

Newsletter Issue 1: February 2015

Research facility opening soon

NEW service managed field laboratory for industrial-scale research in fresh produce at:
Hasse Fen Road, Soham, CB7 5UW.

After the initial setback from an ecological survey of the site which found some bats, owls and water voles in residence; our construction work is happily back on schedule with a forecast date for completion at the end of June 2015.

NIAB AgriGate Hub Community

With our founder members; [Barfoots](#), [Finlays](#); [Greenvale AP](#), [Strutt & Parker Farms](#); [TH Clements](#); [G's Fresh](#); [Emmett](#) and Tesco; we have established the critical mass for core groups with special interest in key areas of soil health, brassica crop management, and legume crop establishment. The soil health group is expected to also benefit from added input from [Cranfield University](#), [Spearhead](#) and [NRM Laboratories](#).

Membership is free and we welcome collaborative interactions all industry, research and academic organisations with an interest in resource use efficiency in the fresh produce sector.

Recent engagements include discussions with [Anglian Water](#) about their water quality and conservation research. Andy Brown, (Head of Sustainability) explained that working with NIAB AgriGate Hub brings the added benefit of the Hasse Fen facility being ideally located for their flagship Water Resource East Anglia (WREA) project. This multi-sector strategic water resource planning project aims to bring climate resilience and sustainability to mitigate long-term risks in the provision of quality water for customers in the region. Food growers and other land managers have a significant role in helping Anglian Water to achieve WREA goals. We are considering how best to engage in collaborations through NIAB AgriGate Hub.

AD Biogas production has been adopted for renewable energy generation by some members of the AgriGate Hub who have invested in their own plants. Others are keen to explore the opportunities that renewable energy generation offers by way of managing excess and/or waste biomass. NIAB AgriGate Hub has therefore joined the BBSRC [AD Network](#) to keep abreast of science and technology developments in AD, gather information and seize opportunities (funding and research) arising for our community. From a more practical perspective, [Future Biogas](#) is a valued participant in NIAB AgriGate Hub, bringing expertise in the development, cultivation and management of bespoke AD feedstock mixes. Of particular interest is the perennial AD Flower mix which offers new options for managing field margins and, for the fresh produce sector, brings the added benefit of attracting pollinators. We will work with Future Biogas to investigate the cost benefit analysis of this and other mixes which could be harvested for AD.

Post-harvest storage and handling of produce is also a key challenge in reducing fresh produce waste. We welcome the opportunity we now have to work with [Fresh Pod](#) to investigate strategies for extending the applications of their innovative ethylene control products to help growers.

Research activity pipeline

- A range of vegetable research trials are being commissioned from breeders, growers and chemical companies looking for the **added flexibility** of not conducting trials in commercial crops. These trials will be **located at Hasse Fen**.
- Research **grant proposals** are continually being developed to access public sector money to co-fund projects of special interest to NIAB AgriGate Hub members. If you have particular projects you would like to develop we will be very happy to hear from you. See contact details below.
- Grant applications will be led by NIAB as will be the management of research projects, enabling research partners the flexibility to focus on their commercial enterprise.
- Research space is available at Hasse Fen but projects can be located anywhere in the UK.

Anyone interested in joining in this research activity should contact effie.mutasa@niab.com in the first instance.

Special interest topics

A number of topics have emerged as key areas of interest for NIAB AgriGate Hub members as follows:

- **Soil health** : Development of a simple, accurate and reliable soil health indexing system
- **Brassica Crops** : Strategies to control and manage crop maturity
- **Legumes** : Exploitation of rhizobial and mycorrhizal inoculants to improve establishment and reduce fertilizer and irrigation inputs.
- **Waste** : Understanding waste streams in fresh produce grower enterprises; establishing whether it is a problem or an undervalued resource.

Hosting trials

There are opportunities to host trials in commercial crops and any growers interested should contact nick.watson@niab.com in the first instance.

Wider industry engagement

To ensure and maintain the relevance and value of research at NIAB AgriGate Hub, we are actively engaging with industry representatives and expert consultants including the, HDC, Grower Associations, and specialist Fresh Produce Consultancies.

Apprenticeship training is an important objective for us at NIAB AgriGate Hub. We are applying for funding to support this activity. If you are interested in hosting funded apprentices in your business, please let us know so that we can add your details to our host register.

Finally...

Newsletters will be issued on a three-monthly cycle so look out for the next instalment in May.

If in the meantime you have questions or require further information about NIAB AgriGate Hub please Contact:

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