

# Future business leaders in agriculture: Who will lead the industry forward?

*A report for the  
Worshipful  
Company of  
Farmers*

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The Worshipful Company  
of Farmers

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## Foreword

Every industry needs great leaders. The agricultural industry is no different. It faces an unparalleled level of change and challenge, including concerns about climate change and global commodity, as well as input and energy markets massively disrupted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This means that now, more than ever before, the agricultural industry needs to act. It needs to recruit, develop, train, empower, and encourage a new generation of managers with the ability and willingness to see the world differently, to apply learnings from every walk of life, and to lead and manage with real skill, passion and commitment.

The question is, where are the leaders to come from? The industry already has some great leaders, and others will no doubt emerge from within the sector. However, to have the greatest possible talent pool to choose from, agriculture needs to make itself attractive to as wide a range of potential leaders, from as a broad a spectrum of society, as possible.

This is why the Worshipful Company of Farmers commissioned this piece of original research from the excellent team at the Centre for Rural Policy Research (CRPR) at the University of Exeter. This report seeks to explore the potential barriers to entry that the industry needs to dismantle, and to identify the changes to structure, education, policy, and planning required to widen the agricultural labour pool, with talent attracted from as wide a spectrum of society as possible.

If this report opens the door to an industry-wide debate on the best way forward, it will have done its job. I commend it to the reader and look forward to the Worshipful Company of Farmers playing an active part in the debate that I hope it will generate.

*Richard Davies*

**Master  
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**The Worshipful Company  
of Farmers**



# Executive summary

## Introduction

The trajectory of the agricultural industry in the United Kingdom (UK) demands a new type of leadership as expectations shift both within the industry and without. Beyond their essential role in food production, those working in primary production and beyond must also take in to account nutrition, food safety, and dietary changes on the part of the consumer. They must consider their contributions, and response to, the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis – all of this alongside trying to make a profit. Significant policy changes following Brexit are placing farmers in an economic and policy environment where the emphasis is on the production of food and fibre alongside the delivery of environmental goods and services. This could potentially create a more vulnerable market dynamic for producers as well as put them under scrutiny from both public and policy stakeholders.

Such significant transitions mean that effective leadership is vital for farmers, and for agricultural industry staff in management or directorship positions. This applies equally to those already established within agriculture, but also to new generations moving into the industry.

The well-established ‘new entrant problem’ and ‘young farmer problem’ in agriculture poses a significant challenge both in terms of attracting potential new leaders to a career in agriculture and addressing the entry-exit issues stemming

from a reduced rate of younger entrants into farming. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that introducing new and capable entrants is still key to the future of the industry.

Against this background this report examines the current profile of the agricultural sector with regards to career trajectories for potential leaders and investigates how best to counter existing barriers to potential leaders entering the industry.

Our objectives are:

- To establish the qualities, characteristics, knowledge and skills required of future agricultural business leaders.
- To identify the specific agricultural training opportunities for future leaders from non-agricultural backgrounds.
- To identify mechanisms and processes for attracting and recruiting future leaders from non-agricultural backgrounds.

Our approach involved a combination of desk-based research of existing literature on leadership, new entrants, entrepreneurship, and training in agriculture, and semi-structured interviews with 17 stakeholders including those involved in the delivery of education and training, ‘industry leaders’, and individuals from a mixture of backgrounds who are now in management/ leadership positions. Clearly, this is a small sample and as such we would recommend that our findings are seen as indicative rather than generalisable for this reason.



## Findings

Our findings suggest that the industry does not simply need new leaders, but new strategies, new understandings, and a change in attitudes, in order to benefit businesses, to look after people, to benefit the environment, and to promote food security. The industry needs to get the message out there to business students, and leaders looking for a career change, that agriculture presents excellent opportunities. There is also a need to develop lasting ‘real world’ strategies in order to recruit more individuals with leadership potential across the entire life-cycle of new entrants (from school age upwards).

Diversity in agriculture must be addressed.

Farming in the UK has traditionally been a white-dominated industry, described as ‘structural racialisation’, which has resulted in it being the least diverse occupation in England and Wales. Gender diversity and ethnic and cultural diversity in corporate leadership is associated with improved business performance and is an essential part of moral justice. Barriers include racial microaggressions or racial violence, unconscious bias in recruitment or campaign targeting, intersectionality (such as growing up poor), encountering ignorance and harmful stereotypes, urban upbringings, and experiences of isolation and disconnection. Failure to urgently address these issues risks ‘sabotaging the industry’ according to one participant in this research.

Studies relating specifically to new entrants and leadership in farming are lacking. Determining how best to attract new leaders into agriculture is challenging, and the drivers involved in career-related decision-making are multiple.

Leadership skills required in contemporary agriculture are very different to those required for past generations of managers and leaders. Therefore, strategies to promote and develop new leaders need to be adjusted to meet the challenges faced by the industry and the individuals needed to drive it forward. Industry leaders need skills which ensure pro-active behaviours, constantly working towards building an effective enterprise rather than operating from a point of crisis.

It is increasingly important to recognise that challenges around the recruitment and development of new leaders do not stop with access to land or other barriers to entry, but new entrants will also have to deal with ‘normal’ challenges such as weather, policy changes, shifting dietary patterns, labour shortages, etc. Therefore, those entering the industry need to be sufficiently prepared, in terms of skills and competencies, for all eventualities. It is also vital to understand that barriers faced will be different for different people, and therefore solutions need to be multidimensional, recognising these differences and designing appropriate schemes and strategies (e.g. barriers to BPOC, women, older people, different ways of learning etc). New entrant programmes need to be more inclusive and any further research extended to encompass



all potential new entrants in order to understand barriers and enablers.

## Recommendations

### For industry

- **Greater collaboration across all agricultural and horticultural public-facing organisations is essential** in order to resolve the issues outlined in this report. This could be achieved through a **cross-organisational national conference** to bring together all potential interested parties with the purpose of generating the momentum to drive on-going collaboration and helping to develop further **collaborative industry campaigns**.
- **Greater cross-organisational collaboration on inclusivity in the industry and attracting a more diverse workforce is essential.** This should involve individuals and organisations already active in the promotion of careers to BPOC, women, and other groups less represented in the industry.
- **Facilitate networks or network-building among new entrants at leadership level.** This might be achieved through the use of an online forum for aspiring leaders, inter-disciplinary networking events and linking people through social media campaigns. It is vital that local, accessible, face-to-face opportunities are made available in **all regions**.
- **Facilitate a more joined-up approach between employers, educators and young people in order to ensure effective matching for**

**all stakeholders.** This would be most effectively achieved following the research mapping study mentioned in the below ‘further research’ section as it will be driven by empirical data.

- **Build more impactful awareness campaigns** regarding the opportunities within agriculture for interesting, exciting and well-paid careers. This needs to be maximised *outside* of the industry.
- **Work with the extended rural community to subsidise, design and run ‘farm camps’** for young people with little to no connection to farming.
- **Formal succession planning should become as commonplace as making a will.** Industry organisations should facilitate succession planning and the training of succession facilitators.
- **Create a more recognised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system** and encourage engagement using incentives such as the ability to become a ‘**chartered agriculturalist**’ (C.Agric).
- **Liase with the MoD to include explicit inclusion of agricultural opportunities** within the Career Transition Partnership and **ensure service leaver initiatives are included** in any collaborative ‘cluster’ moving forward.

### For government

- **Further sustained development of the New Entrant Scheme (through the pilot), is required,** with input from organisations such as



The Institute for Agriculture and horticulture (TIAH) and The Institute of Agricultural Management (IAGRM). Issues brought up in this report, particularly those around barriers and diversity, should be considered and included in developments moving forward.

## For educators, trainers and scheme designers

- Students from a non-farming background would benefit from **more conversion courses** in the form of a postgraduate qualification aimed at non-agricultural graduates or career changers who are looking to pursue a career within the industry.
- **Training on unconscious bias**, particularly in relation to gender and race, should be included across all available CPD training courses and agricultural degrees as well as at an organisational level across all key agricultural organisations (this should become a mandatory component of *all* training).
- **New entrant programmes should concentrate on ALL potential entrants** and not just young entrants wherever possible, **or separate schemes should be developed** for older new entrants/career changers.
- Education and training aimed at new entrants and those already in farming **should include entrepreneurial education** (such as generation of ideas, how to search for new opportunities and creative thinking).
- **Established farmers need access to, and the motivation to participate in, CPD** around leadership skills. Long established organisations such as WCF and The Institute of Agricultural Management as well as new organisations, such as TIAH, should coordinate activities to ensure ease of access to such training as well as recognition of the benefits it brings.
- **The introduction of an England or UK equivalent to the ‘Aggie Ambassador’** (see section 3.6.3 of the full report) in the US should be considered by agricultural educational establishments, offering course credits to students who engage in outreach activities with schools and colleges.

## Further research

- **Conduct a mapping study**, to determine what is taught at agricultural educational establishments, and what is required by industry employers and potential employees, in order to improve the match between industry demand and educational delivery.
- **Implement an action research project with young people** to determine, through work experience and exercises, the actual motivators, barriers, aptitude and interest in careers in agriculture.





***By 2050, the world will have to feed as many as 9.7 billion people. One key to success in tackling this global challenge is to engage young agricultural leaders and equip them with the knowledge, resources, and access to markets needed to produce and distribute food to feed the world (International Agri-Food Network 2018)***

# 1. Introduction

The trajectory of the agricultural industry in the United Kingdom (UK) demands a new type of leadership as industry expectations shift. Beyond food production at its simplest, those working in primary production and beyond must also take into account nutrition, food safety, and dietary changes on the part of the consumer. They must consider both their contributions to, and the effects on their business of, climate change, and producers in general are being strongly encouraged to incorporate biodiversity renewal into their practices – all of this alongside trying to make a profit. Policy changes which de-link economic support from a basic payment scheme to a more environmentally-driven agenda are placing farmers in a changed economic

environment where the emphasis is no longer entirely on production but extended management practices, such as environment and sustainability. This could potentially create a more vulnerable market dynamic for producers as well as put them under scrutiny from both public and policy stakeholders, especially if new opportunities are not identified and maximised. Such significant transitions mean that effective leadership is vital for farmers, and for agricultural industry staff in management or directorship positions moving forward. This applies to those who are already established within agriculture, but also to new generations moving into the industry. However, a new entrant problem exists which sees multiple gaps linking potential new leaders to a career in agriculture, beginning at



primary and secondary education level and moving up to established, senior staff-level. And in terms of primary production more specifically, a 'young farmer problem' [1] has been identified, both in the UK and across Europe. This recognises the entry-exit issues stemming from a reduced rate of younger entrants into farming, which is occurring alongside a reduced rate of retirement by farmers at a later stage in life [2]. While the actual ratio of entrants to exiters has been disputed [3], with suggestions that there are many more younger people overseeing farm business operations than the official farm holder statistics suggest, there is no doubt that introducing new and capable entrants is still key to the future of the industry. The 'young farmer' problem 'has attracted a large amount of government and institutional investment over the years' [4] (p. 3), such as young farmer start up grants, with little to no success, including in the UK [5]. Ensuring the development of appropriate leadership skills, as well as being able to source the required staff and graduates with the leadership qualities, abilities or potential to lead, becomes difficult under the 'young farmer problem' conditions, as the industry has not acted quickly enough to rectify the problem, meaning a gap already exists in the 'agricultural leader' demand. The extent of this issue is global, therefore while this study's focus is mainly on England, it will be of interest to stakeholders in the rest of the UK and beyond.

This report will examine in more detail the current profile of the agricultural sector with regards to career trajectories for potential

leaders, as well as investigate how best to counter existing barriers to potential leaders entering the industry. We will examine three cohorts specific to leadership in agriculture 1) new entrants (mainly from non-agricultural backgrounds) 2) successors and 3) pre-established individuals, with an emphasis on the first cohort. The report will frequently refer to new entrants rather than new leaders. This is due to the fact the term 'leader' is ambiguous and also, the role of leader and leadership is often something which develops over time, meaning that the journey towards leadership can begin with any capable new entrant, whether they come from an agricultural background or not

## 1.1 Research objectives

The research objectives are as follows:

- To establish the qualities, characteristics, knowledge and skills required of future agricultural business leaders.
- To identify the opportunities for future leaders from non-agricultural backgrounds.
- To identify mechanisms and processes for attracting and recruiting future leaders from non-agricultural backgrounds.



## 1.2 Method

The following methods were used for the purpose of this study:

- **Desk-based research** of existing literature (academic and grey) on leadership, new entrants, entrepreneurship, and training in agriculture.
- **Qualitative semi-structured interviews** with 17 stakeholders, including:
  - Individuals working for agricultural educational establishments or running leadership courses.
  - Recognised 'industry leaders'.
  - Individuals from a mixture of backgrounds who are now in management/leadership positions.

Due to the limited sample, all interviewed stakeholders will simply be given a number as an identifier, e.g. Agri-Specialist 1, so as to ensure that they remain completely anonymous.

This study was subject to favourable ethical review by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter.



## 2. Business leaders in agriculture: A background

### 2.1 Agriculture and leadership

*There is a recognised need to expand the pool of individuals with the desire, drive and ambition to enter the sector (Toogood 2023)*

There are just over 470,000 people currently working in primary production agriculture in the UK [7]. In England, where the most detailed data on the labour force is captured, 64% of the total workforce are in owner, director or management-level positions. Out of all workforce groups, salaried managers are the only group for which numbers have increased over the last 20 years (Table 1), and 90% of employers in primary production industries estimate that the number of supervisors or managers required over the next five years is likely to stay the same or increase [8].

These figures demonstrate that, within the industry itself, the need for managers, and by default leaders, remains high.

Quantifying the number of leaders currently in the industry, or the demand for leaders, however, is not such a simple task. The meaning of leader, leadership, and what it means to be a 'good leader', vary, and no set definition exists for these terms. It is impossible, therefore, to put a number on how many 'leaders' currently exist within the industry. What can be assumed, however, is that there is likely to exist a leadership gap in agriculture and horticulture. This is based on a pool of literature which highlights two key factors. The first is that these sectors are experiencing significant labour shortages generally, across all staff types, which will include those with the potential to be business leaders [9, 10].

Table 1. Number of people working on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 June: England

	2002	2022	Percentage change over 20 years
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	187,951	179,769	-4%
Salaried managers	11,747	12,210	4%
Other workers	128,492	109,167	-16%
Casual workers	44,823	41,740	-7%
Total number of people working on commercial agricultural holdings	328,190	301,146	-9%

Source: Defra [7]



The new entrant problem, which includes but is not exclusive to, young entrants, shows no sign of waning in the current climate, meaning that the pool from which employers might seek to find employees with leadership potential is not likely to increase any time soon. The second factor is that attitudes towards leadership training among established farmers is generally poor. One report [9] discovered that almost three quarters of employers across a range of sectors within the industry had not carried out any formal management or leadership training in the previous three years, and of these, only 10% expressed any intention of doing so in the future. The subsequent lack of leaders and leadership skills stemming from these two drivers means that farm performance will, for many, be negatively impacted both now and in the future.

It is also crucial to recognise that farm-based jobs only constitute a proportion of employment related to the agriculture sector. Work in agriculture also includes roles in engineering, agronomy, nutrition, science, business advice, research, and sales, and while numbers of people involved in such jobs might be comparatively few, the industry as a whole supports many more jobs such as in processing and food manufacturing. These agriculture-related roles depend upon the influx of new entrants with the qualities and potential to lead the industry forward and as such, will also be considered for the purpose of this report.

## 2.2 So, what do we mean by 'leadership'?

The term 'leadership' can be interpreted in numerous ways, and the concepts of management and leadership often overlap [11] (Stewart 2009). However, management usually refers to implementation, order and efficiency, whereas leadership is 'seen as providing energy and direction for the future of the organisation in uncertain conditions' [11] (p. 132). Perceptions of leadership are often associated with one or more individuals who are responsible for the direction of employed members of staff within a business and who 'impose' their leadership or organisation upon the staff for whom they are responsible, commonly described as directive leadership. According to Kruglanski et al [12], this form of leadership is considered suitable where the leaders are more experienced than their staff. However, leadership does not always require a directive, top-down format. In fact, it has been suggested that participative leadership, where all members of staff partake in decision-making processes, might be 'the future of modern international agri-food supply chains' [13] (p.454). This type of leadership requires workers who are more knowledgeable and are able to bring leadership qualities to the table at an early stage in their role or career.

Leadership can also be considered in oppositional terms of active (or transformational) and passive styles [14]. Poor leadership is related to passive or even abusive behaviours which are unlikely to



result in the desired outcomes of a business.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, can enhance ‘employee motivation, morale and performance through several mechanisms’ [14] (p. 269).

While it is most common to perceive leadership in relation to people management, the meaning of leadership can extend beyond this singular understanding. An individual can also be a leader in the industry, a leader in innovation, a sole entrepreneur who motivates others to adopt similar practices, a leader in animal welfare, or a leader in collaboration, among other things. The term is multifaceted, and this is no less the case for agriculture. An individual does not always have to be directly responsible for another individual in order to be considered a leader. A report on leadership and management carried out on behalf of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) [15] describes the three core elements of leadership in agriculture as the following:

**Leading self** – ‘a focus on self-awareness, managing own emotions, building personal strengths and expertise, dealing with uncertainty and setback’

**Leading others** – ‘Engage staff and family towards common goals through effective communication, empowerment, motivation, delegation and by building their skills and competencies’

**Leading the business** – ‘The business, financial, commercial and organisational know-how to

acquire and utilise resources in an efficient and effective manner.’ (p. 60)

These aspects of leadership are split further into traits and desirable behaviours relating to each of the three core elements, with a growth mindset and resilience linked to ‘leading self’, inspirational leadership qualities and decision-making abilities linked to ‘leading others’, and having an entrepreneurial and profit-focussed mindset and being detail conscious linked to ‘leading business’ [15]. Adams et al [15] suggest that leadership effectiveness is highly influenced by desirable and undesirable behaviours, the development or lack of development of which will determine how successful a leader is likely to be.

The three core elements of leadership described in the AHDB report mirror the three tiers of leadership set out in a 2009 study by the Australian Dairy Industry Council [16], as follows:

**Tier 1:** Individual leaders bringing people, technology and strategies together to achieve goals.

**Tier 2:** Collective approaches to build cross-sectoral leadership (e.g. companies, manufacturers and processors).

**Tier 3:** National-level leaders operating to influence agriculture-related policy.

By understanding the term leadership in these broad terms, future strategies to encourage and build leadership potential across the industry might be more effectively developed.





## 2.3 What does ‘leadership’ mean in the agriculture sector and why does it matter?

Various studies link types of work with preferred leadership styles, but few studies exist which examine leadership styles and preferences within the primary production sectors or the agricultural industry more generally. Little is known empirically about which type of leadership is most successful across the different sectors of agriculture and horticulture in the UK, as management will have moved away from more paternalistic styles [17] on most of the country’s farms. Successful leadership formats are likely to differ depending on type of output or the policy requirements of a particular role, and whether workers are permanent and small in number or seasonal and large in number. It will also depend on whether said leaders are working directly in primary production or within the wider industry, and whether they work alone or with others. While this report will not explore styles of leadership in detail, it is important to understand that the term leadership can be multifaceted, which can make discussions with stakeholders challenging as each will have their own pre-conditioned perception of what leadership means. It is also important to bear in mind that

the success of different leadership models might vary from business to business as ‘leadership is essentially situational’ [11] (p. 133).

The constantly evolving landscape of the agricultural sector means that those who are at the forefront of the industry require certain abilities, competencies and attitudes. This might include vision, professionalism, entrepreneurialism, adaptability, formal leadership training, opportunity identification, knowledge of environmental practices, and the ability to engage with stakeholders beyond the farm gate. According to Ingram and Kirwan [2], ‘an ageing population is less likely to be able to compete and remain viable with emerging 21<sup>st</sup> Century food supply chains’ [2] (p. 918), and while this assumes a lack of leadership potential among older employers, which is often not the case, it is clear that the future and sustainability of the industry will rely significantly upon those who are committed to becoming new *or* better leaders. The success of this will depend upon a) the ability of the industry to turn the tide on low rates of entry into farming, b) ensuring that new entrants fulfil the necessary requirements to



become good leaders and c) encouraging those who are already established within the industry to extend their skill sets and develop the desirable behaviours outlined in section 2.2.

Leadership styles also correlate with health and safety behaviours on-farm, and one study found that 'transformational leadership has been associated with improved safety climate and reduced incidence of injury, whereas passive leadership styles have opposite effects' [14] (p. 269). According to research, workplace safety issues, commitment, and attitudes are improved when high-quality leaders promote and transfer knowledge related to health and safety.

A report written on behalf of the AHDB, *Leadership and management development* [15], sought to conduct a review of leadership and management development (LMD) in the UK's farming sector, examining themes such as best practice, qualities, and barriers to LMD. The report highlights the importance of leadership as the industry faces the following five 'megatrends', i) technology and digitisation, ii) population growth and increased demand for food, iii) the environment iv) the marketplace and future support payments and v) social change and the rise of the concerned consumer [15] (p. 4).. Their study supports a growing foundation of evidence [18, 9, 19] which shows that both small and large agricultural businesses could benefit from LMD, often in the form of training. Toogood [19] extends this further by examining how new entrants more specifically experience leadership, management and employee development. They

emphasise how leadership and management styles might impact staff retention, particularly of staff from a non-farming background, and identify those practices and approaches which are most effective with regards to leading and managing such staff.

The objectives of this study aim to fill the gap which rests between these two key studies; by focussing on who might step into these leadership roles, and investigates how a greater number of new entrants from all ages and backgrounds with the necessary qualities, skills and attitudes to potentially become leaders, might be encouraged into the industry.

## 2.4 The role of competencies in leadership development

One means by which potential leaders might be identified is through the concept of 'competencies'. Some studies have looked at business graduates through a process of competency profiling. This is particularly relevant to this study with regards to non-technical competencies; those which can be transferred between disciplines and, subsequently, career types. Non-technical competencies include 'cognitive and soft skills required to successfully and innovatively apply disciplinary knowledge in the workplace' [20] (p. 541). Non-technical competencies are considered to be of equal importance to an individual being 'business ready' as disciplinary knowledge and skills. This fact is key for any future schemes or policies aimed at enabling new entrants to enter the



sector. Having existing skills and knowledge in agriculture does not, by default, mean that the relevant competencies for leadership are in place. But, an individual displaying the relevant competencies for leadership is likely to be able to develop the desired agriculture-related skillset over time. This means that business graduates from non-agriculture disciplines, as well as career changers from non-agricultural backgrounds, could prove to be very effective leaders in the agricultural workplace.

The concept of competencies is particularly important as some studies have shown that employers in agriculture feel that many agricultural universities and colleges are not effectively developing the competencies required by the industry among their students by those who are most likely to employ them. This creates a gap in the matching process between what employers require in their employees in terms of skills sets, and what the educational establishments are teaching [21]. This is also likely to affect leadership and management development and competencies of those entrants coming out of the educational establishments themselves.

## 2.5 Entrepreneurship as a facet of leadership potential

Entrepreneurship is regularly linked to the concept of leadership, although an agreed definition of what entrepreneurship is and how it is supported, is lacking. In rural areas in particular, an entrepreneurial attitude can make the difference between a business that can

develop and create new opportunities, a 'prospector' [22], and a business that is operating purely in survival mode [23], described by Mintzberg et al [22] as a 'reactor'. And in agriculture in particular, development and opportunity creation is regularly paired with the perception of leadership or being a 'good leader'.

While traditionally entrepreneurship might be regarded as the silo-like activity of one individual, it is becoming increasingly regarded as being 'strongly influenced by the surrounding environment and community' [23] (p. 128). Entrepreneurship encompasses particular qualities or characteristics belonging to an individual, known as human or cultural capital, which includes factors such as intelligence, education, knowledge and experience. It also includes social and economic capital but it is the human capital which is potentially transferable between career types and sectors, and which could mean that new entrants, or even returners (e.g. children from farming families who gain work experience elsewhere before returning to the family farm) from farming and non-farming backgrounds may offer entrepreneurial insights to a rural business. A study in the Netherlands indicated that it is also 'possible to improve entrepreneurial competencies of dairy farmers by means of developing and discussing the farmers' strategic plans in study groups' [24] (p. 788). The study recognises the role of competencies in adding insight into farmers' entrepreneurial behaviour. However, the number of Dutch agricultural or horticultural firms with the potential to be labelled as 'innovators' is low [25],



and it has been suggested that due to a reliance on father to son succession traditions, farmers tend to have limited human capital [26] which may potentially stunt entrepreneurial opportunities. New entrants from outside of farming are considered to have the freedom (as in they do not identify necessarily with identities and behaviours inherent to rural communities) to 'break the social barriers of rural areas' [27] (p. 28). This indicates that new entrants are likely to be more entrepreneurially-oriented than those already established within the industry but that by focussing predominantly on established businesses, 'the determinants of growth-oriented entrepreneurship within agriculture remain scattered and underdeveloped' [28] (p. 804).

Pindado et al [27] point out that entrepreneurial behaviours in farming might be further encouraged by the facilitation of networking groups for new entrants. And by default, the extension of such networks into wider and more traditional agricultural circles might encourage greater entrepreneurial activity among established farmers. At the same time, it is important to remember that characteristics alone do not drive business decision-making and other factors such as changes in agricultural policy and industry characteristics also affect intentions to growth for all businesses.

## 2.6 Potential 'new leaders' in the agricultural sector

Defining what is meant by 'new leaders' is even more challenging than establishing a definition of 'new entrants' [29] due to the multiple routes via

which an individual might travel to arrive either at a new role or a new behaviour in the workplace. Add to this the array of meanings attached to the word 'leader' and the ultimate conclusion might be that almost anybody can be a 'new leader' in agriculture. And perhaps this is, in fact, the case. But for the purpose of this report, the categories of potential new leaders in agriculture will be split into three principal cohorts; i) Established farmers, ii) successors or individuals with a background in farming, and iii) new entrants (ex-novo) with no background in farming.

### 2.6.1 Established farmers

The profile of the farmer and the agricultural business leader in the UK has already changed considerably in the last fifty years. It can no longer be said that all farmers stem from families whose history reaches back over several generations of farmers, although this is still often the case. There are also some individuals who have moved into farming as an extension to an already successful business portfolio, or have entered the sector from a non-farming background with entrepreneurial intentions, among other things. A large study of primary production employers in England showed that, of those farmers who are already established, almost three quarters have not carried out any kind of training over the last three years [9]. Of those who reported not having received training, a mere 10% expressed an intention to do so in the next three years. Such a limited culture of training in the industry among established



farmers 'indicates the extent to which lack of management and professional development training permeates the industry' [9] (p. 8). This is concerning as effective management and leadership skills can help to promote greater productivity and increase profit, as well as assist with staff wellbeing and retention. A number of leadership programmes have been established for this particular cohort. (See the *Leadership and Management Development* [15] report for a list of available courses).

## 2.6.2 Successors, re-entrants, or individuals with a background in farming (who are not yet established)

For many years, farming has been viewed as a 'closed profession' [30, 31, 5, 1], available only to those who have inherited a business and often through the process of primogeniture.

Primogeniture refers to the passing down of a business to the first-born child, which in agriculture has traditionally meant the first born son. This practice has been commonplace in farming for generations and many farm holders still adhere to this succession practice. Results of a recent survey of farmers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland [32], indicate that only 17.7% of successors were female, despite these families being roughly equally likely to have both sons and daughters. The risk of relying on this practice on a business can be significant, as a successor identified according to this traditional process might not necessarily be the person best-placed to lead the business.

At the same time, some younger entrants who might potentially have been identified as a successor are choosing not to take up the opportunity, preferring to move away from farming as a career due to perceptions of it being unprofitable, stressful or lacking in prospects [33, 34]. This contributes to the 'exit problem' in farming as older farmers hold on to their farms for longer, believing that there is nobody to succeed them, doing so for tax-related purposes, or because the farm business is expected to contribute to retirement income. However, schemes exist or are being trialled to counter this issue, such as incubator, matching or lump sum retirement exit schemes. So, while it is important to consider those who would not normally contemplate a career in farming, we must not lose focus of those who come from a farming family and may have the opportunity to take over the farm but cannot, or choose not to [35].

## 2.6.3 New entrants (ex-novo)

In this report, we will use the term 'new entrants' to refer to individuals who have entered farming as a career from a non-farming background. This is a relatively new area of research although several studies have approached it from a number of different perspectives [9, 19, 3]. For example, a survey of farmers in six contrasting locations in England founds that "Just 8% were new entrants in the sense that they were the first generation of their family to farm and/or had not previously farmed or occupied a farm elsewhere [36]. Equally, the prospect of new entrants moving into the farming industry is not a novel



concept to the industry itself, although it was really only in the early 2020's that campaigns to actively recruit from outside of the industry were ramped up across the industry. This was partly driven by changes in immigration occurring as a result of the exit of the UK from the European Union, but also a deeper recognition that the requirements of the workforce in the agricultural industry are shifting, with a likelihood that they will change even further in the subsequent 10-20 years as a result of the 'megatrends' outlined in section 2.3. Labour shortages within the agricultural industry are most often associated with seasonal labour but agri-tech, food manufacturing, food processing and other facets of the industry are also reported to be struggling [19]. These shortages are not limited to seasonal work, as is so often assumed, but also roles where leadership qualities and competencies are required [21].

It is important to note that new entrants from a non-agricultural background should not simply be considered as an emergency solution to default to should those from a farming background not be available. Studies have, in fact, shown that new entrants 'may create more value added to the sector and to rural areas than their established counterparts' [27] (p. 20). It is thought that prior knowledge, experience and even social networks help new entrants identify new opportunities which in turn adds to the multifunctionality of a business. For example, in the case of the environment, opportunities are already operating for blended finance approaches to environmental management. Developing relationships with private investors is a completely new skill for many among the agricultural workforce so it is important to integrate new skill sets such as these into the consideration of new leaders and leadership schemes. In spite of this, little attention has been paid to entry routes of new entrants into farming [37, 5], particularly those who might be identified as leaders [38] (p. 1).

The following section uses existing literature alongside the findings from our interviews to explore the contemporary agricultural leadership landscape in England.





## 3. Where will the new generation of leaders in agriculture come from?

*“Our industry is screaming out for people” (Agri-specialist 2)*

*“We haven’t got time to wait” (Agri-specialist 3)*

All participants, who were asked, stated that they felt the industry was lacking leaders or would be in the near future. The following aspects of leadership in agriculture will be investigated in this section using existing literature and the findings from our interviews, in order to determine where the new generation of leaders in agriculture might come from: i) the benefits of new entrants from a non-farming background ii) barriers and enablers to the entrance and development of new leaders in the agricultural industry iii) the role of networks iv) diversity in leadership, and v) the potential of ‘real world’ strategies to widening the pool of potential leaders in the industry.

### 3.1 How might the agricultural industry benefit from new entrants from a non-farming background?

While this report attempts to include all potential leader cohorts, the emphasis is on attracting potential leaders from a non-farming background. The experience of our interviewees of working or recruiting individuals from a non-farming background was varied, but feedback overall supported literature outlined in section 2.5 which stated that the industry could benefit from the inclusion of more people who did not identify with agriculture in the same way an established farmer or successor might do.



“A lot of people from non-farming backgrounds were incredibly focused. They really, really wanted to learn. So, it wasn’t a case of perhaps trying to change mindset or skills. Their approach could be quite different from those from a farming background (Agri-specialist” 6)

“It almost seems to be an advantage that they don’t have any farming background” (Agri-specialist 10)

“Those from a non-farming background aren’t preconditioned and they will challenge and think differently, which is good in terms of going on to leadership and management [...] That is what you need in terms of leadership and management, somebody who is able to think outside the box and challenge what they are doing” (Agri-Specialist 2)

In addition, young people in particular are recognised as ‘important actors in political movements for food justice and ecological sustainability’ [39] (p. xvi).

Numerous case studies exist which detail the trajectory of individuals from a non-farming background into a career in agriculture, highlighting how and why they have been particularly successful in their roles (see Toogood 2023 [19], Nye and Lobley 2021 [40]; and TIAH ‘Roots to success’ examples <https://tiah.org/news/>). Drawing the attention of employers to

these benefits will be a key part of changing employer attitudes in the future.

### 3.2 Barriers to the entrance and development of new leaders in the agricultural industry

Barriers to leadership are multiple and occur at different levels along an individual’s career pathway. These might include the initial barriers to attracting new entrants, the barriers to entering the industry once decided upon as a career, and the barriers to fulfilling leadership potential (such as barriers to offering or undertaking training). The following barriers have been identified by existing literature, our study participants, or both.

#### *Structural issues*

“There are people who don’t have access to land who would be far better managing a business [than those that do]” (Agri-specialist 2)

To begin with, studies suggest that an amalgamation of structural barriers face new entrants from the outset. For example, the principal barrier to new entrants entering agriculture in Europe is access to land [41, 5]. Although several study participants pointed out that it is important to understand that success in agriculture does not, by default, have to mean owning your own farm, land access is frequently cited as one of the main barriers. In addition to land access, a trend exists whereby there are fewer farms across the country, which tend to be larger and more capital intensive than they were historically. In some cases this has resulted in a



reduction in the farming workforce [5] and fewer farms can mean fewer peers to collaborate with on business projects [41]. Studies have also highlighted the importance of small farms to act as a ‘training ground’ for the future workforce, the absence of which has led to a reduction in holdings for aspiring agricultural leaders to develop their skills [21]. With regards to organic and regenerative agriculture opportunities, small farms have also been recognised for their important role with regards to new entrants [33]. In addition, lack of financing acts as a significant constraint [23]. Some studies also suggest that the experience required to transition into a career in agriculture might need to be acquired by either working for free or for an extremely low wage, ultimately setting people back from pursuing their goal of running their own business [4] or stepping into a managerial role. A reduction in the economic viability of agriculture as a business in a climate of policy transitions also acts to repel potential new entrants from attempting to enter the industry.

### *Capital and asset availability*

Young entrants from a farming background can sometimes, although not always, rely on access to financial assets through a family farm [41], which may include not only the land itself but also expensive machinery and other capital intensive assets. This is often accompanied by a transfer of knowledge, networks and potential support from the family in the form of labour. New entrants are unlikely to have similar levels of access to either capital or assets and will

therefore need to rely on personal capital and/or assistance via schemes.

### *Policy*

Transitions in policy and a drive towards ‘public money for public goods’ means that even if farmers, particularly younger farmers who are those identified as most likely to be entrepreneurial [1], orient their business strategy towards growth, innovation and profitability, their ideas might not be supported by policy developments. This may either hamper an increase in production or hinder efforts due to prices being driven down (e.g. by competition resulting from trade agreements with other countries).

### *Traditional succession practices*

**“Some of the people that are coming through from farming backgrounds haven’t got the academic ability and are not going to make good managers and leaders in the future” (Agri-specialist 2).**

The process of succession is arguably one of the most critical stages in the development of the business [42] where the combination of the ‘successor effect’ and the succession effect [43] can be associated with significant farm level change. Such changes may range from the farm being disbanded completely to radical new approaches being implemented by the successor to encourage business growth. Succession continues to be a contentious issue at a micro and macro level.



**“The problem with farming is that so much decision-making is made on emotional and personal circumstance, rather than business” (Agri-specialist 4)**

According to participants, an increasing number of farmers are witnessing a reduction in interest in taking over the family farm from potential successors, partially driven by some of the structural issues mentioned earlier in this section. This raises key questions as to who will take over farm businesses in the future should no successor be in place in time, and as the present generation bows out of the burden of a farming business. The ongoing issue of ‘drift from the land’, where by young people from rural areas migrate towards other careers is ongoing [1, 21]), which may be partly driven in the current climate by witnessing a parent’s job in farming as ‘insecure, poorly paid and with little prospect for the future’ [33] (p. 7).

In addition to this, a continued and somewhat archaic reliance on the tradition of male-dominated primogeniture has led to this cultural practice being described as ‘the single biggest barrier to women’s entry into agriculture’ [44] (p. 4). However, the tradition that a son inherit a farm business is not the only reason that potentially successful women might not lead businesses forward. It has also been suggested that women ‘deselect’ themselves out of a career in agriculture due to early socialisation and parental discouragement [44, 45].

It has been shown that in many cases, the existence of a successor is important to a farm

being able to successfully adjust to changing conditions [1]. This is thought to be partly due to the fact that successors are already involved in trying to make a business a success before officially taking over the business (i.e the ‘successor effect’). But while creative solutions and innovations may occur, generational succession is also associated with strengthening path dependency and continuing traditions passed down through the family, and according to Grubbstrom and Joosse [41], ‘those who inherit a farm business might continue in the same way and use the same networks as their parents instead of reaching out to and beyond their networks to resolve issues’ [41] (p. 29). The result of this may lead to stale business practices, lack of innovation, and limited leadership growth.

Our study participants echoed these concerns, with several having witnessed poor choices regarding successors resulting in negative consequences to the business.

**“It is concerning that farms are being handed down not necessarily to the best leaders and managers” (Agri-specialist 2)**

**“How can you have future leaders if the whole environment is based on situation as opposed to on your ability?” (Agri-specialist 9)**

*The ‘young farmer problem’*

According to our respondents, part of the ‘young farmer problem’ is linked to the inability of business holders to hand over to the next generation in a timely manner. Not only does this



perpetuate the ageing population issue but it can cause any new skills developed by a successor to become stale as they await their turn to lead the business.

**Quite often, the parent isn't able to release the reins, not at the right stage to release the reins, and you wonder whether some of what they [the successor] was taught is just wasted because by the time they do pick up the reins, they have just settled back into the way the farm was being run previously" (Agri-specialist 2)**

This assumes that young farmers are innovators in agriculture, but also focusses on successors, rather than 'outsiders', as the cohort to lose out to the lack of exiting employers.

The young farmer problem as a key issue emerged in section 1. It is a complex problem which requires further examination and definition in order to avoid falling back on familiar tropes which may lack specific evidence to support them [1].

### *Low awareness and understanding of the sector more generally*

A survey of 1014 young people aged 13 to 23 years old [46] revealed that low awareness of the agriculture industry as a potential career avenue meant that it was rarely considered when thinking about future careers, apart from by those who already have a connection to the industry. Explanations of what opportunities are available were reported to positively influence opinions and help make agriculture more exciting and attractive as a prospective job, but it has

been recognised that more work needs to be done in this area [40]. A number of initiatives have been introduced by organisations such as the NFU, LEAF, the AHDB, and Social Farms and Gardens, as well as several independent organisations and farms, to increase awareness of agriculture in schools. However, overall understanding of the potential of agriculture as a career industry remains worryingly low [19], and there was criticism among several participants that these schemes were not joined up enough and that the target age was too young, although we are unable to evidence this here.

Responsibility related to industry awareness is also often ascribed to the key influencers in young people's lives, such as teachers, careers advisers, and parents [46], but their overall impact on a young person's decision-making process in applying for a job is debated [19]. The role of influencers on high-performing students perceptions of a career in agriculture requires further exploration as to how significant a lynchpin it is in their decision-making process, particularly in relation to choosing which courses to pursue in further or higher education.

With regards to awareness, there also exist low levels of awareness among those already established within agriculture of the leadership and personal development training available to them across various different organisations [47]. The repercussions of this will be felt not only within the business itself but also by any individuals managed by employers lacking training.



## Employer attitudes

A study of almost 700 employers across horticulture and agriculture in England showed that 42% of employers are somewhat or very unwilling to employ someone from a non-farming background [9]. According to our participants, employer attitudes vary and several participants suggested that larger employers will be more likely to employ people from a non-farming background than smaller units. This is likely partly due to time and resources, and fears linked to training costs and losing trained staff to competitors.

**“The fear dominates the decision-making (Agri-specialist” 11)**

Participants also reported that interpretations of leadership and management tend to be quite singular among many business owners, particularly if they employ few or no staff.

**“The amount of times [we] get told ‘I don’t employ anybody so [leadership courses aren’t] relevant to me. Who do you employ? Nobody. Maybe one person. Okay, but do you have a nutritionist? Do you have a vet? An advisor? Or this, or that? Yes. Well you don’t employ them but you manage them and if you are not managing them you should be! They don’t recognise that they need that training” (Agri-Specialist 4)**

Lack of awareness or willingness to recruit effectively is still a huge problem among employers across the industry. Many lack general human resources (HR) skills but at the same time

do not want to employ a recruitment body, such as an agency, to find good staff for financial reasons. One participant mentioned how somebody in farming, for example, might be willing to spend hundreds of thousands on a new piece of machinery but baulk at the prospect of paying commission to an agent to find a suitable new manager, be trained in effective HR methods, or facilitate training for staff.

**“They will service that combine harvester pre-harvest, post-harvest, and probably do a winter check on it as well, but they wouldn’t do a staff appraisal or send their person on a training course” (Agri-specialist 4)**

If employers lack understanding around staff skills, people might be naturally promoted to leadership positions who, while fully qualified or experienced in certain tasks, actually lack the relevant managerial and leadership skills required to supervise other members of staff.

**“You’ve got people in jobs that they are not suited to. They are not happy. They are not good at it, and that is not their own fault [...] We promote these people that aren’t capable” (Agri-Specialist 4)**

Equally, employers in the agricultural industry may need to adapt how they perceive certain qualifications from outside of the industry in terms of what they may offer a particular business.



**“Job ads around the graduate employment in the sector can be very prescriptive still. Whereas you will see in other large graduate employers it is not so much around the specific degree [...] It can be more around what did you gain from that, let’s see your teamwork, your skillset etc”  
(Agri-specialist 5)**

On a more positive note, feedback from individuals who are implementing programmes and trying to match people from a non-farming background with positions in the industry say that a cultural shift is occurring and employers are becoming more willing to give people from non-traditional backgrounds a chance, although another participant stated that due to time and economic limitations, employing someone without any experience would not be possible for their own small business. Many small and medium business owners will be leaders in their own right, whether in an entrepreneurial capacity or environment/animal welfare standards. It is, therefore, imperative, that solutions are created whereby these leaders can inspire and motivate a new generation through mentorship at little cost to themselves or their business.

### *Accommodation*

For individuals desiring experience in primary production, lodging can be an issue due to either lack of availability [40] or the fact that caring responsibilities, families or partners prevent movement around the country [4]. This is applicable to top-end jobs as much as other levels so should remain high on the list of considerations for leadership recruitment.

### *Lack of knowledge*

New entrants at any level can suffer from a lack of knowledge which will likely affect business decisions if in a leadership position. This may include knowledge regarding crop planning, rotation plans, and other ‘out of season’ work, and may partly arise from traineeships only running over the busier growing or production seasons, or employers excluding new entrants from the planning process [4]. They may also lack soft skills, such as working with customers, if training programmes are overly-focused on on-farm skills. Lack of knowledge and experience is also the key driver behind farmers’ lack of willingness to employ new entrants and one of the vital gaps to be bridged with regards to the ‘new leader’ issue.

### *Institutional barriers*

Educational establishments which focus on agriculture, horticulture, land-based and green careers are of extreme importance to pathways to leadership in the industry. They are responsible for the recruitment, teaching, and careers steering of young people, as well as staying up to date with the requirements of employers [21]. A 2018 report, *Agri-Food Industry Workforce Skills and Development Strategy* [47] stated that ‘there is a widely held view within the industry that current funding policies promote popular courses with students but do not openly link to employer demand/feedback and that they are not coordinated with recruitment needs to meet skills gaps. The approach is not sufficiently strategic to reflect the urgent need to gear



funding to courses which will deliver against the productivity agenda' [47] (p. 32). The report proposes that the Senior Leadership Group should engage more with the land-based colleges and universities to determine, with the Department for Education (DfE), whether agriculture might be recognised as a STEM subject, and to understand how funding might be channelled more effectively to improve the outcomes and productivity of courses.

A mismatch between what is taught at universities and colleges and what is required by industry employers has been identified as an issue elsewhere [21, 40]. An approach by the government in New Zealand used a capability framework in order to improve the matching process to benefit both the employer and the employee [48].

**"We've had a couple of applicants who have actually come with an agriculture level three qualification but never been on a farm, which we found really strange" (Agri-specialist 9)**

**"There was actually a bit of backlash at one stage because they said the ones coming out of agricultural college they were just turning away because they were not coming with the right skills" (Agri-Specialist 6)**

The capability and competency requirements of different branches of the industry will vary but further exploration of these would be beneficial, particularly in relation to high-performing roles. Nye, Wilkinson and Lobleby [9] discovered, for example, that almost two thirds of staff were

missing so-called 'soft skills' (such as team work and communication) or supervisory/people management skills' [9] (p. 7), and it is important that effective strategies be developed to lessen these important skills gaps.

Universities were criticised by participants for their insufficient careers advice, or lack of interest in supporting students in their transition from education into work, although higher education institutions are not legally required to provide a careers service. Further education establishments are required to 'secure access to independent careers guidance' [49] (p. 5) but services have been described as a 'patchwork' and 'subject to frequent criticism' [49] (p. 5) and in relation to agriculture, it is generally believed that 'career advisors to this day do not get agriculture'.

**"We should be taking the careers teachers to the educational establishments. We should be working with them and showing the options right across the board of all the supporting ancillary industries. Why are we not showing this great scope?" (Agri-specialist 6)**

There is also consensus that various hoops or 'hurdles' discourage high-performing students from non-farming backgrounds from applying for agricultural management courses. For example, many university courses focusing on leadership or management in agriculture require at least ten weeks experience on a commercial farm prior to full matriculation onto a course. Some establishments have dealt with this by offering either a separate short work-experience period for people from a non-farming background, or



having some semblance of a ‘conversion course’ in place. However, many of these interim opportunities have been, or are soon to be, dropped by a number of universities and finding information on current conversion courses was a challenge. Many believe that this experience requirement may inhibit uptake of courses among people from a non-farming background.

**“That is another hurdle to jump, and is that off-putting for them?” (Agri-specialist 2)**

**“Speaking to one university they actually had a work experience requirement as well. They’ve actually dropped that on the basis that it is pretty exclusive because if someone hasn’t got a background, are they going to get farming experience before they come to uni? Unlikely” (Agri-specialist 4)**

In addition to this, the inclusivity of agriculture-focused educational institutions was questioned, suggesting that in a few cases, non-farming background individuals might feel alienated by the culture itself.

**“I think when you come to an agricultural institution and look around, there is a certain feel and identity, inevitably” (Agri-specialist 5)**

**“A lot of people fear if they come from non-farming backgrounds that it’s not a natural place. They don’t feel they’re the sort of people that would naturally be accepted by some of those educational establishments” (Agri-specialist 6)**

One respondent reported that it was not uncommon for people from diverse backgrounds,

such as ‘straight biology’, to enrol on a post-graduate course, but reasons as to why somebody might shift their interest at this stage of education were lacking. Routes into agricultural engineering were mentioned, as well as international agri-business, but these tended to be quite specific and not necessarily include other areas of agriculture. Another stated that, in relation to attracting people from non-agricultural backgrounds onto post-graduate courses, the process has to be made easy.

**“How can you make post-grad routes that work around a full-time job, childcare commitments, a family farm, you know, all the things that [people] might have going on? [...] I think the challenge would be making sure that the programme, the opportunity, the conversion was delivered in a way that was flexible enough to allow people to slot into those jobs that exist” (Agri-specialist 5)**

It was suggested by some people who work closely with educational establishments that due to resourcing and budget limitations, the ‘churn’ of students passing through an establishment had become more important than the career pathway or origin of the students themselves.

### *New entrant schemes themselves*

The issue of leadership, lack of leadership skills, and lack of new entrants with the potential to become leaders, is not new to the industry, either in the UK or beyond. Several initiatives have been implemented over the last 30 years at a macro-level, such as the EU new entrants schemes and



Defra's New Entrant Support Scheme, and a micro level, such as small organisation-led leadership programmes, where organisations have created pockets of leadership training aimed mostly at individuals associated with agriculture in various regions or across whole countries. The format of such initiatives vary from substantial grants and support to build a new business, to paid-for, subsidised training or free programmes, and from six to sixteen week intensive on-farm programmes to off-farm programmes which occur at different learning points over the course of a year.

Across the EU, new entrant schemes are being run to 'help establish a young farmer as head of an agricultural holding [...] to bring into the industry well-qualified younger people who can provide a firmer foundation for the development of a dynamic and competitive sector in the future' [38] (p. 91) through loans or capital grants, which up until recently have been in receipt of European Union support. Generational renewal is promoted in the EU via pillar II direct payments. These are aimed at helping to establish young farmers below the age of 40 in rural areas [50]. In the case of England, a pilot new entrant scheme is in its infancy which is trialling incubation rather than a direct grant-based system [51]. In addition, non-governmental led schemes have also been set up to encourage new entrants into the sector, although a large proportion of these are linked predominantly to regenerative agriculture rather than more commercial businesses. The latter schemes are often modelled around concepts such as

partnership or share farming and add useful evidence to the 'new leader' debate.

Such new entrant schemes are, however, not without criticism. For example, the new entrant scheme run by Defra has been criticised for funding organisations for the provision of advice to new entrants, as opposed to dealing more directly with structural issues such as access to land and financing. Focussing on writing effective business plans is seen as wasteful if, at the end of the process, there are no tenancies for the new entrants to actually apply for [52].

The consistency and permanence of these initiatives also vary and while their importance is not questioned, budgetary issues, organisational member preferences, key figures leaving a leading role, or transitions in curriculum requirements sometimes mean that key opportunities are removed from the landscape of leadership training potential, leaving a gap which then needs to be filled by another institution or organisation, if at all.

The majority of said initiatives are aimed at established farmers, new entrants from farming backgrounds, or individuals who are related to the agricultural industry in some way. Formal opportunities for individuals who do not have any experience in farming but who have leadership potential or who have already developed leadership skills in another industry but want to move into farming, are severely lacking. Initiatives such as The Prince's Countryside Fund *Opening the Gate* scheme demonstrate an appetite for support, as well as engagement, and



the lessons learned from the different strategies employed by each should be used for larger initiatives to be developed in the future.

Frequently, schemes aimed at new entrants concentrate on ‘young entrants’, which encapsulates those between the age of 18 and 35 or 40. It is not always clear as to why this criteria exists but it likely partly due to recognition of the ‘young farmer problem’ occurring throughout Europe [1, 53, 54] and that ‘younger people have a longer planning horizon and tend to invest more heavily in business growth than comparable older age groups’ [38] (p. 95). However, concentrating solely on the under 40s results in the exclusion of a large pool of potentially highly skilled and capable candidates, for whom access to help becomes prohibitive. A study examining perceptions of people working in agriculture from a non-farming background revealed that 36% were career changers, and of the entire sample of 127 respondents, 33% were between the ages of 35 and 65 [19].

Leadership schemes and programmes tend to be relatively small-scale and, in many cases, limited in what they can offer.

**“It was brilliant and we used to get a massive return on investment for it, but it was [few] people every year. How do we scale that up?” (Agri-Specialist 4)**

**“Out of 200,000-odd holdings in the UK, you know, it is not reaching enough [...] it didn’t really scratch the surface” (Agri-specialist 1)**

This is partly due to capacity, and partly to do with numbers who are interested in engaging. One interviewee dismissed small-scale fears, highlighting that change takes time and that all efforts, however small, are worthwhile.

**“You get people saying ‘oh well, we’ve done this for a year and we’ve only had 10 people come out of it get into agriculture and it’s like, well, if you hadn’t done that you would have been ten less people and you would have still been in the same position you’re in now [...] Surely, it needs a slow build up and persistence to get it to make a change?” (Agri-specialist 3)**

Another participant suggested that the way around low uptake of any agricultural leadership course is to make courses more bite-sized and modular, enabling course participants to pick and choose in the moment which courses they require without having to wade through non-essential material or having to wait several months for the module they require. Others feel that this is risky, because if the employers themselves are left to decide what they need to know, they are less likely to recognise their actual needs and limit their personal development in relation to leadership.

There was also some criticism among participants that leadership schemes in the agricultural industry are ‘elitist’, often being taken up by the same small pool of participants.

**“If you don’t have a pair of mustard corduroys and elbow patches on your jacket, you can’t get in” (Agri-specialist 1)**



**“It makes you wonder if it’s the same people engaging [...] It’s a shame it’s not hitting those people who really need it” (Agri-specialist 10)**

In addition, potential participants might not identify with previous cohorts who have moved through a scheme or feel that they will not ‘fit in’ due to the way a scheme might be targeted, ensuring exclusivity rather than inclusivity.

**“I think for the new entrants it can feel like a sector where unless you were born into it or your grandparents were born into it then perhaps you won’t be able to gain that credibility” (Agri-specialist 5)**

The above statement is particularly important and was echoed by another participant who reported that, of those taking a particular course aimed at people from a non-farming background or with little farming experience, very few would go on to primary production jobs or careers very closely related to agriculture, due to feeling like they could never catch up with their peers who were from a non-farming background. This demonstrates that influencers and successful recruitment strategies might not be enough if a ‘sense of belonging’ gap also requires bridging.

Another potential barrier includes the fact that several programmes offer a small number of participants opportunities which require being away from home for a length of time, or taking time away from a business at periods where many would be unable to leave. While this offers excellent opportunities to those who are able to

participate, it automatically deselects many potential recruits from engaging.

The purpose of one programme was to stimulate farm transfer using what may have previously been considered as ‘unconventional’ tenure arrangements (e.g. joint ventures such as share farming). The objective was to match new entrants with older farmers who lacked a successor, progressively enabling the new entrant to take over management of a business [2]. The initiative approached the issue holistically providing not only matching support but also business and personal support, mentoring and training. Similar initiatives have been set up in recent decades with varying success. In the case of this particular programme (the Cornwall Fresh Start programme), a number of barriers led to recommendations for future initiatives. More specifically, it emerged that matches made between people who had no previous knowledge of each other were less likely to lead to a committed joint venture, than those where previous informal relationships already existed. This links to section 3.4, which discusses the crucial but often ignored role of networks in building a successful business or developing critical leadership skills.

Above and beyond this, the whole concept of personal development training and schemes among employers and employees is said to require a dramatic culture shift across the whole industry.



**“It needs to be much more normalised. It needs to be something you would talk about in the pub. Don’t just talk about yields. ‘I have been on a great personality course and it was great and now I understand the awkward so-and-so because he is a blue and I am a red, or whatever’ [It needs to be] much more chunky and less elitist and more practical” (Agri-specialist 1)**

One participant mentioned that schemes need to encompass leadership across the sector, not just at a primary production level, ensuring that leadership requirements are met in all areas.

**“I think it’s probably worth highlighting that all agricultural careers aren’t necessarily on-farm and I think that’s something which is possibly missed within a lot of the schemes at the moment” (Agri-specialist 7)**

### *Lack of mid-level opportunities*

Described as the ‘missing link’ [4], a dearth of opportunities at mid-level can be prohibitive to those new entrants who have gained some knowledge of farming but require further experience prior to running their own business or taking on management or leadership roles of other businesses.

### *The industry not playing to its strengths*

The agricultural industry has long been criticised for not showing off as an industry, painting itself as an ‘unsexy’ occupation to the general public and limiting fanfare towards potential recruits. While a variety of campaigns have surfaced in recent years to change this image, participants

believe that more could be done to shift public perception of agriculture as an industry.

**“As we’re playing ourselves down, is it any wonder everybody else plays it down?” (Agri-specialist” 13)**

Other barriers which emerged from the literature included lack of availability of affordable or accredited educational opportunities, training opportunities being too seasonal, and lack of available help in transferring skills from different sectors or industries. Further barriers to new entrants [19], to the uptake of leadership training [9] and to non-successors or re-entrants from a farming family [55, 56] are broadly covered in the wider literature.



### 3.3 Enablers for potential 'new leaders' to thrive in business

This section examines current enablers to the entrance of 'new leaders' into the industry which emerged from the existing literature, and will feed into the later section 3.6 on solutions moving forward. The report avoids listing current schemes and initiatives currently in operation in the UK due to the constantly changing landscape of opportunities.

#### 3.3.1 Initiatives to support new entrants

While subject to several barriers, as outlined in section 3.2.1, the varying schemes, programmes and courses available to those with a connection to agriculture also offer many positives and are some of the most effective 'enablers' to the development of leaders in the industry. Through the persistence and consistence of a number of industry bodies, the importance of personal and leadership development is gradually trickling down to those individuals most in need of skills development. An industry body, in the form of The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH), has also been established, the focus of which is on skills and careers support within the two sectors. In addition, for those from a farming background, a number of means have been introduced through governmental agricultural policy in the global north, which attempt to facilitate farm transfer, in some cases, at an earlier point in a successor's lifecycle. Emphasis has largely been upon early retirement incentives [2] but various experiments examining farm transfer, incubators and partnerships have also been trialled in an attempt to increase business

and leadership opportunities. Incubator schemes in particular are becoming more popular as a means by which to link individuals interested in running a farming business with existing land holders (often older). Described as 'an innovative model to increase land availability for new entrants to agriculture' [57] (p. 3), incubators allow prospective farmers and new entrants to develop and implement a business idea at a lower risk, through access to land, assets, training and business support. In the United States, incubators have enabled better access to farming for minorities and women, as well as other new entrant groups [57].

A small number of initiatives have been developed and trialled for individuals from a non-farming background and these are anticipated to increase in the next few years. Such initiatives will prove to be key in resolving the current leadership and new entrant crisis and will need to continue to develop and change according to the transitions within the industry itself, as well as those occurring at a wider level in terms of education, knowledge exchange, policy transitions and opportunity development outside of the industry.

#### 3.3.2 Solo individuals and influencers

The role of social media as an effective recruitment method is explored later in this section but it is worth mentioning separately that there do exist several key individuals who operate independently of any other organisation but seek to inspire people from a non-farming background to join the industry, or to motivate those within



the industry to build upon their leadership potential. While they may not have the resources of an organisation or larger body, through the use of social media, print media, podcasts, news outlets and outreach, the impact of these individuals can be significant.

### 3.3.3 Institutional enablers (FE and HE)

The ability to formally study some aspect of agriculture or horticulture is dependent upon the availability of courses to young people. Up until recently, options available to school-aged children have been limited but a GCSE in Agriculture and Land use was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2014 and an IGCSE in Agriculture is available to students in England. Uptake is still relatively low across both countries [8] but a two-year T-level qualification is due to be introduced in September 2023 which will combine classroom theory, practical learning and a placement within industry to offer a technical equivalent to A-levels. T-levels could play a significant role in bridging the experience gap which currently acts as a barrier to entering agricultural universities for many, particularly due to the work experience on offer. Recruitment campaigns should, therefore, emphasise T-levels to promote uptake of courses at a later stage in students' studies.

Apprenticeships also hold potential for leadership development in the industry but currently apprenticeships in agriculture, horticulture and animal care constitute a very small proportion of the total volume of apprenticeships started in England [58]. Boosting apprenticeship numbers in

agriculture has been the task of several organisations over the last five to ten years with little success, but higher level apprenticeships are equivalent to a foundation degree or the first year of an undergraduate degree and would be useful as a stepping stone into leadership and management opportunities.

One study participant suggested that apprenticeships could offer higher-level opportunities which allow individuals to eventually specialise in areas at levels similar to that of a degree or equivalent, but that traditional perceptions around apprenticeships need changing. Another suggested the need for a third party, such as an educational establishment or organisation, to actively recruit in areas where applications are low:

**“Some companies really need to start that outreach process and say [...] ‘but what are we going to do about it? How can we be proactive? Can we do internships? Can we do traineeships?’” (Agri-specialist 6)**

**“The thick kids in school, they were advised to go into agriculture, and apprenticeships are maybe seen as less academic, it is almost like a double whammy, maybe two things that are seen with a negative connotation traditionally” (Agri-Specialist 1)**

This participant highlighted how some utility companies have recently brought back high-level apprenticeships which take individuals through the various aspects of business and what they may want to specialise in. They suggest that this



should be far more commonplace within the agricultural industry.

In spite of the fact that 74 HE institutions offer courses in agriculture, horticulture or food-related studies [59], enrolments in agricultural and food related subjects decreased by 4% between 2014/15 and 2020/21 [59], although enrolments by female students increased. Table 2 shows the median salary of UK domiciled full-time graduates who obtained first degree qualifications and entered full-time paid employment in the UK by subject area of degree and skill marker. Mean graduate earnings for agriculture, food and related studies are split by skill level and for 2019/20 averaged at £23,000 across all skill levels, against an overall median salary of £25,000 across all skill levels and all graduates [60].

**Table 2:** Median salary of UK domiciled full-time graduates who obtained first degree qualifications and entered full-time paid employment in the UK by subject area of degree and skill marker Academic year 2019/20

<b>Agriculture, food and related studies</b>	
All skill levels	£23,000
Low skilled	£20,000
Medium skilled	£19,500
High skilled	£25,000

(Source: HESA [60])

In terms of employment prospects, the percentage of students graduating in agriculture, food and related studies in further study,

sustained employment, or both were above 80% at one, three, five and ten years post-graduation, which is in line with the majority of other subjects [61].

However, it is difficult to ascertain exact figures related to agriculture and horticulture alone due to the grouping of courses. For example, in England, agricultural and food related courses are grouped together and limited data on agriculture as a separate course theme are publicly available. One study in Australia suggests that by grouping courses which are potentially little-related, figures on enrolment lack transparency. In the case of Australia, it was reported that agriculture and forestry were grouped with environmental studies, which overall led to data suggesting that likelihood of employment post-graduation appeared less when, in fact, for agriculture it was 20% higher than environmental studies when separated from environmental studies [62].

An additional benefit to future leaders of enrolling on a formal HE course related to agriculture is that it helps to facilitate networks which may prove useful at later stages in an individual's career.

### 3.3.4 Recruitment and recruitment strategies

Beyond the role of the traditional 'influencer' in the earlier stages of an individual's life, and formal education, another key aspect of matching individuals with leadership potential to the sector is recruitment. This includes recruitment by agricultural education establishments working in management and leadership, recruitment onto leadership courses and other conversion-type



courses for those from a non-farming background, and the recruitment methods of firms themselves.

#### *3.3.4.1 Recruitment onto agricultural and agricultural management courses (Further or Higher Education)*

##### **“It is all about marketing” (Agri-Specialist 1)**

Utsugi [33] adapts a model developed by Leach and Zepke [63] to examine decision-making in vocational choices in relation to land-based careers. The three stage model comprises the following decision-making steps: the ‘predisposition stage’ (which considers factors such as family background, education, gender and parental disposition), the ‘search stage’ (where the individual explores the vocational options available to them) and the ‘choice-making stage’ (where active decisions are made based upon a variety of factors such as availability and cost). While traditional influencers are believed to play an important role in the decision-making trajectory of young people, less attention has been paid to how further and higher education institutions recruit individuals onto their courses. Daynard [64] outlines how ‘smart marketing’ is required by educational establishments wanting to recruit students onto agricultural courses, which involves studying perceptions of a career in the sector, understanding why students choose where to study, tailoring messages towards different stakeholders such as parents and potential students, and incorporating ‘buzz words’ or terminology that is likely to appeal to non-

agricultural students. They identify the importance of how language is used for the purpose of recruitment and recognise certain words or terms, such as ‘green’ and ‘technological’ as potentially influencing a potential student’s decision as to what to choose to study. The importance of language will be explored further in section 3.6.7. A study of careers in dairy in Ireland discovered a positive correlation between studying agricultural science at school and choosing an agriculture-related course or career [35]. Schools outreach, therefore, becomes one key method linking young people to agricultural management courses.

Schools outreach might involve visitors going directly to schools, discussion events, or interested students going for experience events at a university which might involve an overnight stay and attending one or two lectures and related social events. Traditionally, this might have occurred in more rural areas or areas located close to agricultural colleges but now some inner city cohorts are reportedly being targeted, as well as STEM-focused events, which attract students from a more varied background of abilities and interests.

**“[We create] opportunities to try and broaden our exposure that then leads to those opportunities for people becoming aware of us and finding their way in” (Agri-specialist 5)**

**“We are going into schools, talking to them about what a course in food or farming a land-based area might involve” (Agri-Specialist 5)**



Such an obvious recruitment method is crucial but funding has been recognised as an issue [64] and while several of our participants representing agricultural educational establishments reported actively engaging with schools, they also recognised that their efforts might not be sufficient to draw significant numbers of students from a non-farming background into the industry.

**“This isn’t just about trying to keep numbers up here at [the agricultural college]. It is – how can you appeal to an eighteen year old who doesn’t come from a farming background” (Agri-Specialist 2)**

Of those we spoke to who run agricultural management courses, it seemed that there were few who could offer definite figures pertaining to how many students came from a non-farming background. One participant described the proportion of students coming from a non-farming background as ‘stubbornly low’, but stated that about five or six per cent came from a non-rural background (with just a few more coming more specifically from a non-farming background), for both foundation and undergraduate degrees. The number of career changers coming onto courses as mature students was described as ‘tiny’ or ‘miniscule’, and estimates varied among participants as to whether numbers had grown over the last 5 years. One participant stated that the majority were still from an agricultural background but that there was ‘more diversity’ and ‘increasing numbers who don’t come from an agricultural background’ (Agri-specialist 5).

**“Those people who’ve found their way to an agricultural course, they’ve done so in increasingly broad ways. So it is not just about living down the road from a farm anymore. There are other ways in” (Agri-specialist 5)**

While another feared that little had changed at all over the last five to ten years. One participant felt that in agriculture, there had been little change but that:

**“In horticulture it is changing fast. I think the innovation and technology in horticulture is probably bringing in a different kind of person than you might necessarily see in agriculture [...] Horticulture is probably just starting to turn the tide” (Agri-specialist 4)**

Potential solutions to the barriers faced in schools outreach programmes will be explored further in section 3.6, but beyond schools outreach as a solution, it is clear that more innovative methods are required to engage high-performing students and people from a non-farming background with the possible agricultural management courses available, as well as how to support their transition if they do not have any experience in the industry so far.

First of all, the industry as a whole needs to build a similar reputation among the graduate cohort as other industries with ‘kudos’ attached to them.



**We don't always have those kind of graduate platforms [like] those kind of bigger employers offering those opportunities with a certain amount of kudos attached to them. We don't perhaps have that presence in the graduate marketplace the same way (Agri-specialist 5)**

This may already be being done by certain types of firm within the industry but there is very little representation on the part of primary producers. This is likely to be financially-driven but also due to the fragmented nature of primary production and the likely lack of collaboration between employers and industry organisations to create a 'face of farming' whose purpose is to represent at graduate platforms on behalf of the industry, rather than on behalf of a single business.

Secondly, the various types of media used by young people need to be effectively harnessed to engage their attention. Trends change rapidly, particularly social media, therefore it is important to have steer from young people themselves in social media recruitment drives. Social media as a recruitment tool was mentioned more by those running non-FE or HE training opportunities among our respondents, and although some social media is certainly used by universities and colleges, due to a lack of individuals showing willingness to be interviewed, the level at which social media is used by universities and colleges cannot be ascertained.

Several large organisations have harnessed the success of 'social media influencers' (not to be mistaken with traditional influencers such as parents and teachers). Social media influencers

are individuals who have built up a large following on one or more platforms based on a reputation in a particular area of expertise or topic.

**"We invited a number of farming social media influencers to those sessions which was really useful. So in terms of that, it was a direct messaging approach [...] which has been really quite successful at gaining new followers [...] Instagram is probably the one which has worked best for us. We have got Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, but I think Instagram is where we've had the most responses from" (Agri-specialist 7)**

**"He's got like sixty thousand followers on his YouTube channel [...] then we got another influx of enquiries" (Agri-specialist 9)**

**"We bombarded Twitter [...] Across the whole thing we had 8 million impressions in that week, and that is as good as a paid-for campaign [there is no way that somebody like me or anybody in [the organisation] or in 90% of the industry can relate to those [young] people" (Agri-specialist 1)**

**"We approached her because she had 70,000 or 80,000 followers on Instagram mostly, there are a few older men but mostly girls aged between 16 and 25" (Agri-Specialist 1)**

Social media, and the internet more generally, should not be overlooked as a crucial tool not only for attracting new entrants to the industry but also creating important networks between themselves as well as landowners, investors,



seasoned farmers etc [33]. Many small farms are still without a business website but use of social media and the internet among young people, including young farmers, is extremely common and can be used as a promotional tool for the industry and an effective recruitment tool for businesses seeking to broaden their search for talent [40]. Podcasts, webinars, social media platforms and YouTube can be used as standalone recruitment methods or can be integrated into courses or online resources for employers *and* potential employees.

In addition to this, television media was also report to be a highly successful, albeit more challenging, route for recruitment, with one scheme being broadcast on a major breakfast channel reportedly leading to 400 applicants for a programme in quick succession following the broadcast. Television and radio campaigns, similar to those carried out by the armed forces, would likely be beneficial but again, a facilitating body would need to drive this on behalf of the industry. Other ad hoc representation is useful but too sporadic to drive lasting change.

Another organisation mentioned how partnering with a large sponsor not directly associated with agriculture allowed their scheme to have a much wider reach than it might normally at no extra cost to them, as it allows a scheme or programme to ‘piggyback’ onto the sponsor’s media framework.

### 3.3.4.2 Recruitment more generally

Recruitment methods were described by some participants as ‘multipronged’ but still tended

towards a farming background audience, which quickly excludes a large pool of potential recruits.

**“We’ve linked in with a number of colleges that offer agricultural courses. We’ve linked in with the young farmers, NFYC, Scottish and Welsh federations as well” (Agri-specialist 7)**

One participant who was more focused on recruiting from a non-farming background used much more direct approaches such as email drops, social media, phone calls, visiting local job centres, and training job centre staff to be more aware of opportunities within the agricultural industry. Where advertising was carried out in farming media circles, much of this was to recruit support or potential employment from employers within the industry. One organisation has also arranged time spent on farms for job coaches from job centres, so this exercise could be extended towards other key influencers.

### 3.3.5 Eligibility criteria

Part of the recruitment process depends upon the eligibility criteria of the institution or organisation in question, as this has the potential to deselect certain individuals due to personal characteristics (such as age) or lack of a certain qualification, for example. However, it was reported that some people from non-farming backgrounds do also deselect themselves or worry they will not be selected due to personal perceptions around ‘fit’.



**“A lot of the ones from non-farming backgrounds thought, oh, the farming ones are going to get all the benefit, they’ll be the first pick. But that’s not how I viewed it. To me, coming into the industry is just as valuable to come from a non-farming background. We need that new blood. We need that change of things and to get people to think differently. We spend a lot of time getting those non-farming people through and would give them a bit of extra help (Agri-specialist 6)**

One university representative mentioned that their selection process has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

**“We don’t have time to interview anymore. It was COVID that hit that, where you then couldn’t interview. So now it is based on the personal statement and their academic qualifications (Agri-specialist 2)**

Another non-university representative responsible for recruiting people to shorter courses stated that their selection process depended solely upon the attitude of the application.

**“We never went on qualifications. Never. It was more where they were, what they were seeing, what they wanted to do” (Agri-Specialist 6)**

Similarly, another respondent used a ‘day on a farm’ as a method of selection. This allowed course leaders to determine the willingness of the candidate to ‘show up’ and also gain feedback from employers as to their suitability to a role.

**“We’ll take anybody. They’ve just got to get through our selection process and we’re hoping that [a] day on the farm is where we’ll determine whether they are suitable for that environment” (Agri-specialist 9)**

### *3.3.6 Type of farming or sector*

According to one study, types of farming associated with sustainability, agro-ecology and more regenerative approaches tend to attract entrants who are ‘far more likely to be female, educated and young’ [4] (p. 3). Such ‘eco’ terms have come under scrutiny by some experts due to the implication that the practices employed by all commercial farming businesses are not ‘nature friendly’. But due to the gradual shift of the industry as an entity towards an environmentally-driven agenda, associations between nature-friendly agendas and the wider agricultural industry might help to boost the attractiveness of the industry.

### *3.3.7 Business and leadership experience gained elsewhere*

It can be easier for new entrants from non-farming backgrounds to identify opportunities or specialisations than traditional farmers who identify with certain methods and practices [23]. A study of new farming entrants also demonstrated that they tend to be pragmatic, seeking to learn and experience by visiting a variety of farms with differing business models and diversification strategies before building their own business strategy [4].

### *3.3.8 Changes in farming practices*

The introduction of new technologies has, and will, change the nature of agricultural



management and labour. Stock managers, for example, will depend more on the successful use of apps, and crop-centred businesses now require scientific and technological knowledge beyond that traditionally associated with it. New, high-tech jobs are common in the industry but the public perception of it as a career has yet to catch up with these transitions. As mentioned, greater emphasis on the environment and biodiversity renewal requires a whole new set of skills and knowledge which might attract individuals who previously would not have considered a career in farming.

### *3.3.9 Supporting new entrants in becoming agri-leaders*

It is essential that, once recruited, new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds are retained, the act of which may face challenges additional to other retention issues seen in the industry. For further details, see Toogood [19].





## 3.4 The role of networks: How social capital can encourage entrepreneurialism, leadership and growth

*The vocational choices young people make are not simply determined by their preferences or perception of work. They are the result of the structural process whereby an interconnectedness of assorted social factors builds their preferences and perception of work (Utsugi 2012: 5)*

The importance of networks to new entrants and entrepreneurial activity is prevalent within the literature [28, 62]. Networks provide access to new knowledge, as well as groups or individuals who may offer potential to help with more tangible requirements, such as land or assets. Equally, connections formed between entrepreneurs mean that those with a 'large entrepreneurial network identify more opportunities' [28] (p. 23). According to Pindado et al [28]:

*The results suggest that new part-time farmers who treat farming as their second job are less likely to identify new business opportunities. By contrast, new farmers with high levels of confidence in their entrepreneurial competencies tend to identify more new business opportunities. Farmers' weak social ties and a positive attitude in their context towards entrepreneurship increases opportunity identification (p. 19)*

Some studies suggest that weak social ties between employers in agriculture are ultimately of benefit to the growth of the business due to being less likely to be held back by more traditional and less innovative peers [27]. However, strong social ties which cross sectoral and industry boundaries might be of benefit to a potential leader, as such broad networks allow for new ideas and innovation to be stimulated.

The aim of several of the schemes with whom we spoke to is specifically to build networks among participants. For others, the aim is to highlight the networks that might already exist in local areas. Networks are recognised as key to potential leaders moving forward within the industry, and may be considered in terms of communities of support. This might be achieved through bringing the same group of people together for webinars, conferences, training events, farm walks and socials.



“Others came with a wish to start their own business from a non-farming background, but really their links to the industry were very minimal for that. So, they were coming as much for that networking element [...] because they didn’t know where to start” (Agri-specialist 6)

“That’s where the point about agricultural networks comes in more because you’re more likely to be integrated within those already. You’ll probably have a working knowledge of how tenancies work or share farming or, you know, the various opportunities that are available [...] Particularly from the new entrants that we’ve spoken to, they really have noticed a difference in their opportunities once they’ve broken into the agricultural network” (Agri-specialist 7)

## 3.5 Diversity in leadership

Agriculture as an industry is reputed for lacking diversity among its workforce [40, 19, 65], a pattern mirrored by uptake of agri-food courses at higher education level [66]. While not the only industry culprit, this lag is likely to be of detriment to agriculture in terms not only of creativity and reputation linked to moral justice, but also because diverse workforces have been linked to improved financial performance [67]. The report, *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*, states that their ‘latest analysis reaffirms the strong business case for both gender diversity and ethnic and cultural diversity in corporate

Another participant described networks as essential to any business leader in agriculture, and stated that even those already established within the industry are unaware of the importance of networks, and that their businesses suffer as a result of this. Including non-agricultural individuals within wider networks is seen as important to avoid self-perpetuating negativity.



leadership—and shows that this business case continues to strengthen. The most diverse companies are now more likely than ever to outperform non-diverse companies on profitability’ [67] (p. 3). According to another report, ‘82% of business leaders are certain that a more diverse and inclusive workforce will help them improve their financial performance’ [68] (p. 18).

Despite ad hoc efforts to increase diversity among the workforce overall, diversity across the agricultural industry is still lacking, and in addition to exploring the binary of people from a



farming or non-farming background, the issue of diversity in the industry is one which is in dire need of advancing. The dearth of diversity among leaders in the industry was described by one study interviewee as ‘sabotaging the industry’ (Agri-specialist 11).

### 3.5.1 Black and people of colour (BPOC)

**“I think the industry could benefit from having people from different cultures and backgrounds because it is quite mono-culture, the farming industry [...] Agriculture is so siloed that we constantly just want to hang around with people who do the same thing as us, which makes us feel comfortable. But you won’t get any gains if you’re comfortable” (Agri-specialist 3)**

Farming in the UK has traditionally been a white-dominated industry, described as ‘structural racialisation’, which has resulted in it being the least diverse occupation in England and Wales [65, 69]. Very few black and people of colour (BPOC) work in the agricultural industry, and even fewer are farm holders in their own right. A number of barriers exist at a variety of levels to promoting greater inclusion of BPOC individuals but comparatively little has been achieved in order to bridge such a gap, despite attention being brought to the whiteness of the profession. Barriers include racial microaggressions or racial violence, unconscious bias in recruitment or campaign targeting, intersectionality (such as growing up poor), encountering ignorance and

harmful stereotypes, urban upbringings, and experiences of isolation and disconnection [65].

The recommendation is that in order to combat racism in green career sectors, a combination of support and representation from white-led institutions should be combined with well-supported BPOC-led movements [65]. While organisational diversity has the potential to encourage a ‘stronger employer brand’ [68] (p. 20), one of the key benefits of opening a business’s doors to a wider pool of potential candidates by ‘seeding awareness’ beyond the traditional recruitment pools is that it could help businesses attract a greater number of both entry-level and management-level candidates from a variety of skill backgrounds.

Interviews with participants mirrored findings by Terry [65], revealing that the industry does not simply lack diversity, but falls short in terms of levels of prejudice still encountered regarding BPOC individuals.

**“I have been in the industry for nearly thirteen years and sometimes I still feel like I don’t belong” (Anonymous)**

**“The other thing is xenophobia [...] just that fear and incompetence and lack of understanding” (Agri-specialist 11)**

**“There is a lot of unconscious bias and gender blindness and race blindness” (Agri-specialist 11)**

**“There is a lot of misogyny, racism, homophobia” (Agri-specialist 14)**



One participant reported knowing an individual who worked in primary production but left as a result of prejudiced behaviour. This corroborates Terry's acknowledgement that challenging rural whiteness might be perceived as an 'attack on Britishness' [65] (p. 10), and openly discussing barriers to both employment of, and opportunities available to, BPOC people can cause discomfort.

**"If something was easy, it would already have been done. And if it is easy and comfortable, it is probably not a good enough change. Change has to make you uncomfortable" (Agri-specialist 3)**

A number of study participants reported that either the organisation for whom they work or the industry overall has a significant way to go in terms of representation of BPOC individuals.

**"We've got a low proportion of students from BAME backgrounds but that reflects where our strongest recruiting areas are. That is not us saying we are happy with that" (Agri-specialist 2)**

**"People don't take the time out to educate themselves about different backgrounds, and how certain comments or certain things make people feel" (Agri-specialist 3)**

There exist pockets of individuals who are striving to resolve the cultural issues around diversity issues in farming but much more needs to be done to join their work up with a bigger industry push aiming for more lasting change and a

permanent cultural shift. The use of social media has been one means of achieving this.

**"It has got to be a long journey and we have got to put budgets aside to do these things" (Agri-specialist 3)**

### 3.5.2 Women and leadership

**"We've still got a situation now where if a woman is on an agricultural panel, people congratulate themselves. I think, how is that still a thing?!" (Agri-specialist 3)**

**"I think it is getting better but it is still not where it should be" (Agri-specialist 1)**

Numerous studies have shown that leadership in agriculture is often constructed in terms of hegemonic masculinity, meaning that perceptions of who is a leader in farming is often afforded by default, to men and male behaviours [70]. It is suggested that women in leadership positions have, now and in the past, had to camouflage their femininity by adopting different behaviours or avoiding talk of certain topics, such as family, even though leadership styles adopted by women can often be more communicative and nurturing than those used by men. But it has also been recognised that some women might not have the confidence to start their own business or recognise their input as entrepreneurial or business-creative [71], particularly when faced with a male-dominated environment [72].

In a study of women in farming and the agricultural sector in Scotland [44], exclusionary practices were reported which made women feel



unwelcome by existing male leaders, and overall women were underrepresented among the elected leadership of national-level farming bodies. Only a third of female respondents in said study showed any interest in engaging with leadership roles, with lack of confidence partly responsible. Some women also reported feeling intimidated by their male peers.

According to McCarthy [73], ‘female representation on dairy co-operative boards in the UK, Netherlands and New Zealand is higher than in Ireland, but remains low’ (p. ii). They suggest that potential female board members would benefit from mentoring and increased information regarding board requirements and the benefits of membership, in order to increase the number of female ‘trailblazers’. But it is also the responsibility of the varying committees and sub-committees across the industry to address gender imbalance in high-performing and leadership roles. This should not be to tick a ‘quota’ box, but to actively shift cultural perceptions regarding the place of women in leadership positions within the agricultural industry. A number of female-led boards now exist within the UK which does demonstrate progress, but they should not act as isolated cases or the exception to the norm.

Reports of misogyny were common among study participants, either as experienced directly or witnessed of others. Several talked about how it was not uncommon for a woman working in agriculture to undergo a period of not being accepted by men working for the same business

or organisation until at least several months had passed, and employers discussed having been part of discussions where men, including recognised ‘leaders’ within the industry had actively attempted to dissuade them from employing a woman in an industry role, with one employer being told, ‘women can’t be farmers’. Another participant stated that some people will state outright that they do not want a woman filling a particular role when recruiting; this applied to women across all facets of the industry but particularly positions of leadership.

**“It’s really hard to deal with the ‘I don’t want a woman’ requests. You know, that’s chronic “(Agri-specialist 15)**

It was also reported that women are left out of decision-making processes or not ‘invited to the table’ for discussions around important issues if their name is not officially on a holding. There were suggestions that efforts to improve diversity among the agricultural industry workforce were poor, and at times a ‘tick box exercise’ rather than a meaningful effort to encourage deep-seated change.

**“I felt like there was this automatic sort of collective huddle happening somewhere else where, yes, we know we need to do it but it’s too hard, we’re not going to do it” (Agri-specialist 6)**

However, by allowing female business leaders to change ‘how business is done’, cultural definitions of what might be appropriate business practice may also be changed, which in turn



might lead to a greater number of females moving into leadership roles. Fortunately, social media has allowed a platform for these issues to be discussed openly, and key voices within the industry, belonging to both men and women, are pushing hard to shift perceptions.

**“There are exceptions who are creating the space for more women to mentor women” (Agri-specialist 11)**

Success stories related to women working in leadership roles within the industry were frequent within this study, with innumerable qualities attributed to women, particularly with regards to leadership roles. One participant stated that they would always seek a woman for a managerial role due to their tendency towards good people skills and organisation. One report points to a study which investigated almost 22,000 companies in 91 countries, and ‘found that having at least 30% of women in leadership roles added 6% to net profit margins’ [73] (p. 4).

The potential for women to undertake a greater number of leadership roles in agriculture is infinite, as are the benefits likely to be reaped by the industry should such a shift be facilitated. At an early age, women are frequently deterred from climbing career ladders in the agricultural sector due to traditional patterns of succession and/or familial expectations so change needs to begin at the earliest socialisation stage. But a continued push to ensure that women are regarded and treated equally and ensure positive behaviour is encouraged between and by those in

leadership positions (of boards, for example) and more specifically, by men, is urgently required.

### 3.5.3 Diversity more generally

Several participants commented on how horticulture as a sector has seen a rise in the employment of, or opportunities taken up by, BPOC individuals as compared to agriculture, suggesting anecdotally that horticulture might be more diverse and welcoming as a sector than agriculture. Horticulture has been described as ‘an important entry point for many BPOC into farming’ due to it being regarded as more accessible in urban environments compared to agriculture [65] (p. 18).

Among our participants, it was also suggested that perceptions might vary between smaller and larger firms.

**“I think if you look at some of the more traditional farming and smaller family farms, I think you would probably struggle to see much diversity and willingness for diversity [...] If you go into some of the larger companies, I think it is different because they are run as a company rather than a farm” (Agri-specialist 4)**

One participant revealed that even the word ‘diversity’ among some was misinterpreted, where it was understood it to mean diversification rather than relating to people.



Attitudes among study participants were, however, open and optimistic towards a more diverse future for the industry.

**“At the end of the day, everybody is a consumer. So, we should be looking at promoting a diverse industry that people, consumers, can see themselves and recognise and think that is something they associate with” (Agri-specialist 4)**

Another participant suggested that recruiting people from more diverse backgrounds onto HE courses should entail an expansion of clubs, societies and activities that show that they are diverse and welcoming to all in order to ‘reflect wider society’ as much as possible.



## 3.6 What might be the ‘real world’ strategies to widening the pool of potential leaders in the industry?

*“If we don’t crack this, if we don’t get it sorted or at least start on that path to doing it, we’re going to look at an industry that’s just not going to thrive”*  
(Agri-specialist 6)

This section aims to contribute to a growing body of work related to the development of new leaders within the agricultural industry, with the intention of augmenting the pool of ideas being developed or implemented by industry experts already working in the field.

### 3.6.1 Diversity

Some attention has been paid to the issue of diversity in the industry [65, 74], and further research has also been conducted examining BPOC individuals and the outdoors, and access to nature [75]. In addition, while few, there are several key individuals who represent BPOC who are gradually gaining a platform within the wider industry, and the varying issues and opportunities surrounding women in agriculture are also coming to the fore [44]. Rather than act as silos, reports, representatives, and groups which are currently marginalised, particularly in terms of leadership roles in agriculture, must be allowed a wider platform to encourage a cultural shift in attitudes towards recruitment and employment.

**“There is a difference between equality and equity. We need to give women and people from minority backgrounds a step up. We need to be doing more than giving them equal opportunity”** (Agri-Specialist 17)

One individual mentioned the difficulty of onboarding various different industry bodies or independent organisations to create a collaborative campaign to attract new leaders from a variety of backgrounds that will have sufficient impact to attract beyond the tiny pool the industry currently recruits from.

### 3.6.2 Research strategies

Further research is required using a framework such as the capability framework to determine in more detail what skills, qualifications, aptitudes, competencies, and attitudes are required of potential new leaders. At the same time, the needs of those potential leaders in terms of pay, conditions, opportunities for progression, training and personal development need also to be considered to ensure appropriate matching can occur to the benefit of both cohorts.



**“Rather than trying to tell them that they will be part of the farming business, it is matching their aspirations. What do they want to be a leader of? What are their aspirations? Do they want to run a sustainable business? Do they want to support the environment? Well, actually, yes. Okay, well come and be a farmer!”**  
**(Agri-Specialist 4)**

### 3.6.3 Institutional strategies (FE and HE)

Several participants agreed that agricultural educational establishments are in need of a ‘shake up’, and that they will play a crucial role in the development of new leaders required by the industry. While engagement with individuals from a non-farming background will vary from institution to institution, relying on the traditional pool of potential recruits may not be efficient moving forwards. The controversial lifting of student caps at universities (meaning that there is no limit to how many students can, in principle, enrol on a course) does offer some opportunity to encourage greater social mobility, and a focus on Widening Participation across all universities to recruit greater numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds should lead to ‘real world’ opportunities. This might include the development of full or partial scholarships for outstanding students from a non-farming background (such as the John Innes Foundation Bursary [www.johninnesfoundation.org.uk/what-we-do/](http://www.johninnesfoundation.org.uk/what-we-do/)), or industry-funded grants for specific

courses where potential ‘leaders’ might be lacking.

Widening participation programmes related to agriculture face additional challenges of public perception around the industry therefore extra effort will be required to entice capable students from, for example, low income, urban backgrounds onto a long-term course. This is particularly likely due to perceptions of low pay being linked to the industry.

One of the most successful programmes implemented in the global north has been that of the 4-H programme in the United States. Born from a small plant-growing club in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the 4-H programme has developed from the setting up of agricultural after-school clubs locally to a nationwide ‘Cooperative Extension System’ which is made up of a community of over 100 universities and has a network of 500,000 volunteers, 3,500 professionals, and mentors 6 million youths to help them ‘grow into true leaders today and in life’ (<https://4-h.org/about/what-is-4-h/#!menu-builder>). Among other objectives, the initiative acts to expose students to agriculture. In Canada, the Canada Agriculture and Food museum facilitates 4-day long junior farm camps (age 12-14) which offer young people the chance to take part in work on a real working farm.

There also exists a recruitment programme among agricultural colleges in the US, the ‘Aggie Ambassador’ where students are offered course



credits, and in some cases, payment, to travel to schools, careers fairs, and trade shows exhibiting agriculture as a viable and exciting career to pursue [64]. As well as actively working to attract new recruits to the industry, these ambassadors also develop leadership skills as part of their role. In the UK, a presence of student and young farmer ambassadors exists but a collaborative rollout of a scheme similar to the ‘Aggie Ambassador’ could be of benefit to all stakeholders. All large agricultural educational establishments would need to buy-in which may help to counter fears that resources directly put in by any one university might end up benefiting a competitor. Such collaboration may also lead to a cross-industry representation group which could represent the industry at major graduate fairs across the country, as well as opportunities to collaborate across businesses for the purpose of training and development [76].

Some universities in the US have created more flexible agricultural courses, such as UC Davis whose Arts/Science Fusion programme ensures that all students receive exposure to agriculture as part of their wider course [64].

Requirements of universities related to work experience prior to enrolment might be assisted by the introduction of ‘volunteering credits’, which individuals might acquire from a variety of experiences, such as working on a city farm (e.g. in animal care). Employer schemes offering volunteering credits might also be set up for businesses who have the capacity to offer short work experience packages to young people, and

an effective incentive scheme set up for participating businesses.

Other suggestions from study respondents for FE and HE institutions include the creation of new and more interesting content that reflects business in agriculture in the contemporary climate, to avoid over-focussing on ‘bums on seats’, to reconnect with the study and career pathways of the student’s themselves (by improving careers advice services, for example), to re-introduce sandwich courses for those on agricultural management courses in areas not directly related to primary production in order to develop skills, and to push advanced apprenticeships to recruit potential leaders to the relevant courses.

**“I think there is a big opportunity there for universities to engage more with the business opportunity arena and what that can deliver” (Agri-specialist 15)**

### 3.6.4 Skills Bootcamps

**“It is a way of getting you from zero to farm hero in 16 weeks” (Agri-Specialist 9)**

**“The LEPs are in charge of what they want for that area and you have to come to the table with your employers and say, ‘I’ve got fifteen employers who want to do [x, y, z] and they can’t recruit. Can we do a bootcamp on that?’” (Agri-specialist 11)**

Skills Bootcamps are government-funded courses which are built around the needs of local



employers and their related supply chains. They are free to individuals over the age of 19 and offer up to 6 weeks of courses and work experience to develop skills in a certain field. Skills Bootcamps are an ideal opportunity to harness government funds to promote and recruit individuals into the agricultural industry, but so far only the East of England is engaging with this opportunity in relation to agriculture (as far as the authors are aware). Skills Bootcamps are one means by which to provide the experience required by individuals interested in a course or career in agriculture for whom gaining experience would normally be a challenge, and it is recommended that industry bodies dialogue with regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in their area to create skills bootcamps within the agricultural industry for the coming year. One of the many benefits of using Skills Bootcamps includes the fact that a guaranteed job interview will await the participant at the end of the bootcamp.

One organisation working with a LEP is planning to add some professional qualifications such as tractor driving, transport of animals, and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) licensing to ensure that potential new staff are legal to work on certain holdings following the bootcamp. Something similar could be arranged for high-level staff who might not need the basic skills but want to develop further leadership and management skills in order to become leaders in their chosen area of expertise

## **“We need them work ready at the end of the 16 weeks” (Agri-Specialist 2)**

There is no requirement for a Book Skills camp to have an age limit or specification.

### **3.6.5 New workforce models and employer training**

Training schemes for business employers could introduce the concept of new workforce models which will apply to staff from any background but facilitates the inclusion of those from a non-farming background who may want to work in the industry but may also choose to top up their income from another career source, such as consultancy. The resulting model might offer a shift-work approach. The latter cohort may lack training as do many managers of businesses where ad hoc labour is required and this creates a gap for both parties as a) the staff member struggles to improve skills and b) the managers cannot get the best out of their staff due to lack of training (but are also lacking in leadership skills, time, resources to provide training themselves). There are many people who are attracted to the idea of agricultural work but are put off by the rates of pay, so a blended work approach being made available to employees might be the way forward for many smaller businesses.

### **3.6.6 Encourage successors to leave the family farm before returning to run the business**

**“It concerns me that quite a lot of farmers’ sons and daughters think the education element isn’t important” (Agri-Specialist 2)**



The majority of our participants believe that individuals already within the industry who are yet to become established on their own holdings would benefit from taking time away from their family farm to develop skills and have experiences which would help them transition into successful business leaders themselves. Although now somewhat dated, international research demonstrated that successors in England were less likely to undertake such a ‘professional detour’ than their counterparts in North America, Austria and Germany [77].

**“The best farms that I saw where sons and daughters had come home to farm was where they had gone away, got a good qualification and then they’d gone to university, got a good qualification, and then gone and worked away for an extensive period. They came back, and they changed farm businesses” (Agri-specialist 2)**

**“Even another family business which isn’t your own and learning from that and being able to take that learning home at the point that is right for you can be really significant and also open doors” (Agri-Specialist 5)**

There was also the suggestion that some successors were limiting themselves entirely by committing to the family business rather than seeking opportunities that might be better suited to their skill sets, potential and interests.

**“Young people who have gone into the family business, I think sometimes they are**

**not reaching their full potential because they are within that business and they haven’t seen what’s on the other side of the fence” (Agri-Specialist 9)**

For one who did leave the family farm to seek new opportunities, he admitted that he ‘probably wanted to get away from’ his ‘overbearing father’.

A particularly successful ‘leader’ in farming mentioned that:

**“My parents encouraged me to do something else to find what I liked in life, and if I came back to it, then that’s great, but they didn’t want to just say ‘you will be a farmer’” (Agri-Specialist16)**

They stated that completing a Master’s degree in business management was ‘probably the best thing I ever did’ saying ‘it gave me a really good working knowledge of every single part of business from accounting, sales, marketing and just sort of gave me the confidence to give it a go (Agri-Specialist 16). They have also been particularly successful with grant applications due to their broadened work experiences.

But of those who do seek some level of qualification such as a degree, the majority do then go on to return to their family farm, according to one course leader at a leading agricultural educational establishment. Gasperini [6] states how, in the US, some of the larger family farm businesses have a requirement that ‘any family member who aspires to senior management roles to have pursued a successful



off-farm career for at least several years post university' (p. 314).

### 3.6.7 The importance of language

*'Agriculture speaks a language few people outside of the sector understand'*  
(Daynard 2010: 24)

The use of language emerged as crucially important to both recruitment and dialogues around leadership in agriculture, in both the literature and among our participants. Daynard [64] identified a link between the use of language and the image of agricultural courses and how attractive they might be to potential students. She discovered how universities in Canada and the US had rebranded courses, with one institution removing the word agriculture from its name and changing it to the College of Land and Food Systems, resulting in enrolment figures doubling.

Several of the respondents responsible for running courses at HE level also discussed decision-making processes related to language, and how attempts had been made to attract a wider pool of applicants.

**"We decided we wouldn't sell ourselves down the river and smack 'sustainable' in front of everything [...] Sustainability is taught throughout all of our modules but we are hoping [that] putting 'environment' back in, might be something that will attract people from non-farming backgrounds" (Agri-specialist 2)**

**"The titles of the courses might need a bit of a tweak if I'm honest [...] I do think they do need to revise a lot or some of the content in the courses that will make it more appealing to people to go for" (Agri-specialist 6)**

One university stated that name changes are underway on some of their courses in order to make them more appealing, by using the words 'environment' or 'policy' in the titles, for example. On the other hand, another respondent also warned of 'pandering to a title to attract people'.

Language and using it to make agriculture feel more relatable was also referred to more generally with regards to the sector:

**"Is there another term that we could use that would open people's eyes and think, yes! [...] making sure we are not pulling the wool over anybody's eyes, but I think we could be more savvy with the way we promote our sector and match their language and their [young people's] aspirations" (Agri-specialist 4)**

**"It is making it relatable [...] You know, you have enjoyed maths, so let's look at actually the statistical analysis and the programming that might be involved in working in an agricultural career" (Agri-specialist 5)**

With regards to employment roles in particular, language also proved important. Some discomfort was demonstrated, or had been witnessed, in relation to the term 'leader' and, in



some cases, ‘manager’. This is similar to Brosnan’s [16] findings where the term leader was perceived as potentially elitist and ‘coach’ or ‘facilitator’ was preferred.

**“The word ‘manager’ can feel quite alien to them [...] The kind of manager/leader jobs that they can envisage are sometimes ‘technical specialists’, it has got that element of doing rather than managing [...] Anything that is focused on getting you in to manage and lead will feel alien and maybe unattractive compared to ‘I’m going to go and ‘do’ this thing” (Agri-specialist 5)**

Even some of the participants we spoke to for the study, who are regarded as leaders by many, were tentative to self-describe that way.

**“You don’t need a title to be a leader”  
(Anonymous)**

Or, they did not necessarily believe that they would be recognised as a leader by others.

**“One of my neighbours said to me, ‘we laugh at you and then, 5 years later, we realise that we’re doing it ourselves” (Agri-Specialist 13)**

**“A lot of the leadership is taken up by the people on the floor, not by the guys sat around the boardroom table” (Agri-specialist 15)**

**“Leadership for me is lifting people up”  
(Agri-specialist 16)**

Another participant warned of overusing the word ‘farming’ in discussions around careers in

agriculture, due to the fact that as a word it might be off-putting to those seeking high-level roles in the industry who do not associate leadership or management with primary production.

### 3.6.8 Recognise the competency potential of all abilities

It is important not to concentrate solely on traditional forms of education as a precursor to leadership, as some individuals who might be challenged in certain ways, such as with dyslexia, also have the potential to be leaders but might need different pathways to be made available to them. A reliance on the degree as a ‘gateway’ qualification has been described as a ‘one-dimensional way of selecting people’ [78] (p. 1) and may in fact cause essential skills required in the labour market to be underdeveloped.

Potential leaders can be individuals who thrive in different learning environments and ranking people on the single dimension of academic qualification potentially diminishes their actual competencies.

**“It is having the ability to convey to people your message or vision, whether that is for the vet or your feed merchant or whether that is for the people working for you. There is something about being really focussed and having a really entrepreneurial mindset and we kind of think that people have either got it or they haven’t [but] all of these traits can be taught” (Agri-specialist 1)**

A pathway to a career in the agricultural industry can be steered according to an individual’s interests. For example, one participant stated



that originally they had wanted to be a veterinarian but they were unable to achieve the necessary grades.

**“I didn’t study hard enough. I ended up working on a farm, and the rest is history” (Agri-Specialist 3)**

This particular individual went on to become what would be considered a ‘leader’ in the industry for a number of reasons.

At the other end of the scale, it should not be assumed that high academic achievers in non-agricultural subjects do not have a place within the industry.

**“What people can do is sign up for doing a biodiversity degree, and they end up in agriculture” (Agri-Specialist 15)**

### 3.6.9 Avoid focusing entirely on youth and the young and make space for career changers

Several participants stated that it would be folly to concentrate on under 40s only in attempting to encourage more leadership talent into the industry, stating that many career changers who have already developed leadership qualities and abilities have, and can, transition into the industry, with a little assistance.

**“I’d want them to be a kind of senior farm worker first, if they’ve not come from a farming background, then I would want them working with my foreman and maybe do a bootcamp at that level leading into the**

**land management stuff after that. Just to make sure there’s that fit [...] You can’t manage the land if you don’t understand the land” (Agri-specialist 10)**

**“So, in bringing professionals in, it just stretches the mindset doesn’t it? Like, the more professionals that you have interacting in the sector, the more the systems and the thinking and the approach moves forward” (Agri-specialist 11)**

Several individuals commented on the potential for career changers to work part-time in the industry, balancing their predominant career with one which makes them feel differently.

**“She’s most happy in the countryside and finds working here [on a farm in addition to her profession] restorative, because that’s what makes her whole. It gives her headspace” (Agri-specialist 16)**

Patterns in the US also demonstrate that there are ‘increasing numbers of millennials in middle and upper management positions’ [6] (p. 313) being prepared to lead agricultural organisations, but that these businesses tend to be very large operations rather than small family farms. It is not uncommon for these business leaders to originate from non-farming roles or roles which were not directly involved with growing, such as marketing or human resources, before taking on direct management in growing positions.

Relocation has been mentioned as an issue therefore the development of relocation



packages for new industry leaders should be considered.

A greater emphasis on the value placed on, and access to, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points was also referred to as a progressive means by which to encourage development among staff, with the added potential of introducing CPD points within agriculture that might mean something outside of the industry and thus make an individual's skills more transferable.

**“The boundaries of the industry will be more fluid. We will see people move in and move out during their career process. But, if we are training people that have completely untransferable qualifications...” (Agri-Specialist 13)**

More on the potential of career changers can be found in Nye and Lobley's *Farm labour in the U.K. Accessing the workforce the industry needs* (2021).

### 3.6.10 Breaking down barriers

It is important that structural and attitudinal barriers, such as those outlined in section 3.2.1 are broken down, some of which will be addressed in the following sections.

**“There is always a barrier. ‘It is not safe for them to be here’. ‘I don’t have time for them to be here’. ‘I don’t have the facilities if a woman wants to come and work on the farm’ [...] There needs to be a lot of perseverance” (Agri-specialist 4)**

**“How do we have a really good story that work experience, having somebody out of the industry actually is brilliant for you, will make your life easier, will solve your problems? [...] If we had enough of those stories we might move things a little bit” (Agri-specialist 4)**

### 3.6.11 Celebrate the business opportunities available in agriculture

The majority of interviewees agreed that opportunities in agriculture were plentiful, and that multiple non-agricultural degrees or skillsets could be transferable to the industry, including but not exclusive to, primary production.

**“You could be a geneticist. You could be an agronomist. You could be a tractor driver. You could work in an abattoir. You could be in food standards. There are many jobs that could be linked to agriculture” (Agri-specialist 3)**

And many referred to the fact that rapid changes in ag-tech provide opportunities which not only appeal to more people but that, potentially, nervousness about technology among older age groups might be a useful means to encourage people to transfer more managerial responsibility at a younger age. The obvious example here is the growth of online banking and the demise of the cheque, which may encourage earlier involvement in financial decisions.

Others highlighted how the need for entrepreneurial leadership within agriculture was



growing, and that smaller businesses in particular benefited from this route.

**“You’ve got to go big, or go niche” (Agricultural specialist 17)**

Several also highlighted how knowledge and experience related to agriculture opened up numerous opportunities to travel, particularly in places such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada, a facet of the industry which should be used to attract more individuals from all backgrounds.

**“It’s the biggest job on earth. You can go anywhere with these qualifications” (Agricultural specialist 10)**

The international potential of agricultural recruits should be explored further, and non-elitist programmes developed which would enable

work exchanges with countries globally which build upon leadership potential of both the domestic agricultural staff and that of the visiting staff. Offering permanent positions to outstanding non-UK staff might help to fill some of the leadership gaps currently in existence but such a proposal is likely to be met with significant opposition generally. However, reconsidering immigration rules in order to open up high-level jobs to skilled internationals will likely remain high on the agenda of many in the industry, particularly in relation to the Shortage Occupation List.





## 4. Conclusion

*'The need is for clear and informed leaders who engage widely across society' (Alliston et al 2007 [79]).*

Targeted studies relating specifically to new entrants and leadership in farming are lacking. This report aims to spark further debate around this topic in the hope that both scholars and industry representatives can engage and contribute to new conversations around the future of agriculture and who might lead it. Determining how best to attract new leaders into agriculture is challenging, and the drivers involved in career-related decision-making are multiple. Optimal conditions for exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities will result from a combination of social, human/cultural and economic/physical capital. Where one is lacking, a heavier weighting elsewhere might help to

remove barriers (e.g. social networks and people who might be willing to partner or offer incubator opportunities). Interventions and systems of support can assist with any or all of these factors.

Leadership skills required in the contemporary climate are very different to those required for past generations of agricultural managers and leaders, therefore strategies to promote and develop new leaders need to be adjusted accordingly to meet the challenges faced by the industry and the individuals needed to drive it forward. Industry leaders need skills which ensure pro-active, rather than reactive, behaviours, constantly working towards building



an effective enterprise rather than operating from a point of crisis. They need to acknowledge the communities within which they operate at a social and environmental level and adjust their practices in ways which benefit their business as well as public goods, harnessing opportunities as they arise.

It is increasingly important to recognise that challenges around the recruitment and development of new leaders do not stop with land access or other barriers to entry, but new entrants will also have to deal with ‘normal’ challenges such as weather, policy changes, dietary patterns, labour shortages and so forth. Therefore, those entering the industry need to be sufficiently prepared, in terms of skills sets, for all eventualities. It is also vital to understand that barriers faced will be different according to different people, and therefore solutions need to be multidimensional, recognising these differences and designing appropriate schemes and strategies (e.g. barriers to BPOC, women, older people, different ways of learning etc). New entrant programmes need to be more inclusive and any further research extended to encompass *all* potential new entrants in order to understand barriers and enablers.

According to Brosnan [16]:

*‘The agri-food industry would benefit from having a team of industry leaders working together to create a shared vision for agricultural and rural leadership development, consult on a strategy, and agree pathways. There is a*

*real requirement for a wider pool of farmers to be mentored and encouraged to challenge themselves and thus provide a new tier of community and regional leaders, and so develop the next generation of farmer leaders’ (p. 15).*

Such a development should also focus on developing individuals so they can appreciate and be inspired by established leaders. This would enable them to follow industry best practice, which in turn would facilitate their ability to influence other people around them in a positive way. There is a clear gap in the measuring systems that assess leadership competencies, and the structures that support the development of leaders, which urgently needs addressing.

The implications of our findings suggest that the industry does not simply need new leaders, but new strategies, new understandings, and a change in attitudes, in order to benefit businesses, to look after people, to benefit the environment, and to promote food security. Nuffield scholar, Daynard [64] stated that ‘recruitment should be an industry-wide goal, not just an institutional challenge’ (p. 3) and that ‘institutions should worry less about competing with each other and more about branding the depth and diversity of career options’ in agriculture (p. 3). The industry needs to get the message out there to business students and other leaders in careers looking for a change that agriculture presents excellent opportunities, and develop more lasting ‘real world’ strategies that consider how to recruit more individuals with



leadership potential across the entire life-cycle of new entrants (from school age upwards).

#### 4.1 Future work

Further work should be in the form of in-depth studies into leadership strategies currently in existence and how these might be improved, such as whether participative or directive leadership is more effective, as well as data collection regarding new leaders/managers who have entered the career from a non-farming background. A mapping exercise to evaluate how well agricultural educational establishments meet the needs of potential employers in horticulture and agriculture would also be of benefit to all stakeholders.

#### 4.2 Study limitations

The sample for this study was small and was further limited by difficulties in accessing the required participants, particularly those with no relation to agriculture. The study subsequently needed to be adjusted accordingly, by interviewing leaders in farming as well as those responsible for running courses. Empirical evidence is not generalisable due to the small sample size.

## 5. Recommendations

For industry	<p><b>Greater collaboration across all agricultural and horticultural public-facing organisations is essential</b> in order to resolve the issues outlined in this report. This could be achieved through the organisation of a <b>cross-organisational national conference</b> to bring together all potential interested parties with the purpose of generating the momentum to drive on-going collaboration and helping to develop further <b>collaborative industry campaigns</b>.</p>
	<p><b>Greater cross-organisational collaboration on inclusivity in the industry and attracting a more diverse workforce is essential.</b> This might be achieved through the collaborative cluster mentioned above, and should involve individuals and organisations already active in the promotion of careers to BPOC, women, and other groups less represented in the industry.</p>
	<p><b>Facilitate networks or network building among new entrants at leadership level</b> – both between similar peer groups as well as established farming industry individuals. This might be achieved through the use of an online forum for aspiring leaders, inter-disciplinary networking events and linking people through social media campaigns. It is vital that local, accessible, face-to-face opportunities are made available in all regions.</p>



For industry (continued)	<p><b>Facilitate a more joined-up approach between business employers, educators (secondary, FE and HE), and young people in order to ensure effective matching for all stakeholders.</b> This would be most effectively achieved following the research mapping study mentioned in the below ‘further research’ section as it will be driven by empirical data.</p>
	<p><b>Build more impactful awareness campaigns</b> regarding the opportunities within agriculture for interesting, exciting and well-paid careers . This needs to be maximised <i>outside</i> of the industry. This will only be achieved by greater collaboration between organisations and educational establishments and through using channels familiar to the target audience.</p>
	<p><b>Work with the extended rural community to subsidise, design and run ‘farm camps’</b> for young people with little to no connection to farming.</p>
	<p><b>Formal succession planning should become as commonplace as making a will.</b> Industry organisations should facilitate succession planning and the training of succession facilitators. If succession continues to be conceived as the transfer of ownership to largely male heirs, we will have failed as a sector. Managerial succession can occur without the transfer of business ownership (think of football teams here) and as this report has demonstrated, improving the gender balance in agricultural leadership can only be beneficial.</p>
	<p><b>Create a more recognised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system</b> and encourage engagement using incentives such as the ability to become a ‘<b>chartered agriculturalist</b>’ (C.Agric). This system is already in place in Australia and is a means by which professional competencies can be officially recognised. It has been discussed in the UK for some time and ‘while not necessarily a ‘licence to farm’, conferral of C.Agric would be formal recognition of a level of professional competency, skills and knowledge against a set of criteria’ [78] (p. 70).</p>
	<p><b>Liaise with the MoD to include explicit inclusion of agricultural opportunities</b> within the Career Transition Partnership and <b>ensure service leaver initiatives are included</b> in any collaborative ‘cluster’ moving forward.</p>
For government	<p><b>Further sustained development of the New Entrant Scheme</b> (through the pilot), is required, with input from organisations such as The Institute for Agriculture and horticulture (TIAH) and The Institute of Agricultural Management (IAGRM). Issues brought up in this report, particularly those around barriers and diversity, should be considered and included in developments moving forward.</p>



<p><b>For education or scheme organisers</b></p>	<p>Students from a non-farming background would benefit from the introduction of <b>more conversion courses</b> in the form of a postgraduate qualification aimed at non-agricultural graduates or career changes who are looking to pursue a career within the industry.</p>
	<p><b>Training on unconscious bias</b>, particularly in relation to gender and race, should be included across all available CPD training courses and agricultural degrees as well as at an organisational level across all key agricultural organisations (this should become a mandatory component of <i>all</i> training).</p>
	<p><b>New entrant programmes should concentrate on ALL potential entrants</b> and not just young entrants wherever possible, <b>or separate schemes should be developed</b> for older new entrants/career changers.</p>
	<p>Education and training aimed at new entrants and those already in farming <b>should include entrepreneurial education</b> (such as generation of ideas, how to search for new opportunities and creative thinking).</p>
	<p><b>Established farmers need access to, and the motivation to participate in, CPD</b> around leadership skills. Long established organisations such as WCF and The Institute of Agricultural Management as well as new organisations such as TIAH should coordinate activities to ensure ease of access to such training as well as recognition of the benefits it brings in terms of professional standing and impact on individual businesses and their employees.</p>
	<p><b>The introduction of an England or UK equivalent to the ‘Aggie Ambassador’</b> (see section 3.6.3 of the full report) in the US should be considered by agricultural educational establishments, offering course credits to students who engage in outreach activities with schools and colleges.</p>
<p><b>For further research</b></p>	<p><b>Conduct a mapping study</b> to determine what is taught at agricultural educational establishments, and what is required by industry employers and potential employees, in order to improve the matching process for all stakeholders.</p>
	<p><b>Implement an action research project with young people to determine, through work experience and exercises, the actual motivators, barriers, aptitude and interest in careers in agriculture.</b> This could be merged with other similar industries, such as fishing, for cost benefit purposes and include a variety of other stakeholders such as lecturers, employers, and scheme organisers.</p>



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