as delivering a successful MSc in AgriFood Technology with NCFM, which in 2022 now has over 65 students. Click [here](#) to hear some of the students and academics talking to the LEP about the new site and courses.

### **Looking to the future**

To reach the full potential the sector offers here, significant further investment is needed and so the UK Food Valley, LEP, and partners in industry and academia are working on new initiatives to go much further.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January the Grimsby seafood cluster launched a new six-month £430,000 UK Food Valley pilot programme to help upskill the fish processing workforce in Europe's largest seafood cluster, supported by the National Centre of Food Manufacturing (NCFM). This programme, which forms part of the government's Community Renewal Fund (CRF), was a priority project supported by North East Lincolnshire Council and the LEP.

The seafood sector and NCFM will also use this pilot to shape and design a new centre for food processing education, research and innovation in Grimsby. The aim is to ensure that the food processing cluster, centred on the seafood industry but also including expertise in other foods, food logistics and cold storage, has the expertise locally to drive forward growth.

LIAT has also been successful in securing funding to undertake two important studies in early 2022 with industry partners, to help set out plans for further investment in workforce development and skills.

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# YOUR NEWS

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A grant from the Gatsby Foundation is focused on a foresight exercise to identify the future skills needed to support the adoption of advanced robotic and automation technologies in the agri-food sector. Specifically for this pilot, the team will address the skills required for the fresh produce sector in companies that pack and semi process fresh fruit and vegetables. This project will report on its findings by July 2022.

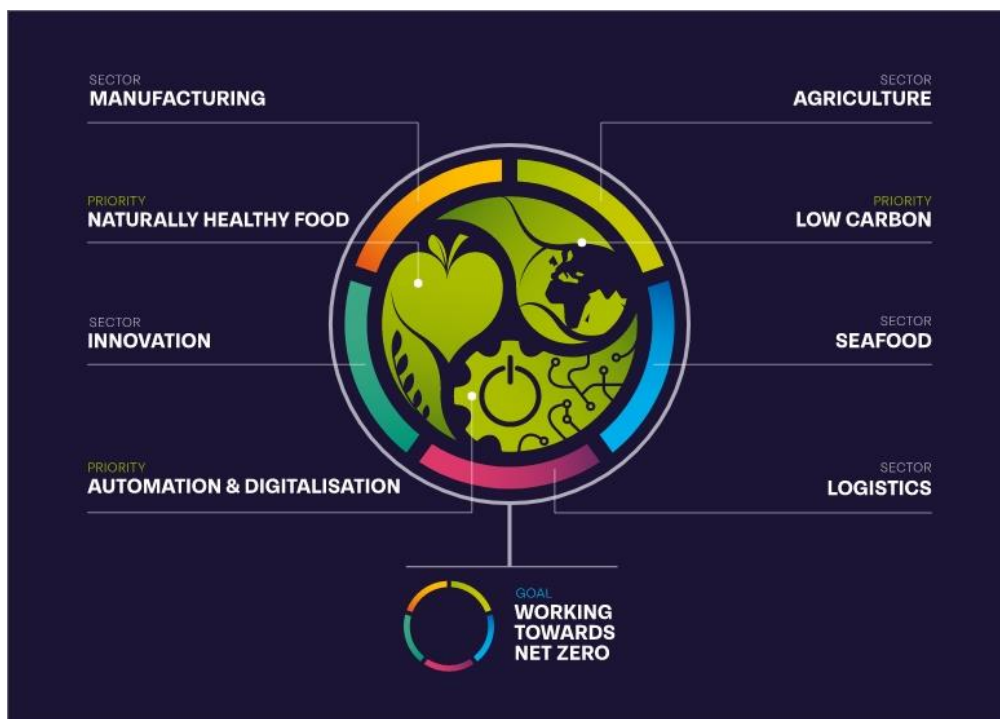
A team led by LIAT is also working to develop proposals for a National Agri-Robotics Proving Ground, supported by the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) by March 2022. This project will scope the potential for a physical facility to test robot applications in real world conditions, to provide both industry and academia with the facilities needed to develop new technologies.

The UK Food Valley partners are very aware of the skills challenges the industry faces and are adopting a proactive and multi-pronged programme of investment, innovation and development so that Greater Lincolnshire remains at the forefront of agri-food sector skills development.

Visit the [UK Food Valley website](#) to find out more.

## AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE LABOUR SURVEY 2022

Please help us build a labour supply case for the agricultural and horticultural sectors by completing this short anonymous survey. [Click here to respond.](#)



# YOUR NEWS

## DEFRA VISITS SEAFOOD CLUSTER TO LEARN ABOUT #MADEGREATINGRIMSBY



**Above: The DEFRA team were represented by Matt Darlison, Jessica Saunders and Adam Kennedy who are pictured with Professor Val Braybrooks, Dean of the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (left).**

On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021 officials from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) funding team visited Grimsby to meet industry and stakeholders to learn about the area's dynamic seafood cluster.

Officials met seafood processing businesses as well as Professor Val Braybrooks from the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM), Mike Woods, Chairperson of Grimsby Fish Merchants Association (FMA), Wynne Griffiths, Fishmongers' Company regional representative and the CEO of the Seafish Industry Authority, Marcus Coleman. After watching a presentation on the UK and regional seafood processing industry, they heard from Professor Val Braybrooks about ambitions for a Grimsby-based centre of seafood processing skills, training and innovation.

The DEFRA team updated the cluster team on the government's £100 million UK Seafood Fund and the three pillars it contains: innovation and science, infrastructure, and skills.

Mike Woods commented: "The level of interest shown by government in our cluster is encouraging and the funding that will be released over the next couple of years gives an opportunity for businesses of all sizes to invest in themselves and the supply chain. We very much look forward to hearing more from DEFRA over the coming months."



# YOUR NEWS

## NET ZERO AND AGRI-TECH ACCELERATOR TO PROVIDE A SPRINGBOARD FOR START-UPS

Continuing the success of 2021, the University of Lincoln is launching its second virtual accelerator programme in partnership with Barclays Eagle Labs, designed to help early-stage businesses drive innovation and growth in the UK's agriculture sector; this time with the additional focus on businesses engaged in net zero specialisms.

At its core, the fully funded programme consists of a series of half-day workshops over a 10-week period.

The sessions will focus on building business competencies, such as developing a business plan, financial planning, and identifying new market opportunities. Workshops are presented virtually in a blended methodology of webinars, videos and directed group exercises by educators and trainers chosen for their subject matter or sector expertise.

Based on their individual needs, each business will also have access to tailored support and resources, such as a specialist mentor and a series of unique masterclasses centered around the start-up's challenges and goals. The accelerator ends with a Programme Pitch Finale – a live demo session in front of an invited audience, with each beneficiary pitching their business to a panel for prizes including a £10,000 cash prize for the best pitch.

Enrolled businesses may also benefit from the cutting-edge facilities and services of the new Barclays Eagle Lab Farm based at the University of Lincoln's Riseholme campus, as well as gaining access to the UK-wide Eagle Labs network and exclusive access to community events.

Twelve diverse businesses using a range of agricultural technologies from across the country were selected for the 2021 Agri-Tech Accelerator Programme. The winning pitch was from Alan Hughes of Farming Solutions, with his innovative creep feeder for cattle. Runners up included Casey Woodward from AgriSound, a business which uses acoustic monitoring of bees to improve crop pollination, and Will Dunn from Ag-Drive, who developed a paperless system for managing on-farm contractors.

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# YOUR NEWS

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Participant reaction was exceptional, with unanimously positive testimonials offered at the end of the programme: “Just loved every minute. Wish it could go on for longer!”, commented one business owner.

Adam White, Barclays Head of Agriculture, said: “I’m pleased to be supporting the accelerator programme for a second year, in conjunction with Barclays Eagle Labs and the University of Lincoln. There are opportunities for early-stage businesses to support efficiency and net zero gains across UK Agriculture and Barclays expertise in the Agriculture sector positions us well to support.”

Simon Pearson, Director of the Lincoln Institute of Agri-Food Technology, said: “Last year’s accelerator programme saw some fantastic small businesses go from strength to strength through the support provided by expert business advisors and the technical advances in agri-tech. At the Lincoln Institute of Agri-Food Technology, we are delighted to be able to host another cohort in collaboration with Barclays Eagle Lab and Greenborough, with the added bonus of net zero initiatives this year.”

[Applications are now open](#) to entrepreneurs with a promising business plan or early stage (0-3 years) businesses in these two dynamic and important sectors with the desire to grow.

In addition, the AHDB Farm Business Review service funded by Defra is independent and offers an online self-assessment tool, expert advice, and peer support to help farm businesses prepare for the biggest agricultural policy shift in a generation. The service will be available until August 2022. Designed for dairy, beef, sheep, cereals, and oilseeds farmers who are most affected by the move away from direct payments, the online Farm Business Review tool includes the following elements:

- **BPS Impact Calculator:** How will BPS reductions impact your business?
- **Business Resilience Assessment:** Is your business fit and ready for the future?
- **KPI Express Calculator:** How well is your farm performing?

To help interpret, analyse, and discuss the results each farmer will receive free half a day’s 1:1 support with a consultant. An action plan and next steps will be agreed, farmers will then be invited to a group feedback meeting to hear the latest information on policy changes and discuss options.

Those with the greatest need for additional support will be offered bespoke on-farm advice to support specific areas of their business:

- **Benchmarking** - a full calculation of cost of production at the enterprise level with a tailored report and benchmarks
- **Business planning** – in depth review of farm accounts and budgeting to support forward planning and succession
- **Carbon audit** - a carbon audit and plan of management options

## *Continued...*

# YOUR NEWS

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Paul Aldridge, a mixed farmer with arable land from Wiltshire highly recommends this service to anyone wanting to unpack the finer details of their operation, saying: "This service has helped me identify a clearer path when it comes to adding value to our operation."

For more information visit [AHDB's website](#) or sign up for the service [here](#).

For help call **0247 5189 300** or email [FarmBusinessReview@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:FarmBusinessReview@ahdb.org.uk)

The AHDB service is part of a wider package of support under the Future Farming Resilience Fund, full details are accessible [here](#).



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## INDUSTRY WELCOMES THE SEASONAL WORKER VISA ROUTE FOR 2022-24

Throughout 2020 and 2021, labour supply challenges in the food sector have impacted UK Food Valley businesses as they have across the UK. In October 2021 the IGD [produced a report on Food Chain Labour Supply](#), the Greater Lincolnshire LEP Food Board debated these issues in autumn 2021 and the EFRA Select Committee will shortly publish the report on its latest inquiry into labour supply.

The UK Food Valley team is taking action on this issue, with increasing the labour supply, investment in skills provision and the development of technology to increase labour efficiency all receiving a high priority in Greater Lincolnshire. We are also seeking to attract further expertise in automation from across the world via the [High Potential Opportunity in in Food Chain Automation we have launched with DIT](#).

## *Continued...*



# YOUR NEWS

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This problem cannot be solved overnight and so [the recognition by Government](#) in an announcement on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, that the industry will continue to need migrant seasonal labour for at least the next few years is very welcome.

In making the announcement the government said: “Seasonal worker visa route will be extended until end of 2024, to allow foreign workers to come to the UK for up to six months to pick both edible and ornamental crops” but has demanded a plan from the sector to cut the reliance on foreign labour.

There will be 30,000 visas available next year, but this will be kept under review with the potential to increase by 10,000 if necessary. The number of visas will begin to reduce from 2023 and the sector will have to improve pay and conditions. Following the 2019 review of the pilot, the Home Office has reviewed the requirements placed on the scheme operators and updated the seasonal worker sponsor guidance to tighten the compliance requirements.

While acknowledging the sector’s reliance on foreign workers, the UK is committed to becoming a high-skilled, high-wage economy and the government has been clear that more must be done to attract UK workers through offering training, career options, wage increases and to invest in increased automation technology. DEFRA will bring forward further proposals in due course on ways to support the sector as well as progressing recommendations in the Automation Review.

However, the challenge that this announcement sets down is that this must be accompanied by rises in wage levels, and that the scheme will start to taper down from 2023 with a long-term aim for the industry to be less reliant on migrant labour. The pressure to increase labour productivity therefore remains strong. **Continued...**



# YOUR NEWS

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In Greater Lincolnshire, the industry and university have been leading the transition to additional UK worker recruitment and a more automated food chain for over 5 years. The work of the Lincoln Institute for AgriFood Technology (LIAT) in this area was recognised in 2021 as UK leading in the Innovation Strategy. The Lincoln Institute of Technology is aiming to reach 1,500 students by 2025-26 with a focus on workforce needs in the food chain.

The UK Food Valley therefore welcomes the December announcement and looks forward to building on its work on automation alongside the industry and government to support the transition to a more productive workforce, whilst the extension to the seasonal worker visa route through to 2024 provides time to invest in new technology.

## UK FOOD SECURITY REPORT 2021

In December 2021 DEFRA published the UK Food Security Report. The report, the first of its kind, sets out an analysis of statistical data relating to food security, fulfilling the duty in the Agriculture Act 2020 to present a report on food security to Parliament at least once every three years. [The report and supporting annexes are available here.](#)

The UKFSR examines past, current, and predicted trends relevant to food security to present the best available understanding of food security and provides data and analysis on five themes: global food availability, UK food supply sources, food supply chain resilience, food security at household level, and food safety and consumer confidence.

At 322 pages long, this report is a comprehensive overview of the industry and its trends. We would be very interested to hear your views on food security in the UK and to have feedback.





# YOUR NEWS

## BRANSTON POTATOES LAUNCHES NEMO - THE ULTIMATE ROASTING POTATO



In December 2021, Branston Potatoes, based just south of Lincoln, launched the new potato variety Nemo exclusively in Tesco's Finest range. Nemo has been developed specifically for roasting in a programme which started in 2015.

Branston reports that they were searching for a quicker-cooking potato variety to make crispy, golden roasties that taste deliciously buttery.

Nemo is a *phureja* hybrid variety, which means that it combines the vigorous,

fast-growing nature of original Peruvian potatoes with the agronomical hardiness of modern European varieties from the *Solanum tuberosum Solanaceae* family.

It has the golden yellow flesh typical of an Andean *phureja*, with a more uniform cell structure which enables it to cook much more quickly. Its distinctive pink skin has creamy yellow patches around its large eyes, giving it a parti-coloured appearance.

David Nelson, Branston Agronomy Director said: "It has been a real labour of love working on this project for the past six years as we were looking for a variety that would not only taste superb but would also save on roasting time.

"Nemo is a natural hybrid that has been developed through carefully crossing an exceptionally wonderful tasting fast-cooking Peruvian variety called Inca Bella and a popular red-skinned Salad variety called Franceline, which grows well in the UK climate. As this is a new variety, we only have a limited amount this year, but enough to cover the all-important Christmas period, when roasting potatoes are at their most popular."

Branston has been growing and trialling Nemo since 2015. It has performed consistently well in cook tests and taste panels. It cooks much more quickly than a typical European variety. To make roast potatoes it can be peeled and par-boiled for just five minutes before roasting or it can be roasted from raw without the need to peel. Just cut into chunks and put them straight in to the roasting tray, making perfect roasties in just 35-40 minutes. Nemo is also ideal for wedges or mash, making it a brilliant all-rounder!



# YOUR NEWS

## TERRAFARMER: REGENERATING FARMING

Terrafarmer is a new venture by local businesswoman Gemma Clarke (MD of Sleaford based Cope Seeds) and Tom Tolputt, a leading regenerative farming consultant based in the South West. They were inspired to bring together their expert knowledge and experience along with a collection of hand-picked consultants who specialise in all areas of farming, agronomy, and soil fertility, to provide real, practical advice and support to farmers who would like to farm more regeneratively.

There is a lot of information available to farmers about soil health, biologicals, and regenerative farming practices, but sifting through all the information to find what really works is difficult. Farmers can benefit from talking to experienced experts in biological or regenerative farming who have tried these practices themselves and worked with many other farms who have had success on their own farms.

Terrafarmer offers this full service that starts with in-depth soil analysis, forming the basis of a Farm Plan that is supported by regular visits from a Terrafarmer dedicated consultant. By helping farmers to manage rotations, livestock, tillage, seeds, nutrition and soil in a way that is sustainable and profitable, Terrafarmer want to help ensure today's farms leave a legacy for the next generation.

If you would like to find out more about this exciting venture, please [visit the website](#) or [get in touch by email](#) or phone (01234) 567 890.



# YOUR NEWS

## GROUND-BREAKING WORKSHOP ON FISH AND SEAFOOD TESTING

Teams from the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) at University of Lincoln and Belgium headquartered Eurofins Limited, who are represented locally in Grimsby, had two days of discussions about collaboration on future food testing initiatives and met with #MadeGreatInGrimsby-based seafood and fish processors in early December 2021. Topics discussed with the industry included training needs, data gathering, authenticity, food safety, and environment. Mark Carnaghan, Managing Director of Eurofins UK & Ireland commented: "The Grimsby Seafood cluster are an important part of our business in Grimsby and it's important that we have the proper collaborations in place to support the businesses.

"NCFM are a best-in-class provider of services to the agri-food sector and it's an ambition for both of us to replicate that for the Grimsby seafood cluster."

NCFM and Eurofins will now work collaboratively on their findings following the consultation and work closely with the board of Seafood Grimsby and Humber managed by Simon Dwyer of Seafox Management Consultants Ltd with the aim to develop enhanced testing services for the food industry locally.



# YOUR NEWS

## LINCOLN INSTITUTE FOR AGRIFOOD TECHNOLOGY (LIAT)

To support its role as an exhibitor at COP26 the Lincoln Institute for AgriFood Technology (LIAT) at the University of Lincoln produced a video which explains the work it does on sustainability in agriculture, which can be [viewed here](#).

The video provides a great overview of a wide range of work conducted at the university which includes projects to reduce food waste at every stage of the food chain. From new robotic systems which help accelerate plant breeding by automating the phenotyping of crop trials, to ways to reduce the use of synthetic pesticides by using UV light on robots to control pathogens.

Other applications highlighted include soil and carbon monitoring using robotic sensors and flux towers, which helps farmers to measure and monitor soil carbon, biodiversity and flood risk, all with the express intention of helping grow better crops with less impact on the environment.

## SOFT RIPE SYSTEM AT WORLDWIDE FRUIT

Worldwide Fruit Ltd (WFL) is an international fruit marketing and distribution company, sourcing products globally from over 1,000 growers worldwide and has worked with JD Cooling to develop and instal the Soft Ripe system for avocados.

WFL's Appleway facility in Spalding handles 70 million packs of apples, avocados, pears, and stone fruit per annum, with over 40% being ripe and ready to eat.

Driven by zero waste, WFL's aim was to reduce the non-value adding activities within their ripening process and cease dependence on repeated inspection to achieve and assure quality.

WFL's previous avocado ripening process was designed around removing pressure variability within the ripened material to achieve a tight customer specification. This process contained many elements of inspection (destructive and non-destructive) in the management and conditioning of the fruit to achieve the desired outcome.

Neal Collishaw, Operations Director at Worldwide Fruit and member of the Greater Lincolnshire Food Board said: "Soft Ripe now ensures we have a more consistent, superior product and has enabled us to remove the secondary grading from our processes. Along with the reduced ripening cycles, there are clear benefits to producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers."

Prior to Soft Ripe, over 489 tons of product was wasted by destructive testing during the traditional method of ripening and sampling process. Post ripening, fruit was required to pass over a non-destructive grading process to remove the unwanted fruit and to close the range to meet WFL's customer specification. In a very good season, the grader had a ceiling of 80% accuracy in the non-destructive testing process. The more variable the sample, the less accurate the grader became.

A full explanation is available to [view here](#).



# YOUR NEWS

## MSc AGRIFOOD TECHNOLOGY

The University of Lincoln's MSc in AgriFood technology has gone from strength to strength, attracting students from across the world to the course which is based at the Lincoln Institute for AgriFood Technology (LIAT) in partnership with the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM).

The course has 65 students in the 2021-22 academic year with students from Nigeria, Ghana, India, Pakistan, China, Hong Kong as well as the UK. You can read our insightful discussions with staff and students [here](#).

Interestingly, many of the students on the programme did not study agriculture or food production as undergraduates, but come from undergraduate courses in life sciences, geography, engineering, or business studies and have chosen to transfer into the food chain for their masters' qualification. The course is therefore helping to bring new skills and recruits into the global food chain.

The course is intended to combine academic training with exposure to the practical issues in the food chain to prepare students for a wide range of roles in the UK and global food chain. It offers options from a period of professional practice to a focus on further research.

Dr Ian Gould, who lectures on crop production, has produced a video to explain the course content [here](#). For more information on the course [click here](#).

If you are an employer and would like to support a student's major project or recruit graduates from the programme, please contact Dr Ramana Sundara, Programme Leader, Lincoln Institute for Agri-food Technology, University of Lincoln, Lincoln LN2 2LG. Email [rsundara@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:rsundara@lincoln.ac.uk) or call 07766420343.



# YOUR NEWS

## SUPPORT FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR GROCERY AND DISTRIBUTION (IGD)

### Educator Hub



In November 2021, the UK Food Valley and University of Lincoln teams met with the Institute of Grocery and Distribution (IGD) to explore the potential to work together and specifically to support SMEs in the food sector.

The IGD is a membership-based charity who as well as a range of commercial paid for services is also committed to social impact to help the industry grow and to attract new employees to careers in the food sector.

As part of its services and charitable mission the IGD provides a range of free services to help food sector SMEs gain new insight or skills as well as helping facilitate work experience to encourage the next generation to join the industry.

There is a good range of free reports and advice available from IGD for SMEs and those in the industry; you can sign up for a free account [here](#). For larger companies and those who need more in-depth industry knowledge or insight IGD, a full membership of IGD provides a wealth of industry reports and support services.

Work experience resource for the food chain are designed to help years 10 and 11, FE students and those in the sixth form to learn about the industry. These resources are accessible [here](#).

IGD also helps teachers and careers advisors educate students about the food industry with free resources for them to use in the Educator Hub [here](#).

# YOUR NEWS

**YOUR SCHOOL**

**NEEDS YOU!**



What are your New Year resolutions for 2022? How would you like to add one which inspires young people's career choices, supports your local school, and gives you that feel good factor knowing you are supporting your local community and meeting your social responsibility?

With the launch of the Greater Lincolnshire Careers Hub in September 2021, the Greater Lincolnshire Enterprise Adviser Network continues to thrive across the area, bringing together business and education to support careers programmes in schools and colleges for young people.

There are now over 90 individuals – our army of Enterprise Advisers - who volunteer to work with schools and colleges from over 70 different businesses.

An exciting new development is the introduction of the Cornerstone Employer Group. Cornerstone Employers work with networks of schools and colleges to improve careers education, make sure key skills for their sector are understood by teachers and education leaders, inspire students, and champion jobs in their local area. These employers connect at a national level and are supported LEPs and the [Careers and Enterprise Company](#) to work strategically and over time will influence and affect change within careers education. A great example of a Cornerstone Employer is BAE systems, and this [video](#) explains why they wanted to get involved and what they have achieved through being part of their local group.

*Continued...*



# YOUR NEWS

## *Continued...*

Our Cornerstone Group will help to support Enterprise Adviser recruitment, provide information and resources for National Apprenticeship Week and provide case studies from within their own organisation on local people and the kinds of jobs and careers available in Greater Lincolnshire.

Membership reflects our key sectors and industries and includes large, multi-nationals as well as family-run businesses including: Butlins (Bourne Leisure), DFDS, Lincoln Medical School, University of Lincoln, Lincolnshire Co-op, Micronclean, Orsted, Philips 66, Royal Air Force, RES (Renewable Energy Systems), Siemens Energy Industrial Turbomachinery Ltd, and Worldwide Fruit!

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## CONNECT WITH YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL

The Careers and Enterprise Company recently published evidence that shows that the higher quality careers provision a young person receives in school or college, the less likely they are to be out of employment, education, or training by the time they leave formal education. At the heart of high-quality careers education is engagement with employers and local businesses and the benefits of engaging with students and teachers speak for themselves.

As well as promoting improved visibility and awareness of your organisation or industry, this is also creating a new talent pipeline for your business, gives your staff the chance to develop their skills and give something back to their local community, while also raising aspirations and attainment in schools.

The Greater Lincolnshire LEP team supports businesses to deliver workshops and presentations, take part in mock interview days and provide mentoring opportunities for young people. With new, virtual ways of working, the team can support you to engage with schools in a creative and meaningful way.

So don't delay! If you would like to connect with your local school or college, contact Natalie Poole, LEP Skills Delivery Manager at [Natalie.Poole@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Natalie.Poole@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

THE CAREERS &  
ENTERPRISE  
COMPANY

# NATIONAL NEWS

## EXPORT SUPPORT FOR UK'S WORLD-LEADING AGRI-FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY



At the end of November 2021, the UK government announced that a new network of agri-food and drink attachés is to be placed in key global markets to promote trade and boost exports.

The government announced further measures to support the UK's world-leading agri-food and drink sector, helping them to build back better from the pandemic and thrive in a Global Britain, by adding eight new agri-food and drink attachés in priority markets, as part of a wider plan to boost exports.

As well as posts in China, USA, India, Canada and Mexico, the agri-food attachés will be covering growth markets in the Gulf, Africa, South America, and the Asia-Pacific region. There will also be additional capacity and resource in Europe, as Government's key market.

Existing attachés in China and the UAE have been pivotal in securing access for a greater range of products, driving export growth, and building mutually supportive relationships with trading partners. Attachés are based in UK embassies and consulates overseas and have long-standing expertise in the agri-food and drink sector. The new attaché roles will help to reduce and remove trade barriers, broaden market access, and support companies as they increase their market share in established and emerging international markets.

This new investment follows the recent successful launch of DIT's 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' [campaign](#), which saw a range of measures to support UK businesses in their exporting journey and deliver on the aim of exporting a trillion pounds' worth of goods and services by 2030.

The UK's food and drink industry exports totalled £21.7 billion in 2020.

# FUNDING

## AGRI-TECH 'HOT FUNDING' LIST – A REGULAR LIST OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES IN AGRI-TECH

If you are working in agriculture, farming or food production then these funds may help.

The agri-tech research teams at the University of Lincoln are expert at working with industry to build practical solutions to productivity, transportation and growing challenges for food and farming.

If you have a process, resource or technology challenge inside your farm or food business, then please do get in touch with us at [LAR@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:LAR@lincoln.ac.uk); or for Innovate UK enquiries at the University of Lincoln: [mvals@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:mvals@lincoln.ac.uk)

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## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT INVESTMENT READINESS FUND (ENVIRONMENT AGENCY)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs invites applications for its natural environment investment readiness fund. This supports the development of investment readiness proposals for environmental projects aiming to protect or enhance the domestic natural environment in England. Projects must help achieve one or more outcomes from the 25-year environment plan can produce revenue from ecosystem services to attract and repay investment and produce an investment model that can be scaled up and reproduced. [Further information here.](#)

Closing date: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022

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## HORIZON EUROPE

Horizon Europe, under Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, and its food, bioeconomy natural resources, agriculture, and environment cluster, invites applications for HORIZON-CL6-2022-GOVERNANCE-01 — innovative governance, environmental observations and digital solutions in support of the Green Deal. This supports projects contributing to innovative governance and sound decision making in policy for the green transition. [Further information here.](#)

Closing date: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022



# FUNDING

## INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION AWARD FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Invites nominations for its international innovation award for sustainable food and agriculture. This recognises innovators in the field of sustainable agriculture. [Further information here.](#)

Closing date: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (forecast)

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## COMING SOON:

### Industry-led R&D partnerships fund – large partnership projects Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The following information is subject to change. This call supports businesses and academics who want to carry out larger scale R&D for innovative solutions that have the potential to substantially improve overall productivity, sustainability and resilience of the farming sector. Projects are worth between £3 million and £5m for up to four years. [Further information here.](#)

Closing date: TBC

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## PRODUCTIVITY HUBS PROGRAMME



The Productivity HUBs Programme is a University of Lincoln initiative, funded by the ERDF. The Programme is aimed at helping businesses in Scunthorpe, Boston, and Grimsby to develop, grow and thrive. Eligible business will be provided with either or both of the following:

### Business Development

Access to a business development manager who will work with you to identify key challenges and opportunities and help you to develop a plan to drive your business forwards to increased productivity and profitability.

### Business Acceleration

Aimed at ambitious start-ups that are committed to accelerating the growth of their business. Eligible businesses will get a package of intensive support designed to improve performance and drive growth, and an opportunity to pitch for seed-funding grants of up to £10,000.

More information is available [here](#). Contact Gary Mumby, Business Advisor: [GMumby@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:GMumby@lincoln.ac.uk) | 07989 868 969



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