

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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**Oxford Farming Conference boosts commitment to youth and diversity with more Breaking Barriers bursaries**

The Oxford Farming Conference (OFC), in partnership with McDonald’s UK and Ireland, is pleased to announce the recipients of the Breaking Barriers Scholarship, which is supporting eight individuals aged under 30 years old, who identify as Black or Person of Colour (BPOC), to attend the Conference in January as part of the 2025 Scholars programme.

Quadrupling the intake since the programme was launched five years ago, the 2025 cohort sees representation from a range of academic disciplines and industry specialisms, from animal nutrition and veterinary science, to sustainability and food system resilience.

The successful candidates, who were able to demonstrate a passion for the agricultural sector, ambition to advance their skills, and desire to embrace valuable networking opportunities include:

* Umar Muhammad, a PhD candidate in Agriculture, Health, and Environment at the University of Greenwich, researching the resilience of agri-food value chains.
* Jessica Dickson, a 4th-year Veterinary Medicine and Surgery student at the University of Nottingham.
* Navjot Gill, a Sustainability Consultant at Promar International with a BSc in Environmental Science from the University of Reading.
* Nacia Bonnick, a Ruminant Technical Advisor at Trouw Nutrition with a degree in Agricultural Science from the University of Nottingham.
* Mary Ogunmodede, a Commonwealth scholar studying for an MSc in Agroforestry and Food Security at Bangor University.
* Yetunde Ikudabo, a Project Support Analyst for Leeds City Council with a farming background in her home country of Nigeria and degree in Agricultural Science.
* Chimbusonma Ikeyi, an Agriculture and Crop Science student at the University of Nottingham currently undertaking an industry placement with PepsiCo.
* Mariyah Salahuddin, a student at the University of Bristol who will soon be commencing her first year of Veterinary Sciences.

The scholarship looks to support diversity and inclusion within the agricultural industry by offering candidates the opportunity to attend the Oxford Farming Conference as well as participate in a pre-event programme with mentoring, bespoke events and materials such as books, to support their future career journey. They also benefit from the Scholars Programme more broadly, which includes a workshop event in collaboration with McDonald's, an online interactive webinar, and in-person leadership and communication training.

Commenting on the landmark Breaking Barriers Programme, OFC Director and facilitator Jude McCann, who is supported by Sheena Horner and Navaratnam Partheeban said, “The Breaking Barriers programme is not just an initiative, it’s a movement towards transforming the face of agriculture. The increased interest and intake for 2025 demonstrate both the urgent need and growing desire for greater diversity in our sector.

“These eight exceptional individuals represent the future of agriculture - their unique experiences, academic backgrounds, and industry insights are exactly what we need to meet the challenges ahead. Diversity isn’t just a tick box; it’s a vital ingredient for innovation and resilience. We are proud to support their journeys and excited to see the contributions they will make to agriculture, food systems, and sustainability."

2025 Breaking Barriers Scholar Navjot Gill said, “I applied to the Breaking Barriers scholarship as it presented a unique opportunity for me to develop in my career, both personally and professionally. This scholarship will allow me to connect with like-minded individuals and mentors passionate about advancing diversity and inclusion in this sector. I am most looking forward to getting to know and building meaningful relationships with the others on the programme, understanding their experiences in the agriculture industry and getting out and about on the field trips.”

Fellow scholar Jessica Dickson added, “As a vet student who grew up in Hong Kong, I never set foot on a working farm until vet school. I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to learning more about farming, agriculture, and food production - particularly aspects of safeguarding public health and how British farming can be at the forefront of global advancements, adapting farming practices to a changing world.”

Commenting on the opportunity, Hetty Elliott, Agricultural and Sustainability Sourcing Manager for McDonald’s UK and Ireland, said, “We are delighted to be partnering with the Oxford Farming Conference, sponsoring both the Scholars Programme and the Breaking Barriers Programme, for which we have increased the number of places available in 2025. Our sponsorship provides opportunities for young people from a range of diverse backgrounds to attend the 2025 Conference. As part of our Plan for Change programme we’re proud to be inspiring candidates from all backgrounds to consider a future career in the agricultural industry.”

The group recently gathered in London for a "get to know each other" day, where they shared their aspirations for both the programme and their future careers. In November, they will join the larger Scholars group - 40 individuals - for a two-day field trip focused on networking, training, and skills development, all in preparation for attending OFC25 in January.

The Oxford Farming Conference takes place from 8 to 10 January 2025, following the theme “Facing Change, Finding Opportunity”. More information and tickets can be found at: <https://www.ofc.org.uk/booking>.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

For more information on the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC):

**Website:** [www.ofc.org.uk](http://www.ofc.org.uk/)

**Twitter:**[@oxfordfarming](http://www.twitter.com/oxfordfarming)

**YouTube:** [OxfordFarmingConference](https://www.youtube.com/oxfordfarmingconference)

* The OFC is one of the only external events to be allowed to host a debate in the Oxford Union. It has a long and proud history going back to 1936 and a strong reputation as one of the UK’s leading agricultural events. It always takes place in Oxford in the first week of January and is based at the Oxford Examination Schools. It offers a vibrant programme of speakers, panel and politics sessions as well as networking.
* OFC is a charity that invests in agricultural education and knowledge-sharing. It attracts over 650 delegates every year, including many people from the wider food chain, retail, NGOs, scientific organisations, media, policy-making bodies and governments from around the world.
* HRH Princess Royal is patron of the OFC.
* The dates of the 2025 OFC are 8th - 10th January 2025.
* Geoff Sansome is the chair for OFC25 and the theme is 'Facing Change, Finding Opportunity'.