

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

5 December 2024

**Oxford Farming Conference Unveils Inspiring Innovators for 2025**

*Six pioneering voices to present at OFC25 on transformative ideas in food, farming, and sustainability*

The Oxford Farming Conference (OFC), supported by McCain Foods (GB) Ltd., is thrilled to announce the six trailblazers selected for its inaugural Inspiring Innovators programme. These forward-thinking individuals will take centre stage during the opening session of OFC25, which runs from January 8–10, 2025, in Oxford and online.

With this year’s theme, “Facing Change, Finding Opportunity,” OFC25 highlights how today’s challenges in agriculture can spark groundbreaking solutions. The Innovators exemplify this vision, bringing fresh ideas and actionable solutions to some of the sector’s most pressing issues, from sustainability and food security to market diversification and consumer trends.

Representing a broad spectrum of expertise, the 2025 Inspiring Innovators are:

* **Dr. Thomas Farrugia, Beta Bugs Limited:** As CEO and Founder of Beta Bugs Limited, Dr Thomas Farrugia pioneers the use of Black Soldier Fly Larvae (BSFL) as an alternative protein source for animal feed. Through selective breeding, Beta Bugs enhances the genetic performance of BSFL, enabling the insect farming industry to scale and compete with traditional protein sources like soymeal. At OFC25, Thomas will share how insect farming offers farmers new diversification opportunities while addressing feed shortages and sustainability challenges.
* **Kate Drury, Sustainable Rope:** Kate is a wool innovation PhD student at the Royal Agricultural University and owner of Sustainable Rope, a project aimed at addressing two significant challenges: microplastic pollution and the undervaluation of British wool. By creating sustainable, natural fibre rope, she is providing an eco-friendly alternative to synthetic materials while supporting UK sheep farmers. Her presentation will highlight the market potential of natural fibres and the environmental benefits they offer.
* **Michael Kavanagh, The Green Farm Collective:** Founded by four award-winning farmers, Michael will share how the group are reshaping regenerative agriculture with a whole-farm certification system and premium markets for regenerative flour. He will present their vision for scaling regenerative practices, the challenges of engaging supply chain stakeholders, and the opportunities for farmers to access premium markets that reward sustainability.
* **Dr. Lynda Perkins, Queen’s University Belfast:** DrLynda Perkins will showcase Rapid Evaporative Ionization Mass Spectrometry (REIMS), an emerging technology that rapidly analyses food quality and safety. Her presentation will delve into how REIMS can transform traditional food testing methods, ensuring authenticity and quality in a fast, sustainable, and objective manner.
* **Annie Weiss, Udderly Flavoured Milk:** Dairywoman and entrepreneur Annie Weiss is breathing new life into the flavoured milk category with innovative, functional products like Matcha Milk and Lion’s Mane Cacao Milk. At OFC25, she will share how Udderly is responding to changing consumer tastes and driving a “Dairy Renaissance” that supports dairy farmers and reinvigorates the market.
* **Keir Doe, Renewables Connect:** Keir Doe is a farmer, chartered surveyor and chartered town planner. His platform, Renewables Connect, is the UK’s first online multi-agency platform connecting landowners with renewable energy developers and investors. His presentation will explore how this tool simplifies the process for farmers to engage with renewable energy projects, unlocking diversification opportunities in the face of agricultural challenges.

To prepare for their presentations at OFC25, the Inspiring Innovators recently participated in a tailored training day at McCain Foods’ headquarters in Scarborough. The session, led by media training experts and supported by McCain representatives, provided practical guidance on public speaking, storytelling, and crafting impactful presentations. McCain's team also shared valuable insights into innovation, sustainability, and navigating the evolving challenges and opportunities in the agri-food sector. Together, these elements helped the Innovators refine their messages and build confidence for effectively engaging the esteemed OFC audience in January.

OFC Director Sheena Horner, who is supporting this initiative, said:“The Inspiring Innovators programme embodies the spirit of the Oxford Farming Conference - connecting people and ideas to shape a sustainable and progressive future for agriculture. Each of our Innovators brings a unique perspective, and their concepts are certain to captivate and inspire our delegates.

“This initiative reaffirms that amidst significant challenges, there are countless opportunities for those willing to innovate and embrace change, aligning perfectly with our 2025 theme “Facing Change, Finding Opportunities”. We look forward to seeing how their ideas enrich the discussions at OFC25, and our thanks go to McCain for supporting these innovators, who are sure to positively impact the future of agriculture.”

James Hopwood, McCain’s Director of Agriculture added: “We are delighted to be supporting the Inspiring Innovators programme for 2025, which is so important in providing an open platform for individuals from across all backgrounds to showcase their expertise, concepts and interests. It was brilliant to host a training day for this year’s cohort of innovators at our HQ in Scarborough, and to discuss innovation, sustainability and navigating the agri-food sector with such a talented and interesting group.”

The Innovators will also enjoy full access to the conference, including accommodation, meals and networking opportunities with over 650 delegates, fostering collaboration and inspiration throughout the three-day event.

For more information on the Oxford Farming Conference and to book your ticket, visit: <https://www.ofc.org.uk/>. Please note the Inspiring Innovators session will not be live-streamed so is only accessible to those attending in person, however, all sessions will be recorded to watch back after the event.

 **Notes to Editors:**

Press accreditation is now open, and available at <https://www.ofc.org.uk/press-room>

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%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

* 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'.