

Agri-Food & Drink Deep Dive

Notes from ES:

- The UK imports a large % of food – Suffolk can help shift that dial and increase the UK's/England's food security.
 - Note: need to source the specific data for this.
- Agri-Food & Drink could be emphasised more as a priority, as it is a priority for Suffolk.
 - There is a currently a fear amongst industry stakeholders that Agri-Food & Drink is more of an afterthought.
- There is anecdotal evidence that SCC is supporting/funding agri-food & drink businesses outside of Suffolk rather than within.
- There are issues with skills/talent pipeline:
 - Very few people are interested in/applying for roles within the Agri-Food & Drink sector.
 - Better promotion is needed to promote the sector as a place to work.
- Sizewell C is at risk of displacing talent and labour away from the sector.
- We need to articulate and emphasise what the key barriers and blockers are in the sector and how we will overcome them.
- There is anecdotal evidence that it is very difficult to receive funding for solar panels.
- We need to improve the volume of food processing in Suffolk, as a large proportion of food that is grown in Suffolk is processed outside of Suffolk.
- We need to emphasise positive case studies in order to promote best practice within the sector.
- What further can the sector do to have a positive influence on Net Zero?
 - We need to use buzzwords such as “climate resilience”
- There is currently not enough reference of the challenges in the sector currently in the Economic Strategy narrative.
 - In particular, there is currently a lack of urgency in tackling these issues in the narrative.
- Skills – the responsibility also falls on businesses to promote the sector as a place to work:
 - There is currently not enough self-promotion.
 - Business should engage with careers hubs and education providers to promote the sector as a good place to work.
- There are very few students in subjects related to agriculture – how can we address this?
- There is anecdotal evidence that there is good engagement from the sector with primary schools, but they do not continue this engagement into secondary schools.

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- The sector has a perception of being not an attractive sector to go into and it is a sector for those who struggle academically.
 - However, there are high-value, technical, and high-skilled roles in the sector, particularly now with the movement towards AgriTech.
 - This needs to be better promoted.
- There is anecdotal evidence that there is no promotion of the sector in secondary schools, even in rural areas of Suffolk, the heartland of farming.
- There is a lack of high-quality teachers.
- There were multiple references made about the positive impact of Jeremy Clarkson promoting the sector (previous farming programmes had a negligible impact).
 - Clarkson has put the sector on the map and has created an avenue for young people to learn about the sector and consider it as a potential career path.
 - We need to harness this interest and provide this pathway to young people.
- The future of the sector is uncertain (see challenges listed above and below) which impacts the attractiveness of investing into the sector.
- There is a lot of potential for highly productive, high skilled roles in AgriTech, particularly in areas such as automation.
- How are we able to increase the proportion of the energy that is produced in Suffolk that is consumed in Suffolk?
- Agri-Food & Drink is of course about the whole food supply chain and therefore can we help to progress students into attractive supply chain roles – e.g. chefs?
- There is a feeling that pride of place takes care of itself if we tackle all the other regional challenges.
- We need to dedicate significant resource in marketing/communications/promotion in order to ensure that the strategy ends up in front of the right people to result in the necessary economic changes – i.e. lobbying.
- Can we create a hub/enterprise park for Agrifood & Drink?
 - i.e. similar to Norwich Research Park/Food Business Park).
- We need to continue efforts on decarbonisation.
- We need to emphasise our promise for a clean, low-carbon, agri-food sector.
- We need to be able to quantify what the economic benefit would be from the interventions we implement.
- We need a clear, simple, consistent message in order to ensure that our messaging to central government is as powerful as possible.

Infrastructure & Planning

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- Utility supply of Agri-Food & Drink is an issue and essential for the health of the sector – i.e. both water supply & energy supply.
- There are issues with industrial water supply in Suffolk:
 - The supply of water is going to decline over the next 10 years before long-term water supply projects kick in.
 - Water is an essential foundation for the sector – without ensuring that there is sufficient water supply in Suffolk, any growth for the sector is impossible to be robust.
- There is a real fear over the lack of urgency and priority given to increasing local/domestic water supply:
 - There is a feeling within the sector that we will wait until it is too late (i.e. we are about to run out of water) before we take action on increasing the water supply.
- The conversation often looped back around to emphasising the scale of the water supply problem.
- There is a difficulty attracting talent, particularly as the farms are, by necessity, in rural areas where property is more expensive, and transport links are poorer.
- The issue also is that there is worse access to essential services in rural areas than there used to be, reducing the supply of labour due to people choosing to live in more urban areas.
- People have to commute long distances typically in order to work in the sector, which is a major deterrent for new labour (they typically need to travel from urban areas to rural areas, due to the urban areas being the only places where you can find affordable housing with good access to essential services).
- There is heavy regulation in the sector which results in significant barriers to growth.
- The planning cycle/process is too long:
 - It typically takes 15 years until a project is completed after conception, which results in projects typically being out-of-date/not fit for purpose before they are even completed.
- The Orwell Bridge is inadequate considering it is the only route out of East Suffolk for HGVs.
 - When local logistics is as fragile as that, it is a significant barrier/constraint for new businesses/new investment into the region.
- We need to improve the supply of affordable housing for young people in order to help retain graduate talent.

Additional notes from OP:

- Opportunity of connecting Public Procurement with local supply
- Review of Land Based careers promotion / agri-food skills group

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- Need for Water Strategy and pathfinding / solutions group
- Clear narrative on re-localising food systems; enhancing food & water security and natural capital
- Proactive enticement of food processing operations; milling, veg packing
- Identify a location / existing anchor business, to build a cluster and 'they will come'
- Sponsor Agri-tech. pilots; hydrogen