

Data drives 'radical' food solutions

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Innovation Research news

Agrimetrics, one of four government-funded AgriTech centres, hosted a conference to reveal technologies aimed at transforming the agrifood sector. *CPM* reports.

By Rob Jones

Growers have been promised a fast-growing data resource and pioneering web technologies to help the agrifood sector build new future-proof solutions, products and services.

Three new products for the sector were unveiled at the Winning with Data conference in the Crystal at London Docklands, last month by David Flanders, CEO of Agrimetrics, one of four AgriTech Centres funded by Innovate UK.

Agrimetrics has spent two years investing in the collection and connection of data to address productivity and supply challenges for the agrifood sector. It's used new web technologies to create capabilities, and a pioneering data resource, that can be harnessed by the whole sector, he told delegates.

Field Explorer is the first of a suite of new products from this fast-growing data resource, and gives access to critical parameters on

weather, cropping and soil for 1.45M fields in the UK in one place. The three products are:

- **Field Facts:** supports decisions on cropping choice, management and productivity using data on the main characteristics of the land and field including typical weather, soil, temperatures, natural habitats and altitude.
- **Field Trends:** informs optimum crop rotations and critical crop growth trends to quantify risks to food production at local, regional and national levels using three years of data on crop history and weather at a field level.
- **Field Forecast:** gives users the ability to forecast crop development, inform crop management and food sourcing decisions. The data uses modelled and forecast crop and grass development over a two-week period.

“Accessing a wide range of data and overcoming the technological barriers, Agrimetrics is providing businesses in the agrifood sector with a quicker and more cost-effective win,” explained David Flanders.

He urged the industry to embrace a new data culture – one that puts data accessibility, sharing and integration at the heart of food and farming research, business and Government.

“Together, we have a great opportunity for UK farmers and agrifood businesses to lead the way in delivering global food solutions,” he said. “The food and farming sector should

seize this moment to drive radical new sustainable solutions for food and farming.”

He said Agrimetrics will keep commercially sensitive data safe and secure.

Agrimetrics chief scientific officer Prof Richard Tiffin noted that despite all the unknowns in agriculture, complex systems can behave in predictable ways if all the elements are connected.

“Creating a better-connected food system will allow us to avoid the shocks that can be catastrophic to food supply and to the associated natural ecosystems, communities and businesses,” he said.

Microsoft has helped set up the new data platform as a virtual representation of the real world, allowing prediction of the impact of interventions and a mechanism for asking questions. “Now it's time to go out into the world and see how we can make businesses from it. It's an exciting opportunity,” said Microsoft business development director Matthew Smith.

What is Agrimetrics?

Agrimetrics was created in Oct 2015 with Government, academic and industry backing to unlock the value and insights held in data being generated across the agrifood sector.

www.agrimetrics.co.uk

It's one of four Agri-Tech Centres funded by Innovate UK to drive greater wealth, productivity and efficiency across the UK agrifood sector, the others being:

- Crop Health and Protection (CHAP) that aims to revolutionise how farmers manage crop threats including pests and disease, both in the UK and overseas. www.chap-solutions.co.uk
- Agricultural Engineering Precision Innovation Centre (Agri-EPI) that operates in the precision agriculture market to help the UK's agrifood sector develop advanced technologies for UK agriculture. www.agri-epicentre.com
- Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) which will create new livestock technology and products to boost the profitability and productivity of livestock farming. www.cielivestock.co.uk

Innovate UK has now come together with the seven UK research councils to form UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It's tasked with administering the Government's Industrial Strategy Fund, set to put £7bn of public funding into industry, including agriculture, by 2022. The aim is to improve UK productivity and growth across all sectors, push the frontiers of knowledge and deliver benefits to society. ■