



# GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S AGRI-FOOD RURAL NAVIGATION NETWORK



## VISION STATEMENT

**To be the connected county in supporting and developing individuals and rural businesses to service the needs of the Agri-Food industry, ultimately enabling a positive economic impact for Gloucestershire and beyond.**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gfirst Agri-Food and Rural Business Group aims to help businesses and other key allied stakeholders to address the key economic opportunities and challenges within the county in line with the government strategic initiative of efficiently producing sustainable food, in addition to maximising their own business productivity and profitability, whilst striving for net zero.

This will be achieved by focusing on two areas:

### 1. Skills development and retention of talent

Our aim is to be recognised as the county of best practice for the **attraction** and **retention** of talent for the agri-food industry and **continuous development** of a high level of core and transferrable skills to support the prosperity of the sector.

### 2. Business support and innovation

Our aim is to be recognised as the county of best practice for **supporting** a **thriving** and **innovative** rural economy.

The Gloucestershire Agri Food supply chain employs over 50,000 people, 14.9% of the workforce and generated a GVA of £1.39billion in 2017, or 8.8% of the local economy, both higher shares of the economy than seen nationally with 70% of the county being agricultural land.

As such, boosting productivity, protecting the environment and managing volatility are important variables connected with better productivity not only to maintaining viable and profitable food producing businesses, but also in delivering net zero and resource use efficiency. The use of new technology, coupled with digital skills to fully exploit it go hand in hand, Minette Batters, NFU President, 2023.

There are a number of extremely valuable food, farming and environmental initiatives within the county of Gloucestershire. As such, the Gfirst Agri-Food and Rural Business Group recognise there is a need to join them together, focusing on skills needs and support for business development and innovation to provide a 'go to' solution for the farmer, grower and those involved with agri-business, ensuing that as a county we create, collaborate and communicate.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *CONTINUED*

The Gloucestershire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has recently defined the skills needs of employers under the umbrella of agricultural production and agri-tech, recognised as key sectors for our county, also mirroring regional and national priorities in the support of the economy. The project, undertaken by Business West to inform the LSIP, placed significant emphasis on engagement with employers and other associated stakeholders across all the sub-sectors of agriculture. This Report has therefore provided a solid evidence base from which to support our vision of the 'connected county'. In addition, Gfirst LEP are working with the County Council to shape the new Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire, with agriculture and agri-tech being a key focus for the county along with cyber, advanced manufacturing, construction, aerospace and digital sectors.

Since 2014 Gfirst LEP have prioritised over £6M investment into supporting the agricultural sector through growth funds, in particular innovation within the Agri Tech sector, through Gloucestershire's colleges and universities. There is therefore a need to further build on this investment using the Gloucestershire Growth Hub Network to now specifically support rural businesses at a pivotal time in agricultural history with significant changes and challenges to the policy, subsidy and educational landscape. Bringing together all the key organisations and support into a Gloucestershire 'Hub' where a long-term sustainable service can be created will be essential to support the sector in relation to provision of a sustainable future and in support of food security.



Gloucestershire is a large county, boasting a wide range of sectors within the rural economy. The term "rural" within this vision encompasses businesses based in the Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, Stroud and Tewkesbury. The rural population in Gloucestershire is 394,000. As the Agri-Food and Rural Business Group has a particular focus on food and agriculture, the content of this vision will focus on those areas highlighted in the below infographic, illustrating the food and agriculture ecosystem and the different sub-sectors within it (data taken from the ONS labour market Local Authority Profile).



In order to fulfil our vision and aims highlighted above and the associated key priorities highlighted below, our vision is to create Gloucestershire's Rural Navigation Network to coordinate access to business support and skills development and promote accordingly.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To fulfil the above aims and in recognition of Gloucestershire being home to a wide range of different support services for rural businesses and the challenges this brings, we want to ensure these businesses know which to go to for help, and even what exists to support them. We have outlined 5 key questions facing the rural economy at the moment.

1. Advisory services: who do I go to for help for my specific business needs and how do I access support and grants in the changing landscape?
2. Business skills: where can I develop the appropriate skills to grow my business and my personal development?
3. Digital skills: What digital and/or cyber skills do I need as a rural business? How will these enhance my business or assist with day-to-day activities? What do I need to know to support and accelerate my business now and how will this change in the future?
4. Accessibility of skills and training: how do I find out about appropriate skills and training opportunities? Will they come to me, or do I need to find them?
5. Education: how can I learn more about the rural economy? What's happening in other businesses that I should know about? What's my corporate social responsibility? What policies do I need to be aware of and how do they impact my business?

These challenges can be distilled into 3 countywide strategic priorities:



Navigate - Provision of advice.



Navigate - Skills and knowledge development.



Navigate - Communication and outreach.

Our vision is therefore to establish Gloucestershire's Rural Navigation Network in order to deliver the 3 key priorities.

## PRIORITIES UNPACKED

### 1. Navigate – business advice

Gloucestershire is home to a wide range of business advice services, from professional business advice such as legal and marketing expertise, through to on-farm support from vets and agronomists. This makes the support options hard to navigate for rural businesses and a clear route to accessing this support is needed.

### 2. Navigate – skills and knowledge development

Recent intelligence from the work of the LSIP has highlighted that there are a number of training resources required within the food and agriculture ecosystem such as managing data (e.g., ownership, protection, security, analysis), cyber skills, management skills, accountancy and change management, to name but a few. Providing the right resources across the county is extremely important, and so is access. A number of training resources provided by organisations in the county will not necessarily be focusing on rural businesses, this presents an opportunity to develop cross sector links. A focus in this area should be business skills and digital skills and we should aim to take inspiration from where this works well (such as the Rural Hub in Herefordshire).

### 3. Navigate – communication and outreach

There is a lot of good work delivered through colleges and universities within our county to support the challenge across the UK and internationally on how to educate and broaden awareness of rural practices, particularly where our food comes from and how it is produced. Communicating the importance of food, farming and environmental practice is a role that many organisations across the county play, but is it not always clear who is doing what and when to support the individual business or those needing support or considering a career in this area?

It is important to explore how we educate about food and farming, both formally and informally. There are a large number and range of career opportunities spanning, food, farming and environmental practices related to skilled craft level to higher level occupations; there is a need to educate young people to provide effective awareness raising of this and the associated benefits of this type of career. Lifelong learning and continued professional development have never been more important with the changing of agricultural policy, introduction of new grants and the need to digitally upskill in order to exploit new technology and ensure maximum economic gain.





## IMPLEMENTATION

### Activity streams

#### Navigate – business advice

It is acknowledged that the Gfirst LEP Growth Hub and associated projects have achieved so much with regard to provision of and signposting of business advice and support for the county. In addition to the evolution of the 'hub and spoke' model, there is still more to be done to attract those working in rural, food and farming to access the support available. As such, this proposed vision would support this gap and work alongside organisations such as the NFU, CLA, FWAG and the Rivers Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, specialist land agents, Farm Ed and Gloucestershire colleges and universities to establish an online platform which highlights advisory services in the county for all rural businesses.



#### Navigate – skills and knowledge development

In order to understand what current support is available in terms of CPD, skills training, business development and business support, a mapping exercise must be undertaken. This exercise should also aim to understand potential cross sector links where external support can be brought into the food and agriculture ecosystem. It is important to engage such suppliers for the benefit of rural businesses in the county – what is their capacity and motivation to start supporting food and agriculture businesses?

This will also work to support the implementation and rollout of the LSIP. It is also important here to explore the new Growth Hub model. Each Growth Hub will now be reporting into and supported by their Local Authority and although there are outputs to meet, the level of business support and engagement may vary between each. It is important for the sake of this paper to have an overarching view of all Growth Hub offerings to understand what support is offered and who can access it.

It is important to establish who delivers CPD across the county and develop a plan on how to market these to the right businesses and individuals: accessibility of skills and training is key here. A mapping exercise will be undertaken to highlight what the LSIP has uncovered, and the above must all link to the economic strategy of the county. This activity stream will then flow into the above 'Navigate Business Advice' stream.



## ACTIVITY STREAMS CONTINUED

### Navigate – communication and outreach

We need to support the sustainability of the food and agriculture ecosystem by promoting:

- › Different industries within the ecosystem
- › The work of the Rural Navigation Network
- › Public education (including sparking interest in younger generation to follow a career in agriculture/food production)

It is important to engage with organisations and people that could, or are, playing an active role in promoting food and farming education. It is vital to engage these stakeholders and define the roles they play within the county. We suggest that these stakeholders are approached to form a partnership in order to achieve county-wide aims.

This Vision has been developed by the Gloucestershire Agri Food and Rural Business Group, one of the nine sector business groups working to support businesses within the county, and as such is supported and endorsed by...



**Agri Food and Rural (gfirstlep.com)** Chair: Claire Whitworth – Hartpury College & University, GFirst LEP Board Member: Emma Hanby – Campden BRI, Ben Compton – Bruton Knowles, Tim Andrews – Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Jenny Phelps – The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Gill Reindl – Gill Reindl Consulting, Carey Ives – Gloucestershire County Council, Chris Farr – Gloucestershire CLA, Barbara Pond – Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC), Ben Thompson – Hartpury University & College, Simon King – Hartpury University & College, Charles Mann – Organic Farmer, Katie Jarvis – National Farmers Union (NFU), Dr Esther Wilkinson – Royal Agricultural University, Janet Dwyer – University of Gloucestershire (CCRI), Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins – NICRE South West, Jonathan Powell – Virgin Money



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