

Edinburgh Technopole Agri-EPI Centre Ltd

The Agri-EPI Centre is a precision engineering innovation hub for the agricultural industry. Marketing Manager **Yoni van Breukelen** talks about the concept behind the centre, the benefits of membership and how the centre is helping farmers produce more with fewer resources.



“The agri-food and agri-tech sectors cover a broad scope of disciplines that must work together to develop new technologies and knowledge that will help make UK farming more productive. We aim to bring them together, working with our members to help them develop technology.”

Can you start by telling us a little about the Agri-EPI Centre?

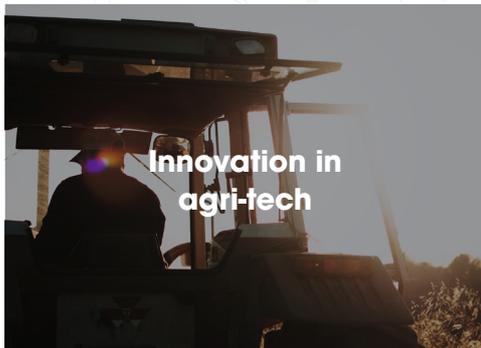
The Agricultural Engineering Precision Innovation (Agri-EPI) Centre was set up as part of the UK agricultural technologies strategy to innovate technology in agriculture, or ‘Agri-Tech’, as we call it. Agri-EPI has four agri-tech innovation ‘hubs’ located across the UK: the Northern hub in Edinburgh, the Midlands hub in Newport, the Southern hub in Cranfield and the South West Dairy Development Centre in Shepton Mallet. We are based at the Northern hub here in Edinburgh. The organisation as a whole specialises in engineering and precision technology, bringing partners together to develop new technologies that will help farmers become more efficient and productive – essentially helping them to produce more with less.

Why did Agri-EPI choose Edinburgh Technopole and what are the benefits of being based there?

The companies and organisations working at the Technopole, including Agri-EPI, are known for being innovative and cutting edge. It’s fantastic to be based at a hub which has that kind of reputation. The recognition that comes from being based at a centre of scientific excellence and innovation, and opportunities for collaboration, are enhanced by co-location alongside key partners, including the University of Edinburgh, the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and Scotland’s Rural College.

What sort of institutions and companies are you partnering with?

We are a membership organisation, so we bring together a variety of players in the agri-food supply chain: farmers; universities; agri-tech and precision farming companies; agronomy and agrochemical companies; and engineers and manufacturers. For example, Tesco, a household name in groceries and retailing, is one of our members. We work with a broad range of farms, both large and small, and many agricultural institutes and governing bodies. Big retail organisations and processors, like Bakkavor and the 2 Sisters Food Group, are also part of our network. The agri-food and agri-tech sectors cover a broad scope of disciplines that must work together to develop new technologies and knowledge that will help make UK farming more productive. We aim to bring them together, working with our members to help them develop technology.



**Innovation in
agri-tech**



**Co-location alongside
key partners**



**Opportunities for
collaboration**

How do you encourage research among your partners?

Bringing people together is a large part of our work, and one of the ways we achieve this is through the satellite farm network. There are 28 large farms in the UK involved in this initiative, all of which share our aspirations for innovation and want to be involved with more applied science. We work together with these farms, installing government-funded technologies and partnering them with academics who conduct research. We also collate and manage the data that comes from such projects, ensuring that it feeds into further studies. The network functions really well as a pilot scheme – the farms show how new developments can work in practice, with the aim that they will be adopted on a larger scale by farmers across the UK.

Can you give us some examples of your work?

There is a dairy farm under development in Dumfries that is using our technology, and likewise another in Edinburgh for beef and sheep. Some of these projects are being run by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). For example, we provided a mass spectrometer that is currently being used in the college's GreenCow project, an investigation of how to measure and control greenhouse gas emissions from cattle and sheep. The Plant Phenotyping and Soil Health Facility in Cranfield is a partnership between Agri-EPI Centre, Crop Health and Protection (CHAP) and Cranfield University. The facility is a key component of the UK's Agri-Tech Strategy and was set up to enable industry, farmers, agronomists and agricultural companies to understand soil management issues and observe changes in crop health over space and time. The facility's research equipment can be used by our members at a discounted rate.

Where do these project ideas originate from?

Many of the core ideas come from our membership network. A lot of our members are start-up enterprises who come to us with project ideas, often needing to bring a consortium together to get the appropriate funding. We can help them to attract the right funding partners and to manage the project once the finance is in place – we're like a project management consultancy in that regard. There's a great deal of potential in this market due to the challenges facing UK farming and food production, not least Brexit – and the UK government is very keen to invest in technology. The funding is there too. It's just a matter of making an idea relevant and attractive.

How do potential members join your organisation?

We often garner interest in our network and technology ideas at big agricultural meetings, where we encounter potential member organisations. We will actively approach some of them and invite them to join us, especially if we're lacking their speciality in our network. At other times companies approach us.

So, what's next for Agri-EPI Centre?

At the moment, we are temporarily based in Bush House Cottages, but we will be moving to the Large Animal Research and Imaging Facility (LARIF) later this year. This new facility, near the Roslin Institute Building, incorporates resources for us and the Centre of Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL), one of the other four UK agri-tech centres. This move will expand our capabilities even further.



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To learn more about the Agri-EPI Centre, visit www.agri-epicentre.com.

To find out more about the facilities and opportunities at Edinburgh Technopole, visit www.edinburghtechnopole.co.uk

