

HARPER DAIRY INNOVATION

Images: HAU

Agri-tech and science to help lead the dairy sector forward

A new partnership at Shropshire's university will focus on scientific research, technology and product development to help bring added innovation to the dairy sector.

Harper Adams University and Dairy Crest launched their new Food Innovation Centre in April, at the main Edgmond campus, which will benefit the sector and enhance student learning.

The new centre was officially opened by the Princess Royal who toured the site, met guests and heard from researchers ahead of the official unveiling.

Princess Anne was accompanied throughout the visit by Stephen Alexander, Dairy Crest chairman, Mark Allen Dairy Crest chief executive and Dr David Llewellyn, university vice-chancellor.

NFU Regional Director Rob Newbery, Dairy Adviser Rosie Maltby and Rednal-based farmer and NFU Dairy Chairman Michael Oakes were also at the event.

The new partnership comes at a time when the UK's agri-tech strategy is being implemented by Government and when universities and businesses are being increasingly encouraged to work together to support economic growth.

The contract between Dairy Crest and Harper Adams is hailed as a unique collaboration project which puts both at the forefront of innovation in British food.

The dairy processor is known for its strong market brands including Cathedral City, Country Life and Clover, among others, and the move comes after it

relocated around 40 research and development and technical staff to the campus.

This followed the closure in 2014 and subsequent demolition of the nearby Crudgington Creamery site which is currently being developed for housing.

The processor said that moving the sector specialists to Harper Adams was part of their aim to deliver "10 per cent year-on-year growth" through new product development.

In addition to the lease of premises and land, the university and Dairy Crest have entered into a knowledge collaboration agreement that will further strengthen links between the two organisations.

The partnership will enhance Dairy Crest's product innovation through regular interaction with staff and students and a link into leading research within the agriculture and food sectors.

The processor will also further support the university curriculum by providing students with 12 month placements, work on one-off projects and there will also be staff secondments.

The Princess Royal, who is Harper Adams University Chancellor, said: "May I just thank

Dairy Crest for joining the University of Harper Adams on this Innovation Centre.

"It's very exciting for everybody but it is really nice for the university to have its reputation and future underlined in quite such an interesting way.

"We all look forward to what is going to happen here in this building."

Princess Anne and the delegates toured the new £4 million site and saw the centre's cutting-edge facilities and equipment, including micro-analytical technology, development kitchens and packaging laboratories.

A large pilot plant on site allows staff to scale up production, with room to expand when new technology comes on line.

Mr Allen said: "Harper Adams and Dairy Crest are extremely proud of this ground breaking partnership.

"This state-of-the-art innovation centre will make sure we continue to lead the British dairy industry.



Princess Anne officially opened the centre



Dairy cows at Harper Adams

"The agriculture and food sector must also invest in talent, that's one of the reasons we have based ourselves here as this is an outstanding agricultural food university.

"Every year it produces some of the best talent for our sector, we can now directly benefit from this.

"We are particularly proud that the building, where our research and development and technical teams are based, is built on the campus.

"This partnership is built on regular interaction between our staff and Harper Adams students, giving us a link into leading research within the agriculture and food sectors.

"This will also allow Dairy Crest to continue our long-standing association with Shropshire."

He said they were already closely linked with Harper Adams on several research projects so he was certain the joint venture would be "a long-term partnership which would go from strength to strength".

"Innovation is massively important to us, with 70 per cent of the growth

of Cathedral City coming from new product development since 2008, and as a consumer-led business we have to keep innovating," he added.

"Why wouldn't we want to have the opportunity to use the facilities and academic strength of Harper Adams?"

At the opening ceremony, students Louise Woolhouse and Ella Weston-Webb, who both have summer placements with Dairy Crest, presented HRH with a hamper containing mature cheese.

They will work together; Louise in new product development on the cheese side of the business and Ella on packaging product development.

Dr Llewellyn said: "We now have the unique situation where a food company has an embedded R&D facility on campus.

"The meeting of minds has been beneficial and we also have an agreement for collaboration between Dairy Crest and the university in academic activities.

"The fact that the initiative is based around sharing expertise in education, as well as in research, is an added bonus in that we hope it will encourage young

people looking at their career options to consider the huge and exciting opportunities presented by the food industry.

"The collaboration is also an excellent opportunity for spotting graduate talent and should be used as a model by other agri-food companies.

"The industry is crying out for talented young people, and with placements our graduates are work-ready."

Ralph Early, professor of food industry and head of department of food science and agri-food supply chain management, said the university covered the entire food chain but it was exciting to have a major food manufacturer on site to interact with the students and staff.

He said Dairy Crest staff had already given guest lectures in some of the modules and it was a vital learning experience for the students, to get an insight from those working at the sharp end of commercial development and product research.

LEADING GRADUATES

The university, founded in 1901, is the UK's largest specialist higher education institution in its field with an international reputation for its teaching and applied research.

It has a long history of working closely with businesses across the agri-food chain, including farms and food manufacturers such as Yeo Valley, major retailers like McDonalds and Marks & Spencer, and manufacturers of equipment for agricultural production including JCB and Michelin.

Every student at Harper Adams, both at foundation and honours degree level, is required to spend a year in employment, so the university has links with more than 500 businesses to manage the placement process.

A key feature is that placements are overseen by academic staff, bringing them routinely in contact with issues faced by agri-food businesses.

There is strong demand for graduates in the sector, with some companies offering generous scholarships.

For further details about Harper Adams go to www.harper-adams.ac.uk online.



NFU regional director Rob Newbery and guests meet HRH Princess Anne