

Press release: Business Secretary calls for new tech revolution in agriculture

- new £90 million investment to bring together AI, robotics and earth observation to improve supply chain resilience in the agri-food sector
- UK agri-tech sector contributes £14.3 billion to UK economy, employing 500,000 people, with companies and researchers developing pioneering technologies from farming drones to 3D printing
- helping to fuel rural growth, create high-skilled jobs and open up new export opportunities as part of the [Industrial Strategy](#)

The Ordnance Survey's use of cutting edge satellite imagery and digital data collection to map over 200,000 miles of England's farmland and the CROPROTECT app which helps farmers protect crops from pests, weeds and diseases are among the technological innovations improving farming and food production that were hailed today (21 February 2018) in a speech by Business Secretary Greg Clark as he set out his ambition for a revolution in agri-farming, as part of the government's Industrial Strategy.

In a keynote speech to the National Farmers' Union conference, the Business Secretary highlighted how new technology is boosting farmers' earning power and making agri-businesses more productive and profitable than ever before.

To make it easier for farmers and agricultural supply-chain businesses to embrace technology and innovation, Mr Clark today announced £90 million of new funding to bring together the UK's world-class agri-food sector with expertise in robotics, AI and data science.

The funding, delivered as part of the new the [Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund](#), will make it easier for food and agri-business to embrace technology and innovation that will be critical to meeting the increasing food demands of a growing population, fuel rural growth and create high-skilled jobs.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

As someone who has known all my life that farming is foundational not just to our economy, but to our country. Providing the food and drink we live on and stewarding the countryside that is so much part of our national and local identity means there is no more essential industry.

The agricultural sector is the biggest industrial sector in the UK, Employing almost 4 million people and larger than the automotive and aerospace sectors combined.

For your unique role in stewardship and in feeding the nation like

big industry, you need to be profitable and we need to help make the conditions right for investment in the future.

With the technological revolution that is happening, the skills of the farming workforce need to keep pace. New technologies require new abilities and today's modern British farmer is a Swiss-Army-Knife of skills. An engineer, an environmentalist, a data scientist a biochemist, an energy producer, a tourism entrepreneur, and an investor too.

As part of the Industrial Strategy, we announced a Transforming Food Production Challenge and I'm delighted to announce the government will invest £90 million to make this challenge a reality.

This will include the creation of 'Translation Hubs' bringing together farmers and growers businesses, scientists and Centres for Agricultural Innovation to apply the latest research to farming practice.

Today's investment forms part of the government's Industrial Strategy which sets out a long term plan to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK. Through this strategy government is working with industry to help businesses create better, higher-paying jobs as well as setting a path for Britain to lead in the high-tech, highly-skilled industries of the future.

The announcement follows the government committing, through the Industrial Strategy, to raise public and private investment in UK research and development to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. This will be the UK's biggest ever increase in research and development investment and help to make Britain's economy the most innovative in the world.

Commitments

Government investment will help build on the strengths of the UK's booming agri-food sector, which employs around 4 million people across the UK, and support it by:

- bringing together businesses, farmers and academics to take forward priority research projects through new Challenge Platforms
- supporting Innovation Accelerators which will be responsible for exploring the commercial potential of new tech ideas at pace
- demonstrating innovative agri-tech projects and how they will work in practice
- launching a new bilateral research programme that will identify and accelerate shared international priorities and help build export opportunities for pioneering agricultural-technologies and innovations overseas

UK companies leading the way

UK farmers, agri-tech companies and research centres are already leading the way in this area, using technology like data, robotics and AI to help create new technologies and herald innovative new approaches, including:

- the Agricultural Engineering and Precision Innovation (Agri-EPI) Centre is bringing together leading organisations in the food supply chain to become a world-leading centre for excellence in engineering and precision agriculture
- the mobile app and website CROPROTECT, developed by Rothamsted Research, is helping farmers to protect their crops with farmers and agronomists using it to exchange best practice and tips on smart management of pest, weed and diseases
- Ordnance Survey have used their satellites to accurately map 232,342 miles of England's farmland hedges to create a new digital dataset and use planes with fixed state-of-the-art digital cameras to record thousands of individual photos that can map out farms and entire green landscapes

The funding forms 1 of 8 key areas that the government, together with business and academia, has identified through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), as being priority areas where research and innovation can help unlock markets and industries of the future in which the UK can become world-leading.

In the [Industrial Strategy white paper](#), the government announced £725 million of investment through the fund in cutting-edge technologies to create jobs and raise living standards.

Other areas set to receive government support through the ISCF in 2018 to 2019 includes early diagnosis and precision medicine to help detect life-changing diseases earlier, new products and services that support older people in the UK to remain active and independent, and new smart energy systems that deliver cleaner, cheaper energy for consumers and their communities.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will shortly open a new expressions of interest call for more industry-led challenges that will form part of the next wave of the ISCF.

This third wave of programmes will invest in further ground-breaking ideas to tackle our major industrial and societal challenges, boost our productivity and delivery economic growth.

Professor Sir Mark Walport, Chief Executive of UKRI, which is responsible for the ISCF said:

Developing and effectively utilising the latest technologies and research methods will revolutionise the way we produce our food. Right across the agricultural sector, we can make the process more

efficient, more productive and more sustainable to deliver benefits for growers, producers and consumers. This is precisely why the ISCF was created.

We are now launching the process for businesses and researchers alike to come together to identify both pressing problems in food production and farming and opportunities that could benefit from the next wave of ISCF funding. I want to strongly encourage everyone in the sector to respond to our call for expressions of interest.