

Suffolk Business Board - Thursday 5th June 2025

Agri-Food Sector – Overview of key challenges and opportunities

Following the agri-food sector presentation at the Suffolk Business Board on 20th March 2025 by Martin Collison, Chair of the Norfolk and Suffolk Industry Council and a joint Norfolk and Suffolk Sector Workshop on 8th April 2025, the following is a high-level summary of the key challenges and opportunities facing the agri-food sector.

To realise the full potential of this growth sector for Suffolk, as recognised by the new Suffolk Economic Strategy, a set of potential actions and interventions are also highlighted below.

Sector Challenges

- Climate change and extreme weather (with 2022 being the UK's hottest year on record)
- Global instability and political change
- Food and input cost inflation
- Water availability, management and storage
- Government Land Use Framework
- Decline in agricultural workforce and pressures on labour productivity

Sector Opportunities

- Potential to add more value to farm produce grown in Suffolk and opportunity for new crops and multi-functional agriculture
- Foster knowledge transfer e.g. promotion of Nuffield Scholarship for young people and leverage national/international connections and engagement with regional business networks e.g. NFU, Framlingham Farmers, CLA, FWAG etc
- Leverage Sizewell C and food procurement opportunities
- Process innovation and tech convergence e.g. use of satellite applications and AI in agriculture and water management to enhance productivity and drive automation
- Encourage clean energy innovation e.g. hydrogen power agricultural vehicles
- Identify local innovation challenges e.g. waste reduction and circular economy, and strengthen connections between R&D and local farmers
- Develop and promote Skills Bootcamps and relevant training opportunities
- Explore the potential for a food innovation centre in Suffolk (learning from Norfolk and Lincolnshire)
- Collaborate with Tastebuds and local food and farming businesses to enhance connections and promotion to boost local supply chains and the visitor economy
- Potential to drive more sustainable intensification – environmentally, socially and economically

Unlocking Suffolk's Potential: Next Steps, Actions and Interventions

- Develop a more commercially led Action Plan via the Agri-Food Industry Council, leveraging Suffolk's strengths in agri-tech, clean energy, innovation and logistics.
- Continue to develop an Eastern England 'super cluster' in Agrifood and Agri-tech (with Norfolk, Cambs and Lincs)
- Encourage the processing, wholesaling and distribution of more food locally (boosting business partnerships and supply chain activity)
- Support plans and initiatives to enhance food security

- Exploit the Freeport, A14 and rail corridors to add value to UK and globally sourced food
- Address the water crisis through a more partnership driven approach (industry, government and academia) with application of new technologies e.g. space and satellite technology and data
- Encourage the use of clean and sustainable energy to deliver on supply chain challenges
- Attract more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and commercial investment into the sector with a more proactive approach e.g. via Invest Norfolk and Suffolk
- Use tech convergence to deliver world-class competitiveness, building on Suffolk's expertise in clean energy, digital, space-tech and data etc.
- Promote business support programmes related to the agri-food sector, supporting start-ups and scale-ups in the industry, attracting investment and enhancing diversification