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**Founder of Graze joins Farm491 as one of three new start-up mentors**

Three diverse and highly accomplished entrepreneurs have joined Farm491 as business advisors to the incubation hub’s start-up companies.

The trio are, serial entrepreneur, Ben Jones, co-founder of the snack-maker, Graze and Tails, a bespoke, subscription-based dog food supplier – Graze was founded in 2009 and now employs 175 people with a turnover of £54 million.

James Waltham is a fresh-produce specialist with a background in farming and board-level management and Christopher Horne is an international entrepreneur with a strong track-record in agritech.

Christopher Horne’s global experience is in investment and marketing agritech companies puts him in a strong position to comment on the UK’s position in global agritech, he described the UK as one of the top countries in Europe for creating agritech start-ups and for attracting investment into these embryonic businesses.

“At present the UK has around 300 businesses in the agritech space, which has created a strong ecosystem for the sector,” he said. “These young businesses are supported by strong science and adopted by a ready population of very progressive farmers, advisors and agribusinesses.”

He added, however, that the agritech space is fragmented. “From my experience globally, Farm491 is unique in that it addresses this fragmentation through community-building of member businesses active in the sector, as well as its incubation support of new start-ups. The environment is not the pressured and typical hot-house that you see with investor-driven accelerator programmes, but rather a friendly, strongly networked ecosystem.”

Christopher’s insight into the focus for the UK’s agritech ‘scene’ is in increasing food security, more sustainable crop production, water use reduction, novel farming, including vertical systems, meat-alternative protein production and soil health improvement.

He said that the three Farm491 start-ups he is mentoring are involved in regenerative agriculture and carbon capture, another in land-based aquaculture – UK-grown prawns and shrimp - and a crop science business.

“These young businesses need a wide range of business support, including taking a product from a lab into production, advising entrepreneurs with no farming background on the fundamentals of on-farm use and preparing businesses to become ‘investment-ready’; and they need personal support – establishing a start-up can be a lonely thing to do.”

Looking to the future, Christopher describes the UK agritech sector as one with “huge potential. It’s a long and tricky path to take a start-up to market, and to get the sector to adopt your technology and to plug the gaps between technologies, but the opportunity is huge.”

Farm491 has supported 200 start-ups and has over 70 members which they bring together in a unique incubation space and hub. The unit which is part of the Royal Agricultural University is dedicated to tech start-ups focused on agriculture, horticulture, food and environmental sustainability.

Its Head of Business, Sarah Carr, said of the three business advisor appointments, “the range of skills our three mentors are wide-ranging and diverse, which is exactly what our start-ups need – different thinkers who can make things happen.”

Sarah added: “The time for agritech is now and the UK has established a strong reputation in this field; as for market potential, it’s burgeoning globally. AgFunder put the investment in farm technology at $7.9 billion in 2020, up 41% on the previous year. It’s unsurprising, really, given that the intent of most agritech start-ups is to resolve the big challenges, like producing more food from less land, with less environmental impact. Big challenges need deeply innovative solutions.”

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**Notes to editors**

Farm491 is a UK based leading technology incubator and innovation space focused on the future of farming and food systems. Based and owned by the Royal Agricultural University we work with entrepreneurs through all their stages of growth, leveraging our unique network of academic, industry and farming contacts and in house experts to help companies achieve their aspirations. This is primarily achieved through strategic advice, support raising investment, finding the right talent to build the team, access to new customers and being part of a network of other entrepreneurs. Farm491 is also involved in local and national policy on AgriTech and works with national and international partners to help reduce the fragmentation in the UK innovation ecosystem.

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