

Speech: NFU Conference 2018

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's great to be with you today. Thank you for inviting me.

It is a great honour to be here for the first time at a National Farmers Union (NFU) Conference.

As someone who has known all my life that farming is foundational not just to our economy, but to our country, it is a particular privilege to be here.

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.

As Guy said, I was born and raised in the food and drink business with my father and grandfather's retail dairy delivery round supplying our neighbours in Middlesbrough with fresh Yorkshire milk seven days a week.

When I talk about agriculture as an 'industry' that's not to ignore the fact that farming and growing is more than just a sector of the economy. It's a life. And its all-consuming.

I was glancing through Farmers Weekly before Christmas and there was an interview with a young farmer from Wales called Tom Parry.

The journalist asked him: "If you won the lottery... what's the first thing you would spend the money on?"

His reply? "More sheep." But food and farming is an industry nonetheless and as Guy alluded to before, it's one of our greatest.

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

And what that means in my view is that it deserves the same seriousness of engagement with all parts of government about the future that other successful industries like aerospace, automotive can count on, like life sciences and financial services expect to get with government.

And for your unique role in stewardship and in feeding the nation, like any industry, you need to be profitable and we need to help make sure the right conditions exist right for investment in the future.

Now, of course, you have a government department dedicated to farming and rural affairs and it is headed by one of the most innovative and effective Secretaries of State in government.

But I'm determined, with Michael, that you should participate fully just as

other industries do in the work that is being done by the whole of government.

Including my department, the Business Department, as we work together to make Britain more prosperous in the future.

I think we need to do a better job in emphasising the centrality of agriculture to our economy and to our economic future.

If proof were needed of that, it can be found in the most recent agricultural exhibition in the London Science Museum.

This started off with farming in the Iron Age and ended somewhere around 1952. 1952?

That's 15 years before I was even born. Imagine if the space exhibition ended in 1952. You'd miss all the good stuff.

No moon landings. No space shuttle. No International Space Station. It's the same with farming.

So it's fantastic that the Science Museum is planning a new £3 million exhibition to show the real face of modern British agriculture to the whole country and especially to the rising generation of people who may not have the knowledge or experience of agriculture, which should open later this year.

I don't know who farming's Tim Peake is but it's very important that the place of this industry at the forefront of innovation should be there.

Because this is one of the most innovative of our industries and we need to ensure that the next generation need to see the opportunities for earning and advancement there are in a career in food and farming.

And I think it is also important that other industries need to see that agriculture is a source of ideas that can drive new ways of working and using technology in their own sectors.

There is a great translation and diffusion of learning across adjacent industrial sectors and I think we underplay the opportunities from the innovations that you have made into other industrial sectors.

That's why I was determined to place food and farming at the heart of our [Industrial Strategy](#), both for this sector and because of the relevance to sectors across the economy.

And why I'm so thrilled with the contribution and enthusiasm of so many people in this room. Of course the NFU, to the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the Food and Drink Federation and so many others.

The challenge for our Industrial Strategy is the same challenge for this sector. How can we become more productive and so more prosperous.

I want to commend the excellent work that Tom Hind of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) has been carrying out on productivity in this sector. It has uncovered that since the mid-1990s productivity growth in agriculture and horticulture has fallen behind our principal competitors.

In fact, it has grown at just one-third of the rate enjoyed by the Netherlands and the USA. Relatively slow growth in productivity in recent years has characterised much of the British economy.

The Industrial Strategy set out a number of ways in which with a sustained national effort we can improve productivity.

It seems to me they are relevant to this industry as much as others.

The first is innovation.

This is one of the most innovative sectors of our economy and the advantages of bringing together our best scientists with our most forward-thinking producers, is clear.

I think most people would agree that the agri-tech strategy which launched five years ago has proved a success.

The Catalyst, for example has helped fund projects fighting diseases in pigs, rearing lobsters off the Cornish coast and improving the efficiency of Strawberry production, to name but a few.

But there is great potential for much more and so the Industrial Strategy commits to the biggest ever increase in public research and development investment. An extra £3 billion a year by 2021.

It brings in a focus on [four Grand Challenges](#), technological changes sweeping across the world in which Britain has a leading position.

I am committed to making sure that agriculture plays a big role in many of these.

One of these is Artificial Intelligence and the analysis of big data.

Intelligent algorithms using data on atmospheric conditions and soil moisture has the real potential to dramatically reduce, for example the water needed for agriculture.

Michael Gove and I have agreed that agricultural technology will be one of the priority sectors for the new Office of Artificial Intelligence announced in our Industrial Strategy.

Through our Grand Challenges on the future of mobility, we know right around the world the way we are transporting ourselves, the way vehicles are powered and how we are connecting ourselves is changing, and we want to make Britain the go-to place in the world for the development of new autonomous vehicles.

I am determined this won't just be the vehicles you see on our road, and that

agriculture will be a big part of that.

Through the Hands-Free Hectare project Harper Adams University and York-based company Precision Decisions are planting, tending and harvesting crops using only autonomous vehicles and drones.

This project was funded through Innovate UK and was the first in the world to farm a crop in this way.

So I have insisted that our Connected and Autonomous Vehicles programme is making funding available to off-road driverless innovation, with a particular application to agriculture.

And yet another challenge – in this country – we've often been better at the invention and discovery of new ways of doing things than the implementation of them.

The AHDB was right in saying we need to put an increased emphasis on the 'D' in R&D, the development half of research and development.

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

It 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.

It should be a big boost to the knowledge exchange that already takes place across food and farming. And with the technological revolution that is happening the skills of the farming workforce need to keep pace.

New technologies require new abilities. Today's modern British farmer is a Swiss-Army-Knife of skills.

An engineer, an environmentalist, a data scientist, a biochemist, often an energy producer, a tourism entrepreneur, and always an investor too. All of these skills are essential to the jobs that you do.

Yet at the moment, we under-invest in skills and training relative to many of our competitor countries.

And if we are to take advantage of the productivity improvements that technology offers we need to have tailored programmes of skills, education and training to meet the needs of sectors, as well as more farmer-to-farmer learning, to demonstrate what works in practice.

The Industrial Strategy emphasises new T-Levels which will provide an important opportunity for a new generation to start their careers in agriculture with relevant skills and we will work closely with the NFU to make them effective.

Apprenticeships will be a crucial part of this. And our reforms to

apprenticeships are intended to present high quality opportunities for individuals and employers alike.

These reforms are some of the most substantial the government has ever made. But they are still young, and we are listening to feedback as the programme develops.

I also hear loud and clear, the challenges you are experiencing in your workforce currently.

As a West Kent MP, the Hoppers huts that can still be found in the fields around our coasts are a reminder that agriculture has always relied on seasonal workers whether from home or abroad.

In particular, two-thirds of your workers born outside of the UK come from the EU. This is an absolutely crucial component that I know Michael Gove touched on yesterday.

And as we move to a new relationship with the EU it is essential that you can get the workers you need.

'A secure supply of skilled and seasonal labour', is one of eight priority areas for our new Food and Drink Sector Council that has been created as part of our Industrial Strategy.

That clear focus and commitment to make sure you get what you need to do the important job that you have, is vital. And the purpose of forming the Council is to not just talk about the issues, but to act on its advice.

Upgrading our infrastructure is another way in which we can help improve productivity and as Guy mentioned earlier, I cannot recall an occasion on which I met the NFU branch in which the need for considerably better broadband and mobile coverage was not top of the list of improvements required.

Michael was emphatic on it yesterday and I completely share his view. The imperative becomes even more pressing because many of the technologies that can transform agricultural productivity and things like Artificial Intelligence rely on the fast transformation of large quantities of data. It is becoming more important than ever.

The Industrial Strategy commits an extra £200 million of investment in the Local Full-Fibre Networks Programme. As Michael said yesterday, 95% of the UK population can now access superfast broadband, a target which was reached last December.

As is evidence, there is much further to go, including making super fast high-speed broadband a legal right to everyone.

There is perhaps no industry in Britain in which local industry and the distinctiveness that one place has from another is as intrinsic as in farming.

My longstanding view is that government policy has been too uniform in failing to take opportunities to recognise that what is needed for a northern city or a place like Birmingham to maximise its potential will be very different for a rural county.

And around the world, we see that one of the most successful ways in which productivity grows is through clusters of adjacent businesses with particular local relevance each reinforcing the other.

We see it all, from life sciences in Cambridge to elite motor manufacturing in Northamptonshire. Successful clusters attract ambitious followers creating expertise and jobs.

Through institutes such as FERA outside York, which I know very well, to the Wellcome Trust's Sanger Institute outside Cambridge, I think there are huge opportunities to gather businesses that can make the most of the proximity of our resources.

A big part of our Industrial Strategy is to do what I know virtually everyone in this room does, and be leaders and participants in their local economies and to give more power to invest locally in other sectors and other industries, helping make the most of local opportunities.

Finally, strengthening relationships are vital if we are to capitalise on the individual strengths of the sector.

Food and farming has always been a diverse and some would say fragmented, sector. But that is not to say that the opportunities that come from working together don't exist. In fact I think they are more plentiful in this sector than many others.

The supply chain from farm to fork and indeed into farms is a crucial source of quality competitiveness and innovation.

Fragmentation compared to other sectors simply emphasises the need to make a deliberate effort to come together effectively.

That's why I'm delighted that the new Food and Drink Sector Council met for the first time last month. I know Michael Gove spoke about this yesterday.

It brings together government departments, farmers and growers, food and drink manufacturers the logistics industry, hospitality industry, retailers and others with a stake in a flourishing sector.

I'd like to thank Sir Peter Kendall for representing the voice of farmers on the Council and its working groups.

One of the Council's early tasks is to propose a Sector Deal to drive forward each aspect of the Industrial Strategy as it reflects food and drink: innovation, skills, infrastructure investment, building up local strengths and getting the right business environment for start-ups and for growing businesses.

Each one of these pillars of our Industrial Strategy, I'm absolutely

determined will apply to the food and drink sector and should be represented in a strong and ambitious Sector Deal.

I take it personally. Michael Gove and I will jointly lead for the government on negotiating this deal. I want this to be a totemic deal that shows to sectors that perhaps have not considered food and farming and agriculture to be part of the economic future of our country, in the way that it so clearly is.

And I hope it will be a beacon to the British industry and the rest of the world that British agriculture is mustering its considerable strength to seize the opportunities before us.

So ladies and gentlemen, Thank you for inviting me to be with you today.

When I first set to thinking about the Industrial Strategy I had a clear vision that this strategy must be for the whole of our economy and for the whole of Britain. And so agriculture one of our largest and most innovation-rich industries had to be at the heart of it.

I am so thrilled at the positive response that it has received from farmers, growers and those engaged in food production.

And whether it is spreading innovation or building a workforce with the skills of the future. These are vital steps. Not all these steps can be taken all of them overnight.

A short term strategy, after all, is a contradiction in terms.

But I strongly believe that by acting deliberately now we can act together to create the future of farming.

Thank you very much indeed.

News story: Britain set to launch Combat Air Strategy, Defence Secretary announces

The MOD will work across Government and closely with industry and international partners to explore the UK's future Combat Air capabilities, building on the Industrial Strategy and refreshed Defence Industrial Policy launched last year.

The strategy will examine the operational capability needed in the future and the skills and resource required to deliver it. The work will take new and emerging technology into account, as well as export potential, whilst testing

British industry's ability to deliver our future requirements. It is expected to be launched in the summer.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Since the birth of airpower, British industry has been crucial to maintaining our military's world-leading position. As we celebrate 100 years of the RAF protecting our skies, it is fitting that we create bold and ambitious plans to help our brave Armed Forces keep us safe in the face of intensifying threats. The Combat Air Strategy will bring together the best of British engineering, skill and design, and deliver a compelling vision for the future of air power.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier, said:

It is especially fitting that we launch the Combat Air Strategy as our Royal Air Force marks its 100th anniversary. Combat Air capabilities have been at the heart of the RAF's capabilities throughout its history, and are constantly employed on operations across the world today.

This strategy will ensure that the RAF can continue to remain at the forefront of the high-end airpower technology and innovation we need to deal with future threats, working in close collaboration with UK industry and our international partners.

The UK is already a world-leader in the air sector which accounts for 85% of the Britain's defence export orders. The industry is made up of close to 2,500 companies, generating more than £33.5bn in turnover and employing more than 128,000 people – some 26,000 of them in highly skilled research, design and engineering jobs.

Investment in combat air technology combined with the strengths of UK industry has resulted in the UK being the US' only Tier 1 partner on the F-35 Lightning II programme, with British industry building around 15% of every F-35 which is built. The UK has been able to exploit the operational capabilities of the aircraft, while reinforcing UK industrial capability, skills and wider economic prosperity.

The UK also continues to lead the way in combat air power as one of the four partner nations in the Eurofighter Typhoon programme. With more than 20,000 flying hours on global operations to date, the Typhoon has offered unparalleled reliability and proven interoperability with our allies.

The F-35 Lightning II and the Typhoon are two complimentary multi-role combat aircraft that will make up the RAF's combat air fleet, placing the UK at the forefront of fighter jet technology – with the Typhoon expected to remain in UK service until at least 2040.

Just last week the UK led the bid to replace Belgium's fighter jets with 34 Typhoons with the offer to include a comprehensive defence and industrial partnership between the Governments of Belgium and the UK. The Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson was also in Qatar at the end of last year to oversee Qatar's multi-billion pound purchase of 24 Typhoon aircraft, supporting thousands of jobs across the UK.

The announcement of the strategy comes after an initial review of the defence aerospace sector by the MOD, which involved engaging across Government and with industry. The development of a Combat Air Strategy is consistent with the themes of the Modernising Defence Programme. It will set out in practical terms how the MOD can deliver its critical military capability requirements whilst considering wider economic and international factors, and our national security objectives.

[Speech: Liam Fox highlights success of British manufacturing](#)

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to be here with you all at the EEF Manufacturing Conference.

In the course of my job as Secretary of State for International Trade, I have been invited to address representatives of all of Britain's major industries.

Each has their own innovators, and each of them has a number of world-leading companies, breaking new ground and raising this country's profile overseas.

None of them, though, boasts quite the same concentration of talent, of drive, and of cutting-edge technology as manufacturing.

And few other industries are doing as much to enhance the UK's global reputation.

Since the Department for International Trade was created in July 2016, the ministerial team and I have conducted around 150 overseas visits.

Everywhere we go, the British manufacturing stamp is a kitemark of quality, innovation, and world-leading technological advances.

Our industrial heritage, of course, plays no small part in this.

But all too often we encounter the lazy assertion that 'Britain doesn't make anything anymore'.

How many here today have, like me, gritted their teeth when confronted by

such ill informed negativity.

So let's today send out a loud and clear message that British manufacturing is not only alive and well but capable, cutting-edge and confident.

Those of us familiar with the UK's manufacturing capabilities know that the United Kingdom is one of the largest manufacturing economies in the world, with nearly £270 billion in exports.

It would be nice to see more of this reflected in our media.

Last year saw a particularly robust performance, with manufacturing growing by 2.8%, compared to 1.8% for the economy as a whole.

We've had the longest period of consecutive monthly manufacturing growth for 30 years, and order books for British manufacturers are well above their long term trend.

And this in an economy that has record levels of employment and saw the highest FDI in our history in 2017.

The mills and foundries of the last century may have largely disappeared. But in their place has emerged an industry built upon expertise, research and development, fuelled by a world-class education system.

Sheffield, for example, is a city long famed for the quality of its steel.

Now, Sheffield University's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre has built Europe's largest aerospace castings facility, and is producing some of the biggest castings in the world today.

This is just one success story among many. The sheer diversity of businesses represented in the UK is testament to this.

From automotive and aerospace, to energy and engineering, the UK offer is as diverse as it is deep.

The advent of digitalisation, the adoption of automation, and an increasing pressure on companies to create more energy-efficient products is driving a revolution in global manufacturing.

British companies are at its forefront.

The UK composite materials sector, for example, predicts that the UK domestic market will grow 6 times by 2030, to some £12 billion, driven by the need to develop lightweight structures for energy efficiency.

In aerospace, the government has worked in partnership with UK primes and tier 1s to identify new supply chain opportunities for fuel systems and cockpit assemblies.

And last year, the automotive sector manufactured more than 2.7 million engines in the UK.

Car production remains one of the prides of British manufacturing. Last year, around 15% of the total UK r&d spend was generated by automotive companies.

Firms like Nissan, who have announced another £250 million investment in their Sunderland plant, are here because of that access to new technology and industry developments.

It is small wonder that, in 2017, a new car rolled off a British production line every 19 seconds.

The government is keen to further its support for critical, cutting-edge technologies.

We have committed to raising the UK's r&d spend to 3% of GDP, putting us in the top quartile of OECD countries.

This has been backed with substantial government support.

Many of you will be familiar with the £246 million [Faraday Challenge](#), designed to boost the development of the next generation of battery technology.

We have also committed £100 million of spending for connected and autonomous research and development for the automotive sector.

And, together with the aircraft industry, we have devoted a combined £3.9 billion towards aerospace r&d.

This level of government support is unprecedented. It demonstrates a real and sustained commitment to attract the right investment in the right areas, in line with our [Industrial Strategy](#).

Indeed, manufacturing courses through the Industrial Strategy, whether it's our ambition for pharmaceutical production in the [Life Sciences Sector Deal](#), or the vision for advanced manufacturing in [Juergen Maier's Industrial Digitalisation review](#).

So does trade, with the Industrial Strategy keeping us at the forefront of crucial areas of comparative advantage, such as clean growth, artificial intelligence and the automotive industry.

But we shouldn't be surprised that trade and manufacturing are central to our plan to improve productivity, when manufacturing productivity has been growing up to 3 times faster than the wider economy and the 9% of businesses that export play such a central role in our productivity growth.

Our approach is already paying off. Companies like Airbus, who are jointly investing with the government to create a new research facility in the South West, are continuing to show their confidence in the strength of the United Kingdom.

As the MP for North Somerset, I particularly welcome Airbus's expansion in the South West. Their new wing-testing centre near Bristol will serve as an

innovation space for supply chain companies across the region. It has also cemented the UK aerospace industry as the second-largest in the world.

Investments such as these demonstrate the high esteem in which British manufacturing is held around the world. But as well as attracting inward investment, my department stands ready to ensure that this capability is shared beyond the borders of the UK.

Time and again, research has shown that companies which export their products are more profitable, resilient and productive.

In short, exporting can increase your bottom line, driving up profits which then in turn allows businesses to invest more.

It is a virtuous cycle, which can be kicked off by the right government support.

My department's ultimate aim is to open up the world's fastest-growing markets for UK companies.

Soon, for the first time in more than 4 decades, we will be able to develop a trade policy framework that works, first and foremost, for the UK economy, UK firms, and UK citizens.

Already, we are laying the groundwork for new trading relationships with countries across Africa and Asia.

Many of these economies will be the drivers of global growth in the 21st century. In fact, the IMF projects that 90% of global growth in the next 10 to 15 years is likely to come from outside the EU.

As their people become more affluent, and their domestic industries more mature, demand for British manufacturing expertise will grow exponentially.

We know that the UK is in a unique position to partner these countries, and that our manufacturing firms stand ready to help realise their ambitions.

Already, my department is deploying our extensive overseas network, stretching across 108 countries, to seek opportunities and provide in-market support for UK firms.

This network is being bolstered by 9 HM Trade Commissioners to promote UK industry abroad. I was delighted to recently announce our commissioners for South Asia, China and North America: [Crispin Simon](#), [Richard Burn](#) and Antony Phillipson.

These new Commissioners will lead our overseas teams, and will develop a regional trade plan that will set out the priorities to be delivered across export promotion, investment and trade policy. They will have more autonomy to do what works best in their region to improve trade with key markets of the future.

And [UK Export Finance](#) is one of the unsung heroes of our economy, working to

ensure that no viable manufacturing export fails due to a lack of financing or insurance options, so that once firms do decide to export, there are no unnecessary barriers in their way.

In the last financial year they made £3 billion available to help boost UK exports; at the same time we have seen exports of UK goods increase by over 11%.

And it's not just for big business. Accessing government-backed export finance is faster and easier for SMEs than ever before.

As of October 2017, small and medium-sized businesses can get UKEF bonds and working capital support for up to £2 million in a matter of seconds directly from their bank, without having to apply separately.

But trade doesn't just benefit exporters themselves.

Supplying to exporters allows smaller companies to access new markets and benefit from the worldwide demand for UK goods and services while they're still growing. And the benefits from trade have positive spill-over effects across the supply chain.

Capital is the lifeblood of commerce. If companies can't get export finance it doesn't matter where along the supply chain it happens – it still clots. But if finance flows freely the benefits do not just accrue to those actually doing the exporting.

They circulate to their suppliers and throughout the economy, better practices and higher productivity from contact with overseas markets and better returns from selling abroad.

That's why small UK businesses who are not yet exporting themselves, but sell to other UK companies that do, can now also benefit from UKEF's trade finance support.

And that's why in the [2017 Autumn Budget](#) we announced a new supply chain product for exporters, which will help exporters access financing to pay their suppliers.

This allows smaller companies in exporters' supply chains to receive early payment to support their cash flow, at the same time as giving the exporter time to pay for supplies of goods and raw materials.

UK Export Finance is here today: if you're considering exporting, they could be the help you need to start selling overseas.

All of these innovations come, of course, at a time when we are seeking a new partnership with the European Union.

I understand that every business here today will be hoping for a glimpse of what this new relationship will look like.

I know that businesses value certainty and stability above all else.

I cannot comment on the negotiations that are still underway. I can, however, tell you that this government opposes erecting barriers to trade where none yet exist, or disrupting the commercial relationships that exist between this country and our continental partners.

I am currently taking the [Trade Bill](#) through Parliament, to give you the certainty you need that there will be a functioning trade regime on day one. The implementation period will also provide time to adjust, which manufacturers tell us they need.

Our Trade and Customs Bills will give us the powers we need to transfer the EU's existing trade arrangements with third countries, which will allow us to protect your access to overseas markets.

They will also give us the tools we need to fight back against any unfair subsidies or dumping from abroad.

We are currently consulting on which of the EU's existing trade defence measures we should keep. I want the interests of UK businesses and consumers to be foremost in the government's mind, so I encourage you to contribute your views.

We want to protect the interests of British manufacturing. We want to maintain your access to markets across Europe, and beyond. And we want to ensure that the UK continues to attract the best and brightest talent from across the world.

I am greatly encouraged by new data from UCAS that shows a record number of European students applying to study in the UK's world-leading universities, despite the dire predictions being made.

The UK will always be the finest place in the world to live, study, or do business.

Outside the EU we have now established a series of working groups and high-level dialogues with key trade partners from the USA to Australia and China to explore the best ways to progress our trade relationships for the future.

The efforts of the manufacturing industry have ensured that Britain will remain a world-leading technology hub far into this century.

We are a nation of innovators. And, as government and industry work together, we can build a brighter and more prosperous future, for the UK and the world.

So let's talk up the success of a UK manufacturing sector that is not only investing and exporting, but is a confident and key player in building that more prosperous future.

There is a big world out there – and British manufacturing can lead the charge to ensure that the people of this country can take their rightful place in the global prosperity of the future.

Thank you.

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.

Press release: Employment remains at near-record high

Today's figures also show that groups across society are accessing new job opportunities:

- nearly 500,000 more people from a black and minority ethnic background (BAME) have started working since 2015
- the gender employment rate gap is at a near-record low, just 8.9%
- every region across the UK has seen employment increase since 2010
- youth unemployment has fallen by over 40% since 2010
- there are a record breaking number of workers aged 50 plus in work, reaching 10 million



EMPLOYMENT RATE AT A NEAR RECORD HIGH

75.2%

Department for Work and Pensions | Source: ONS, February 2018, stats relate to period October to December 2017

Minister for Employment Alok Sharma said:

High employment rates are a reliable feature of today's economy – and this is an incredible achievement. It is equally important that across society everyone has the opportunity to get a good job and get on in life.

Today's figures show that this government is building a fairer economy that supports people from all backgrounds to get into work. We are closing the BAME and gender employment gaps, and people across the country are accessing new opportunities.

Separate figures out today showed that [730,000 people are now on Universal Credit](#). Of these, 40% were in employment (290,000).

Read the [Labour Market Statistics – February 2017](#) from the Office for National Statistics.

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