

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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**Oxford Farming Conference invites applications for Inspiring Innovators 2026**

The Oxford Farming Conference (OFC), in partnership with McCain Foods (GB) Ltd., is inviting applications for its Inspiring Innovators programme, which will return for the 2026 conference.

Building on the success of its launch last year, the programme will give six individuals from across the agricultural, food and rural sectors an opportunity to present their ideas, research or technologies to an audience of more than 700 delegates, including farmers, policymakers, academics and industry leaders.

The 2026 event (7-9 January), which will celebrate 90 years of OFC, will be themed “Growing Resilience”. Inspiring Innovators is open to both new ideas and existing concepts that are ready to develop further, with a focus on how they can help the sector adapt and thrive for the future. The selected participants will take to the stage during the opening afternoon of the conference on Wednesday 7th January 2026, at one of the UK’s most prestigious agricultural events.

The programme’s debut last year proved to be a highlight of the conference, with participants presenting projects that ranged from insect protein production and sustainable fibre development, to new regenerative certification models, rapid food analysis technology, value-added dairy products and digital tools for connecting farmers with renewable energy developers. Since participating, members of the inaugural cohort have gone on to establish new partnerships, secure further speaking opportunities and raise the profile of their work both nationally and internationally.

Kate Drury, one of last year’s Inspiring Innovators and founder of Sustainable Rope Ltd, a company developing a natural fibre alternative to synthetic ropes for the aquaculture and marine industries, commented: “OFC is essential for our industry especially at this unprecedented time, the opportunities and networking experience are invaluable. I am so glad I entered the programme and was chosen as both myself and my company have benefited hugely.”

As part of the 2026 programme, each selected innovator will attend a dedicated Bootcamp Day at McCain’s Scarborough facility in November, receiving presentation and communications training, alongside the opportunity to trial their talk ahead of the conference. Successful applicants will receive a full conference ticket, two nights’ accommodation and invitations to the Chair’s Reception and the Christ Church Dinner, ensuring maximum opportunity to network and engage with delegates throughout the three days.

OFC Director Sheena Horner said: “The first year of Inspiring Innovators exceeded all our expectations. The calibre of ideas and the energy in the room made it a highlight of OFC25, and it has been rewarding to see participants embrace the opportunities it created to move their concepts forward.

“Bringing this element of the conference back in our 90th year feels particularly fitting as it’s about giving space to people with the vision and determination to strengthen the resilience of our sector for decades to come, and encouraging the conversations and connections that help turn ideas into action. I’m looking forward to seeing the creativity and ambition that this year’s applicants will bring.”

James Hopwood, Director - Agriculture at McCain added “At McCain Foods, we are pleased to further develop our partnership with the Oxford Farming Conference through the launch of the 2026 Inspiring Innovators programme. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to supporting visionary leaders and innovative problem-solvers. Together, we aim to empower UK growers, producers, and processors to advance innovation and sustainability throughout the agri-food sector.”

Applicants are invited to submit a written proposal of no more than 600 words, explaining their concept or research, how it relates to the “Growing Resilience” theme and why they would like to present it at OFC26. Proposals must be accompanied by a video lasting no longer than three minutes, delivering their “elevator pitch” for the idea or business.

The deadline for submissions is 5pm on Friday 26th September 2025.

For more information and to submit your application, visit: <https://www.ofc.org.uk/form/inspiring-innovators-2026>

**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.
* OFC 2026 will take place from 7th - 9th January 2026 and will mark 90 years since the launch of the charity.
* The OFC 2026 Chair is Jude McCann and will be themed “Growing Resilience”