

Meeting:	Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board
Date:	14 September 2026
Title:	Farming Technology Adoption Project
Appendices	N/A
Report From:	Economy and Skills – Prosperity
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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 farming technology adoption, and to ask HPPB to consider recommending funding from the revenue LEP legacy reserves.
- 1.2. Building on previous details provided, the Economy & Skills Team have identified an opportunity to support Hampshire based farmers and other land-based businesses in the adoption of innovative technologies. Farmers and other agriculturalists are under increasing pressure from the impacts of climate change, taxation, rising input costs and the need to diversify. The role of new technologies, if adopted well with expert guidance and adequate funding, could have a significant impact on productivity and reducing the cost base for the sector.
- 1.3. 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 identifying the most suitable technology solutions for their operation and then help with implementation and guidance on funding 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.
- 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 dairy 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. There is convincing evidence from both the Government and industry, that adopting new technologies in the sector can improve efficiencies, reduce input costs and help firms to make better decisions. This is particularly in areas like precision agriculture, auto steer control (setting pre-determined paths for tractors etc) and the use of electronic tags and other monitoring instruments in livestock. The UK Precision Agriculture Institute estimate that for certain fields where precision technology is adopted input cost savings of 15-30% can be achieved.
- 2.4. In general, when surveyed, farmers (including one survey undertaken by the UK Agri-tech Centre), indicated support for new technologies, but there remains some resistance amongst some. Issues highlighted include concerns about how easy it would be to integrate new innovations into operations, potential high initial output costs, and identifying and realising the benefits.
- 2.5. The lead officer for this project consulted various stakeholders in Hampshire on the demand and appetite for this initiative. Those consulted included: local authority colleagues in Test Valley and East Hampshire, the Hampshire representative of the National Farmers Union, and Sparsholt College, all of whom were positive about the proposal.
- 2.6. Momentum already exists as in Sparsholt College we have excellent facilities to support regenerative and precision farming including a robotics milking parlour, a vertical farm research centre, and virtual reality and simulation suites. The college also has an initiative linking students with local farmers and businesses offering access to new technologies, so this project would provide more opportunities to enhance this. There are already farming clusters in the county which, in addition, would provide an opportunity to engage a group of farms relatively easily.

2.7. 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, and Sparsholt have offered, in principle, to host them at the college if this proves a suitable and appropriate arrangement.

2.8. What are the expected outcomes?

- We will set specific KPIs once we have commissioned a provider, but it will be a combination of the number of farmers engaged with, successful projects instigated, and funding applications completed (and funding secured if time allows). Schemes such as the Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies Fund (managed by Innovate UK/DEFRA) could be relevant here.
- Further metrics may be farmer specific, but we would look at how input costs including energy and pesticide usage, animal health etc have shifted, although we recognise that we may need a longer period to realise some of the hoped-for outcomes.
- Other programmes such as Made Smarter (a government funded programme that helps manufacturing companies adopt industrial digital technologies) use a digital readiness tool which businesses complete at the start of the programme to assess their capabilities, and then this is further reviewed at the mid-point and at the end of the programme. We would explore whether we can apply a similar methodology specific to this initiative to build in more impact measurements.
- We hope to boost access to learners in land-based sectors if we can capitalise on the existing Sparsholt initiative highlighted above.
- There may be an opportunity to support local companies who want to display their technology in a 'test bed' environment.
- Projects may support biodiversity improvements that could contribute to nature recovery, aligning with the Hampshire Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 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.