Meeting:	Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board
Date:	16th November 2026
Title:	Hampshire Farming Advisory Project
Appendices	N/A
Report From:	Economy and Skills – Prosperity
Contact Name:	Chris Burchell
Email:	Chris.Burchell@hants.gov.uk

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the second strand of the Rural Economy Workstream that has already been presented in outline form to the Board, focused on targeted business advice to support Hampshire farmers, and to ask HPPB to consider recommending funding from the revenue LEP legacy reserves.

1.2. The report is one that has been amended from that which was presented to the Board at its last meeting on the 14th of September. That report recommended support for farmers specifically on how they might adopt new technologies and innovation techniques for their operations and to help with potential funding applications. The Board fed back that they felt that the focus of this approach was too narrow, that proving the benefits of new technologies would take a long time to be realised and that a number of farmers are already engaged in this activity.

1.3. The lead officer consulted with one of the board members who is a farmer, and it was agreed that the scope should be widened to provide a much broader range of support to reflect the real and current needs of the Hampshire farming community. Farmers and other agriculturalists are under increasing pressure from the impacts of

climate change, taxation and rising input costs. If farmers could be provided with impartial expert advice and guidance on how to grow, sustain and diversify their business, this could have a material impact on their resilience and sustainability.

1.4. HPPB is asked to consider recommending funding for a six-month pilot. This would be used to engage a specialist organisation to work with farmers independently, or where convenient in a cluster setting, to assist them in their business plans and guidance on funding and investment options. The request is for £25,000 from the revenue LEP legacy reserves for the pilot. There would be potential to extend the service beyond six months, subject to the results from the pilot period; this would be the subject of a further funding request.

2. Background

2.1. This request is part of the desire already outlined by HPPB to support the rural economy in Hampshire – another workstream supporting rural social enterprises has already been approved and that programme has now been launched.

2.2. The NFU have recently highlighted the challenges nationally for the farming sector including falling profits, higher input costs (particularly for the arable sector - although livestock and diary have fared better). Concerns raised by farmers include increasingly extreme weather conditions, policy changes (notably the loss of the EU basic payments/subsidies scheme, which provided a reliable revenue stream), changes to inheritance tax rules and availability of nature recovery funding. According to the NFU, Hampshire is particularly hard hit this year due to the extended dry weather conditions affecting the arable sector, although the diversity in the county has helped with increasing opportunities provided by, for example, horticulture and viticulture and professionally managed diversification.

2.3. The NFU report that many farmers currently are focussed on maintaining resilience and profitability in the face of multiple pressures. Regular surveys indicate that farmers most need help in the following areas:

- Investment in on site water supply and drought resistance infrastructure
- Supporting the financial sustainability of the business including cash flow, low-cost finance and access to innovation funding and advice (including funding for nature recovery projects – although the Sustainable Farming Incentive Funding has closed with a process that has faced criticism)
- More certainty on agricultural policy particularly with the move away from the previous subsidy system

- Broader infrastructure improvements including more streamlined planning for on-site reservoirs, rural energy infrastructure, and digital connectivity
- Labour and skills – including seasonal labour and technology/digital skills

2.4. One of the priorities of this project will be to help farmers identify all the possible funding or business support opportunities open to them across the national and local ecosystem that might include:

- Future rounds of the SFI
- Future rounds of DEFRA Capital grants and the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund
- Farming Innovation Fund
- Farming in Protected Landscapes Funding
- England Woodland Creation Offer
- Animal Health & Welfare Fund
- Local grants such as through the district and borough councils
- Access to government backed debt finance schemes (such as the Southeast Investment Fund)
- Greater awareness of wider Government business support such as Help to Grow and Made Smarter

2.5. The lead officer for this project had previously consulted various stakeholders in Hampshire on the demand and appetite for an initiative focussed on technology and innovation (including local authority colleagues in Test Valley and East Hampshire, the Hampshire representative of the National Farmers Union, and Sparsholt College). A further conversation with the NFU has confirmed the broader support as highlighted in this report is needed: some farmers already engage with private consultants, but many do not have the funds, so this is an opportunity to make this much more widely available.

2.6. The proposed £25,000 funding has been calculated on the premise that a consultancy would be available to offer 1:1 and group support around two days a week, but we will also seek to capitalise on some of the farming clusters.

2.7. What are the expected outcomes?

- We will set specific KPIs once we have commissioned a provider. We will agree the number of farming businesses that the provider will need to engage in, but we are keen to focus on quality, so we will be seeking to map step

changes in skills and knowledge (appreciating that this is a pilot project with a relatively short time frame) as we move through the programme.

- As part of assessing clients, we plan to utilise a suitable diagnostic tool to provide a snapshot to focus on key areas of the business and draw out opportunities and challenges that need to be overcome.
- There will be a definite focus on improving the awareness for farmers of both local and national funding opportunities and building capacity internally to become more proficient in making funding applications.
- A better understanding of new technologies and roadmaps to adoption will remain a focus where relevant.
- We hope to boost access to learners in land-based sectors if we can capitalise and for better connectivity to the skills-based ecosystem
- A six-month progress report will be produced for review by HPPB.

3. Next Steps

3.1 If the funding is recommended by HPPB and then approved by HCC, we would then move quickly into commissioning phase. We have already identified some organisations who we know would be interested in bidding for this opportunity.