

# NIAB develops Barn4, a Cambridge-based incubator business space for agritech SMEs

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Start-up agritech businesses will have access to new work and research facilities, alongside business support opportunities, with the development of [Barn4](#), a purpose-built facility on the outskirts of Cambridge.

The crop research organisation NIAB has been awarded £2.5 million funding from The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to construct a 375m2 business incubator on its



Park Farm site in Histon in Cambridgeshire. Barn4 will be open to tenants from spring 2021 with start-ups and SMEs offered laboratory, workshop and office space, meeting rooms and video-conferencing facilities. In addition, they will be able to get access to NIAB's high performance computing capability, specialist laboratory facilities and both indoor and outdoor growing spaces.

Demand in Cambridge remains strong for these facilities despite the impact of Covid-19 on office working. The agritech sector continues to grow and incubator space in and around the city is heavily over-subscribed. The unique offering of state-of-the-art technical facilities and links to NIAB, the Cambridge technology cluster and the wider agricultural sector will be ideal for early stage companies to grow and flourish.



Dr Juno McKee, Director of NIAB Ventures, says that Barn4 will provide facilities for up to 15 companies with 45 staff. "NIAB will work with a network of commercial and academic partners to provide a complete ecosystem within which technology driven start-ups and spinouts can thrive."

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor James Palmer says, "In the wake of Covid-19 it is more vital than ever that we level up the economy of the region as we rebound and renew, and if we are to recover quickly and fulfil on the promise of our region we have to take risks and promote disruption in the market. Agritech is one of our key growth areas and I am absolutely delighted that the Combined Authority has enabled

NIAB to create Barn4, which will help the sector expand and flourish. I am passionate about supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, and Barn4's nurturing environment for young companies will help ground-breaking startups to flourish. I look forward to seeing the birth of world-leading technical solutions to agricultural challenges and opportunities as Barn4 opens and develops from 2021."

Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government Simon Clarke MP says, "Investing in innovative agritech projects is at the heart of this Government's commitment to create new, green jobs and reach our target of Net-Zero by 2050. That is why we are investing £2.5 million from the Local Growth Fund in this exciting project to create space for start-ups and small businesses in Cambridgeshire to grow and innovate, creating new jobs for the region and supporting this world-leading centre for agritech."

The new building will be an addition to NIAB's recently redeveloped Park Farm field research station which includes two new large research and office buildings (5,500 m<sup>2</sup>), 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> of research glasshouses with an additional 300m<sup>2</sup> planned, 3,000m<sup>2</sup> protected outdoor growing space and field trial plots.

NIAB's Director of Commercialisation Dr Michael Gifford explains that, in the face of challenges such as Covid-19, Brexit, the new Agriculture Bill, climate change and food security, the UK agrifood industry is under enormous pressure to redefine its farming and food supply chains. One way is to accelerate the pace at which it commercialises and adopts new agritech innovations to deliver sustainable change.

"Cambridgeshire is fast becoming a world-leading centre for agritech with an unrivalled combination of new innovative SME's partnering with commercial industry, research, academia and networking organisations across the science, technology and agrifood sectors. To date there have been gaps in support for start-ups including access to sector specific expertise, basic research facilities with laboratory space, field plots, and engineering workshops. We are thinking about agritech in its widest sense and expect to have companies specialising in plant genetics, pest management, soil health, and AI to support sustainable farming decisions, farm robotics and much more."

A study carried out for NIAB by the University of Cambridge's Judge Institute showed that agritech start-ups felt that they would have benefited most from sector specific technical expertise and advice. This is exactly the type of support provided at Barn4.

"In Barn4, NIAB will be able to provide an environment in which young companies can thrive in the agritech sector. It allows companies to access Cambridge's unrivalled technology sector and University whilst also being on the doorstep of some of the most fertile farmland and progressive farmers in the world," finishes Dr Gifford.

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