

## **Norfolk & Suffolk Skills Economy Project**

### **Rural Economy Skills Report – Farming, Food & Drink Processing**

**Version 8**

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For: Norfolk County Council & Shaping Norfolk's Future

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Trainagain

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Context**

The rural economy encompasses a diverse range of industries. This report focuses on business activity ranging from growing food to processed product. Various definitions of self sufficiency have arisen over the last the last century and in an international market place with high demand for foods which can't easily be grown here, a pure self-sufficient food economy is too simplistic to countenance. A more important measure of sufficiency is probably food security, defined by DEFRA as "consumers having access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for an active and healthy life at affordable prices."

This report's focus is on the training needs of farming, food and drink processing businesses in Norfolk & Suffolk. It attempts to highlight the critical skills factors which could make a difference to the rural economy, looking at the local context for the farming, food and drink manufacturing sectors and talking to businesses and colleges about the key skills issues facing them.

### **Telephone Research and Visits**

For this report we carried out both telephone interviews and company and college visits to gain a better understanding of the skills issues facing the rural economy. Some of the findings from these interviews are mentioned below. A more detailed discussion is contained in section 3 of the report.

### **On Apprenticeships..**

Many of these businesses do not yet believe that apprenticeships are relevant to them. They believe they are for traditional trades, and for big companies. But even those food manufacturing businesses who currently have a shortage of engineers do not believe the answer lies in apprentices. They want ready qualified staff to employ not young people to train. This suggests that a multi-skilling course for older unemployed engineers could be highly valued by employers in the region.

Of the 25 businesses contacted only a very small percentage actually had experience of apprentices either currently or in the past. The most popular reason cited here was 'we're too small'. Several companies interviewed, were indeed micro businesses who felt they had neither the work need nor the skills level required to justify taking an apprentice.

On the whole the use and awareness of apprenticeships seemed poor; there seemed to be an assumption that apprenticeships fitted only the traditional trades. 'Oh I don't think that's for us' was a popular response.

A number of companies expressed openness to apprenticeships should the college put forward any willing candidates or make contact at all.

The Training Association does not offer apprenticeships because they don't currently fit in with the company ethos of delivering short upskilling programmes which employers seek. But Jo Bruce believes that training associations such as hers, could provide a vital bridge between employers and colleges especially for marketing apprenticeships. With a client base of hundreds of small rural companies, they are in an ideal position to market apprenticeships but Jo is concerned about the quality of the training on offer – and would need to be reassured that it was a good offer before taking it to her clients.

Several companies believed there were insurmountable barriers to taking on apprenticeships as expressed below:

“If a good lad came to me looking for an apprenticeship I'd say yes, but it's about the quality of these candidates, someone who is going to be good and put in the work” (Pig farmer in Suffolk)

“our apprentices would need transport because of our location, the college seem to have quite a few individuals who would like to be on an apprenticeship but the location is a problem”. (Drinks company in Suffolk)

“If there were young people who wanted to learn our trade - in fish - then we'd be interested, it doesn't seem to interest many of them though” (Fish Merchants – Suffolk)

Chris Bushby (from the Suffolk Agricultural Association) is a big supporter of apprenticeships but surmises that many don't stay the course. Equally he believes that many students coming out of college do not have the appropriate skills, aptitude or attitude for the farming sector, a theme taken up by several other interviewees.

However Chris does not see this as a simple one way equation. Farming businesses fail to sufficiently reward young people coming into the sector and the perception of farming continues to be poor – manual labour, long working hours, and few career prospects often cited by students as a reason for choosing other sectors. This in itself is interesting, since much farming work these days is mechanised, requires highly skilled labour and can command excellent salaries from day one. Tractor drivers, for example, may well start on a pro-rata of £30,000 per year.

#### **Qualified Engineers not Apprenticeships..**

“We do food manufacturing and production, our apprentices are engineers. We have problems recruiting engineers but that's got nothing to do with the shortage of skilled engineers. Our engineering skilled workers shortage cannot be addressed through apprenticeships. We need qualified engineers now”. (Large Food Processing Company – Norfolk – which does employ many young apprentices).

### **Multi-skilled Engineers...**

A continual challenge for the farming industry is the availability of multiskilled agricultural engineers. Engineers are in short supply across several sectors and farming is often the sector of last resort for qualified engineers from a different industry background. This suggests that there is a case for running courses specifically for multi-skilling engineers for the agricultural sector. If this could be combined with the needs of the food and drink sector (see e.g. Copella below), it may be possible to achieve viable numbers for course delivery.

This point is reinforced throughout the report several times:

“Our engineering skilled workers shortage cannot be addressed through apprenticeships. We need qualified engineers now”. (Large Food Processor – Norfolk)

“There is a real lack of multiskilled engineers and this is something other food and drink processing companies are also looking for.”

“Getting multi-skilled engineers is a continuing challenge for this company (anon). Older unemployed engineers who retrained to become more multiskilled would easily gain employment. The ideal profile for these vacancies is an older engineer who has retrained to provide engineering support across a range of functions.”

One area where Copella have been less successful in recruiting staff is in multi-skilled engineers. The profile of an ideal candidate for Copella is someone who is an experienced mechanical engineer and who has upskilled to incorporate electrical engineering into their area of competence. Angela Wood, HR and Training Administrator for the Boxford Site, insists that there is a real lack of multiskilled engineers and that this is something other food and drink processing companies are also looking for. But she has had no success in trying to engage colleges in this discussion. Finding the right contact at the college, ensuring an appropriate learning environment for mature engineers wishing to learn new skills and being able to provide courses to fit around a 24/7 business, which might mean classes in the evening or early morning would enable Copella to find and create the talent pool that they need.

One of the key recommendations of this report is that the Employer Skills Board should look at the components required to create a course for engineers to enable them to become multi-skilled and fit for employment in a range of sectors – from food and farming, to manufacturing and energy.

### **On labour and economics – A View from Suffolk Food Hall**

Over the last 20 years employment on farms has significantly declined – a 2000 acre farm for example might have employed 15 labourers whereas now that land will require just one skilled worker. At the same time global crop yields have grown substantially (by 115% between 1967 and 2007 according to the Beddington Report - Future-of-Food-and-Farming 2011). Diversification is not just about increasing

profits and managing risk; it is also an excellent way of creating employment. New Suffolk Food Hall employs 55 people – significantly more than are employed on the family farm.

### **Butchery – A dying Art? – The Meat Ipswich View**

The average age of British butchers is 59 according to Jane Dale – Owner of Meat Ipswich. So there is a huge amount to do to ensure that the next generation of butchers are trained. However Jane Dale comments on the state of the retail butchers market by referring to the change over the last 20 years. “In the 80’s and 90’s there were around 24,000 butchers shops in England. That number has now dwindled to just 6,000”. So whilst training young people in the trade is certainly important, the urgency is somewhat mitigated by the substantial fall in independent vacancies. Of course supermarkets will have their own butchery training requirements but much of the boning work is now done in meat processing factories by semi skilled meat labourers and those who train up to serve customers in supermarkets usually have to multiskill across a range of food preparation areas.

Specialist butchery, could become a dying art if independent butchers don’t find a new generation of willing apprentices to learn the trade and take over the retail businesses.

### **On the need for colleges to respond quickly... A view from Bernard Matthews**

“Marks & Spencer won’t wait for us so why should I have to wait for a college” is Bryan Hurst’s riposte when asked about working with the local FE sector. Bernard Matthews used to do more work with a local college but now much of that has either been taken in-house or has been contracted out to private providers. Responding to employers needs is rarely the key focus of a college (whose key client group are government funded full time students). So it is little surprise when they don’t manage to deliver training specifications at the right time or the right price. However EAGIT was signalled out for praise. Bryan has had five engineering apprentices through EAGIT and is pleased with the results; “very good, a change for the better” he remarked.

### **Training Provision Visits**

The report notes that there is a mismatch between what employers need and what colleges provide. The rural economy is an interesting case because there have been two training schemes aimed at providing employers exactly what they need: Beyond 2010 covers 10 sectors including food processing, and is aimed at SMEs with business critical skills needs. The Rural Development Programme has a scheme for land based businesses or businesses operating in the countryside, to train staff in anything they need. These two programmes are briefly discussed below (Is there a Skills Problem), and in the report at the end of section 3.

## **Rural Economy**

The Farming and food economy is worth some £86 billion to the UK economy. A fifth of land based businesses in the UK are based in the South East according to Lantra (2010/11). Norfolk and Suffolk are both vital to the food supply chain – providing much of the country’s cereal output and also producing large amounts of processed food and drink. The two counties rural economy provides employment for some 27,000 people, 52% and 48% in Norfolk and Suffolk respectively.

The food sector highlights the contradictions evident in attempting to match the supply and demand of skills in any one sector. Whilst there are many highly skilled jobs in food processing one cannot avoid the 48% of low skilled labour required for the industry to deliver its produce to the supermarkets, fast food chains and other outlets on a daily basis.

In the farming, food & drink processing sector most training is compliance related, which isn’t surprising given the onerous amount of food safety legislation and the need for extremely high standards of food hygiene required by the principal buyers – the powerful supermarket chains. However, it would be misleading to give the impression that this sector only trains people to comply with outside pressures. In many companies there is a culture of training and development which pervades the organisation.

## **Migrant Labour**

One can’t avoid the question of migrant labour when it comes to discussing training the workforce of the food processing sector. Around 95% of Bernard Matthews new employees are non UK, coming from Poland, Portugal and several other EU countries. If these workers stay, and from Bryan Hurst’s experience, many do, then the investment in training (for example in adult apprenticeships) is worthwhile and a means of upskilling the future workforce of Britain. But if they return to their home countries within a year or two, then one has to ask whether the (government subsidised) investment has been worthwhile – especially given the shortage of public sector subsidies for the development of the future UK workforce. Although not necessarily a problem for Bernard Matthews, the question of subsidising training for short term EU migrant labour needs to be out in the open. It brings to the fore, the issue of the perception of the food processing sector, how to encourage young local people into the sector and how to influence employers so that they do more to provide clear employee benefits: this could include shorter working hours in the factory, guaranteed management training for those who want it; and subsidised travel for those coming from a distance. However, as Bryan Hurst points out, even these measures will not guarantee that British workers will not leave the industry.

## **Is there a Skills Problem?**

Its difficult to describe the supply and demand of skills in the rural economy in Norfolk and Suffolk without sounding contradictory. On the one hand there are few skills gaps or shortages, on the other there is a skills crisis just waiting to happen. How can both of these views be true?

On the 'do nothing' side, the rural economy is less reliant on indigenous labour than ever before. Not only are complex machines (e.g. combine harvesters) doing the work of many labourers but migrant labour from Europe is plentiful. Add to this the fact that young indigenous students appear to have little appetite for work in any parts of the rural economy and one might well conclude that there is nothing to be done.

However this wouldn't be telling the whole story. Both the RDP training programme run by LandSkills East and the Beyond 2010 Programme administered by Food East attest to the huge demand for industry courses. Businesses from the rural economy are as keen as ever to up-skill, develop better management skills, and keep ahead of the legislative requirements for health, safety, pesticide control, animal welfare and other areas. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that many businesses in food, drink or farming are keen to recruit multi skilled engineers but find it difficult to find such skilled personnel.

Apprenticeships too, are popular among agricultural businesses and Easton College has suggested a new model of delivery which will benefit the students, the businesses and the college; teaching on site at Easton for two terms and spending the final term (Easter) entirely at the farm is surely a good step forward. So whilst a 'do nothing' approach is the least ambitious and the least costly, a more interventionist approach could substantially grow the Norfolk and Suffolk rural economy. This could include a series of actions around multi-skilling engineers. The demand from businesses is evident. Although the ONS figures for October 2011 show that there are almost three times as many jobs sought as there are vacancies in Norfolk and Suffolk (29,885 sought & 11,363 vacancies notified), it is important to note that multi-skilled engineers consistently come up as a need among employers.

### **Perceptions of the Industry & Opportunities for the Future**

As pointed out by Bernard Matthews training Manager Bryan Hurst, food companies have many kinds of job roles – from marketing and design, to accounting, HR and of course, training. But the sector often is seen as an homogenous entity – processing raw food materials into some processed form. Changing the perceptions of teachers students and parents about these businesses is a real challenge. It may be a good start to look at a rural economy marketing exercise, aimed at reshaping the image of farming, food and drink businesses to better reflect the changes that have taken place over the last twenty years.

The merger of Easton and Otley College also brings opportunities for re-branding and repositioning the education offer in the region. Many businesses we spoke to for this report referred to Harper Adams as the university of choice for young aspiring farmers – and many farming families in East Anglia rely on this kind of education to continue the family farming connection. However, with university education becoming more expensive, could there not be an opportunity for the new Easton/Otley group to deliver more higher education skills in short bursts ( to fit in with the pressure of the farm working year) and at much less cost than a full-time university degree course? Easton College already has high credibility in the market

place – and presumably the Centre for Contemporary Agriculture could be an ideal vehicle to explore higher skills options for the farming community across the two counties.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

1. Co-ordinate the elements required for a successful multi-skilling course for engineers
2. Undertake a 'rural economy' marketing exercise to reshape the perceptions of the farming, food and drinks sector in East Anglia.
3. As part of the above, encourage apprenticeships in this sector working with employers to identify key benefits.
4. Encourage Easton College to take a lead in designing more short higher skills courses aimed at the farming community in East Anglia.

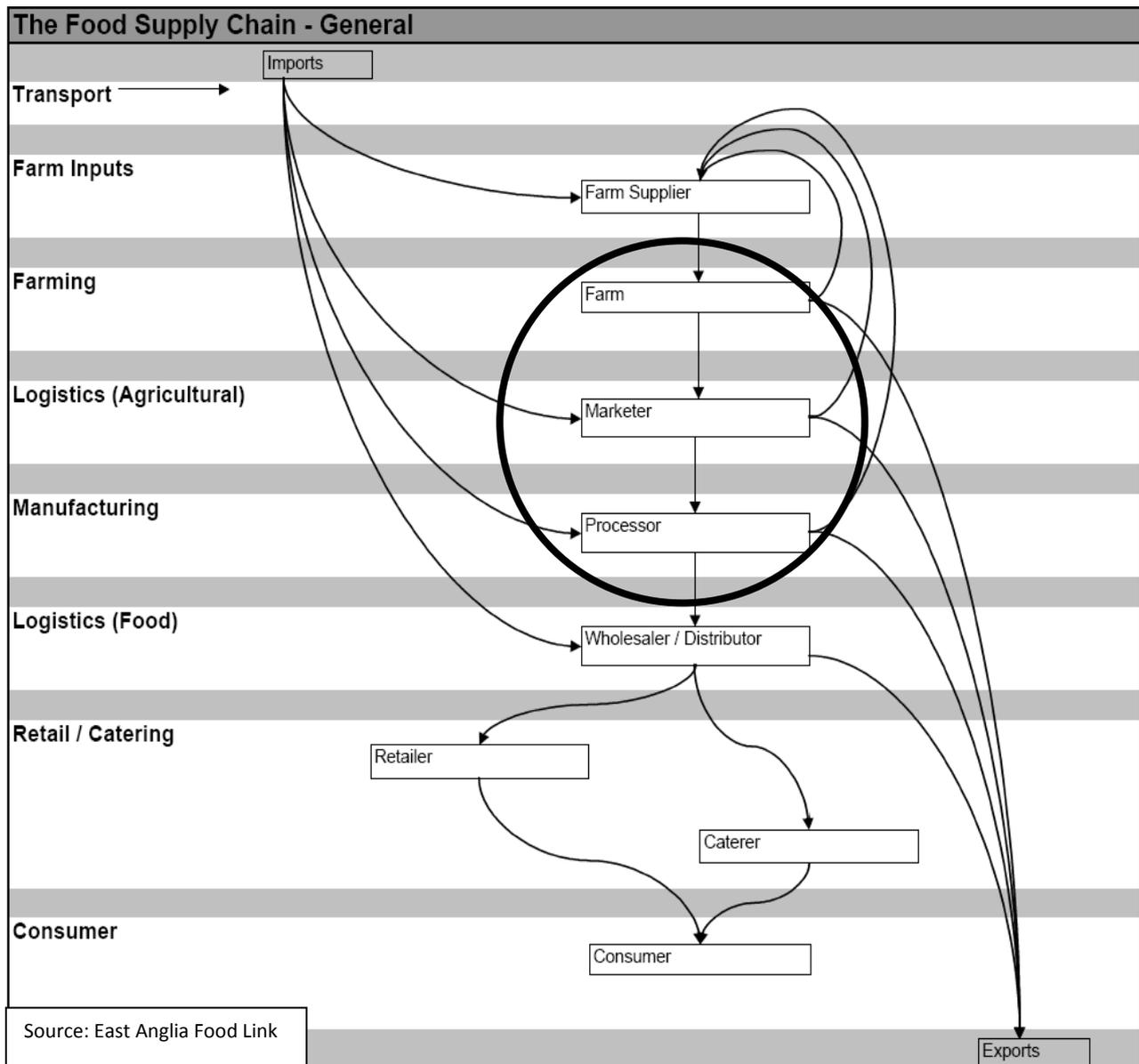
## 1. Introduction

The rural economy encompasses a diverse range of industries whose common denominator is that they exist outside of cities and urban conurbations. In this report the term rural economy is used to describe businesses which have a reliance on the land, as opposed to businesses which simply locate in the countryside for other reasons. Land 'dependent' might be a useful descriptor, but this is usually used to refer to businesses whose activity is directly land based rather than those further down the supply chain. This report focuses on business activity ranging from growing food to processed product. Various definitions of self sufficiency have arisen over the last the last century and in an international market place with high demand for foods which can't easily be grown here, a pure self-sufficient food economy is too simplistic to countenance, but it is sometimes acknowledged that Britain reached something approaching self sufficiency in the 1970s, although food imports have certainly increased since then and one might conclude that we are less self-sufficient now than 40 years ago (see *Food Security and the UK: Defra 2006*). However, self sufficiency is a misleading concept. In previous centuries the food that was consumed by a rural community was likely to have been grown in the same community. Now it is much more likely that rural communities purchase food from retail outlets which display foods originating from many different countries. So, a more important measure of sufficiency is probably food security, defined by DEFRA as "consumers having access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for an active and healthy life at affordable prices." (*Ensuring the UK's Food Security in a Changing World – DEFRA 2008*)

This broad sector study then, starts with the farm and ends with food being processed ready for retail or wholesale. The East Anglia Link diagram (Figure 1) below shows the whole food supply chain, and the areas covered in this report are within the thick lined circle.

The farming sector is characterised by some very large businesses and many very small businesses. The number of people working in farming has declined over the last century, as mechanisation has taken over the work of farm labourers. Much farm equipment (e.g. Combine harvesters) is extremely complex and requires specific training (provided by the supplier); even tractor drivers now need specialist skills. So the farming sector is smaller but more highly skilled. However there is still a significant requirement for low level skilled labour which appears to be unattractive to the local labour market and so much of the work in the fields is undertaken by non-UK European workers. Staff turnover is relatively high but labour supply has been plentiful in recent years. The extent to which the recession will affect the movement of labour across Europe is not known but one can assume that people from less developed countries within the EU will continue to seek work in more developed countries whatever macro-economic conditions apply.

**Figure 1 The Food Supply Chain – and the focus of this report encircled.**



The agricultural logistics sector is a vital part of the farming equation. Businesses such as the 3 Musketeers (Suffolk – see Section 4 below) take responsibility for storing and marketing commodities on behalf of farmers. This brokerage work is highly skilled and requires staff to understand commodity markets, world price movements, and opportunities for achieving greater margins by either holding on to stock or selling at a particular time.

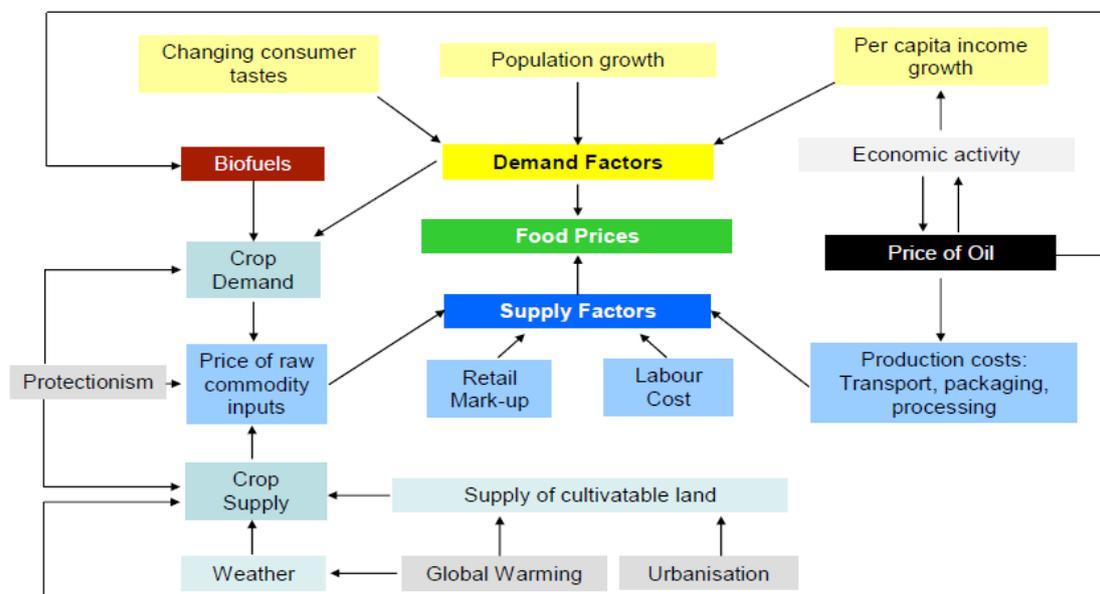
The food processing sector is one of the most challenging to analyse because of its diversity and profile. The sector spans the whole spectrum of labour organisation from fundamental labour intensive production lines to high volume ‘just in time’ manufacturing, automated packaging and highly skilled labour providing engineering support.

Food processing is rarely out of the headlines. Whether its alleged human rights abuses at work (Guardian front page 13/03/2010) or new ‘scientific’ evidence of harmful substances entering the food chain (e.g. see [www.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.fsa.gov.uk)) - because of its essential role in our lives, issues tend to get easily polarised.

Moreover the food processing sector has undergone considerable change in recent years, and purchasing power from the big 4 supermarkets continues to lead to “improvements” in delivery times, and freshness. While consumers never seem to tire of fast food variations, an increasing volume of prepared food floods on to the retail market every day. This higher value end of food processing has become a growth sub-sector all on its own.

DEFRA illustrates the challenge of making food available at “affordable prices” with the diagram below (Figure 2):

Figure 2



So many factors make up the food ‘equation’. In this report we focus on the training needs of farming, food and drink businesses in East Anglia (Norfolk & Suffolk) and attempt to find the critical factors which could make a difference to the rural economy.

In section 2 of this report the local context for the farming, food and drink manufacturing sectors is explored, and Section 3 provides a summary of the research with businesses and colleges in preparation for this report. The skills base of the two counties in relation to the rural economy is explored in Section 4, and some conclusions and recommendations are drawn together in Section 5.

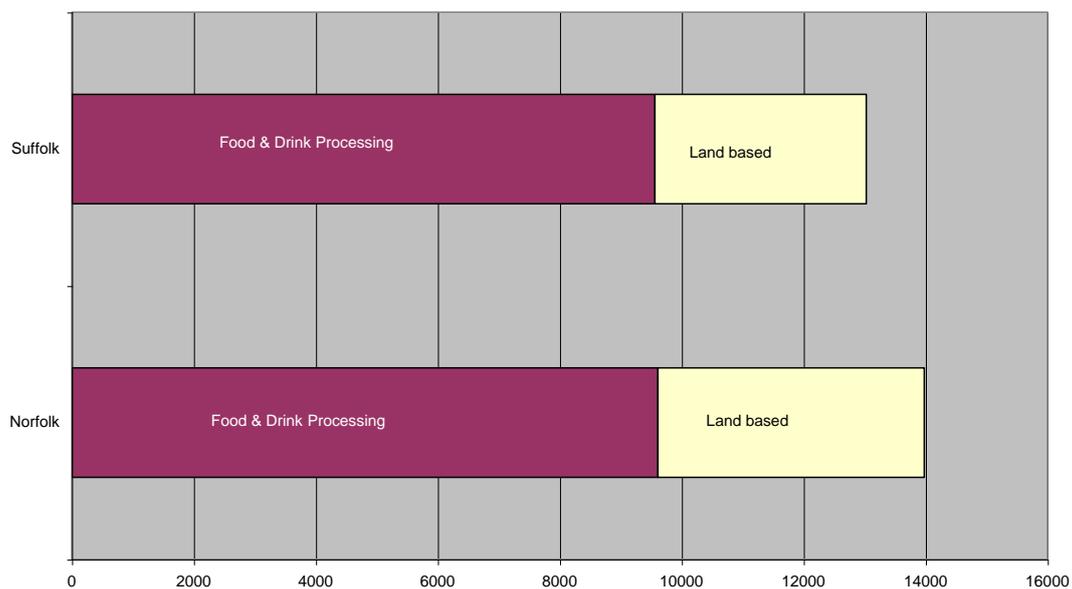
## 2. Local Profile

The Farming and food economy is worth some £86billion to the UK economy. A fifth of land based businesses in the UK are based in the South East according to Lantra (2010/11). Norfolk and Suffolk are both vital to the food supply chain – providing much of the country’s cereal output and also producing large amounts of processed food and drink.

The two counties rural economy provides employment for some 27,000 people, 52% and 48% in Norfolk and Suffolk respectively (see Figures 3 and 5).

Figure 3

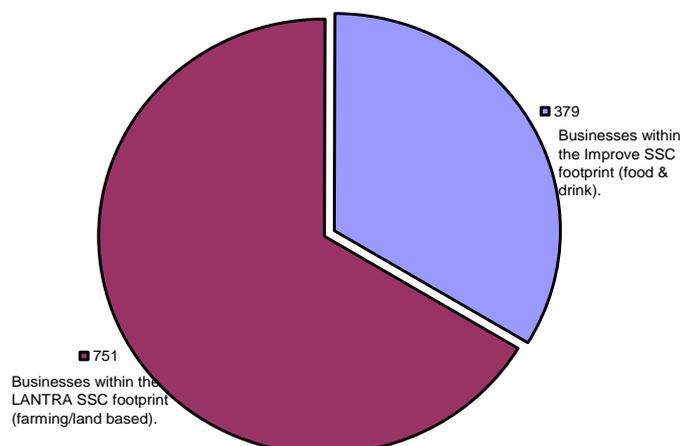
No. of Employees in the Food and Agricultural Sector in Norfolk and Suffolk - Based on ABI 2007.



The number of businesses operating in this broad sector is around 1130, with the majority in the farming sector as illustrated by Figure 4.

Norfolk & Suffolk Food, Drink & Farming Businesses (ABI 2007)

Figure 4



The overall business and employment situation is shown in the table below (Figure 5) based on 2007 Annual Business Survey Inquiry (ABI). Numbers will presumably have shrunk since then but this is still a useful.

Figure 5 No. of Businesses – and no. of employees by SSC and County - 2007

Sector Skills Council	SIC Codes	Norfolk		Suffolk		Total	
		Employees	Businesses	Employees	Businesses	Employees	Businesses
IMPROVE LTD.	15, 51.38	9612	204	9563	175	19175	379
LANTRA	01, 02.01, 02.02, 05.02, 20.1, 51.88, 85.2, 92.53	4366	418	3465	333	7831	751
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>13978</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>13028</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>27006</b>	<b>1130</b>

In East Anglia, as in many other parts of the country, economic pressures and opportunities have led to increasing merger and acquisition activity. This reflects the drive for economies of scale as well as the globalisation of the food economy.

### Nuances of Supply & Demand

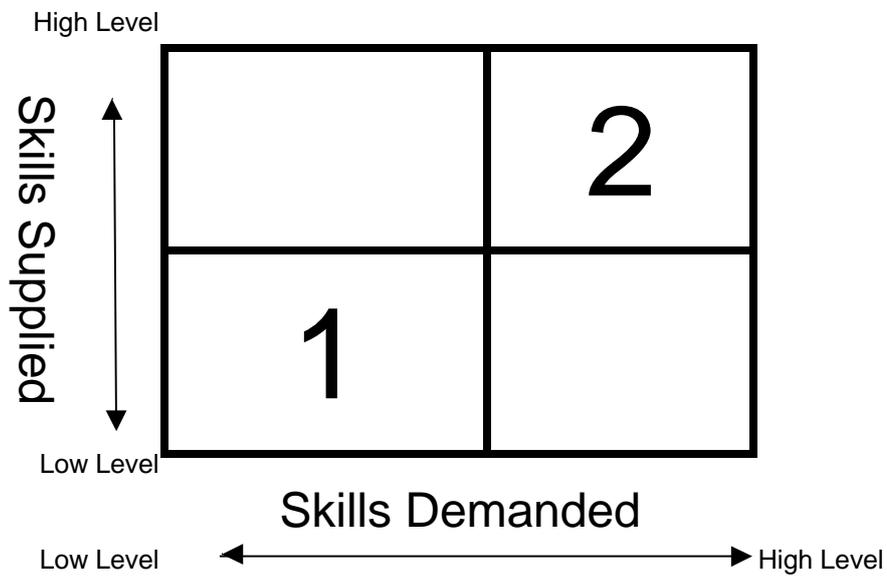
The food sector highlights the contradictions evident in attempting to match the supply and demand of skills in any one sector. Whilst there are many highly skilled jobs in food processing one cannot avoid the 48% of low skilled labour required for the industry to deliver its produce to the supermarkets, fast food chains and other outlets on a daily basis. What has at times been called a low skills equilibrium (DTI 2003) reveals a simple fact: some of the sector needs people to do work on production lines carrying out simple and repetitive tasks – and if the supply is insufficient in East Anglia, there is plenty of labour (especially from the newly acceded EU countries) to fill the vacancies for low skills work.

Given the importance of this issue, and its occasional crude politicisation, it is worth exploring the low skills equilibrium (LSQe) in a little more detail. Before then though, it is important to state that the forgoing analysis does not apply to the whole of the food processing sector. There are many examples – some described in this report - which show that what may be statistically categorised as low skilled labour is in fact highly trained labour multi-tasking in a varied and complex computerised environment. Qualifications may not be evident (except for the mandatory food safety and health and safety certificates), but the degree of learning on the job required to perform to company standards can be much more than low skill. It is interesting to note that these well trained people don't count in the UK statistics on skills levels – suggesting that we may be a more skilled (though not certificated) workforce than appears in UKCES data.

### The Problem of a Low Skills Equilibrium

Figure 6 sets out the supply and demand for different levels of skills . In a highly skilled economy or sector of the economy we are likely to arrive at an equilibrium at point 2 where there is a demand for high level skills matched by a supply of high level skills. The LSQe position (Point 1) might be described as a vicious circle – of consistent demand for low skills matched by consistent supply of low skills.

Figure 6



In the farming, food & drink processing sector most training is compliance related, which isn't surprising given the onerous amount of food safety legislation and the need for extremely high standards of food hygiene required by the principal buyers – the powerful supermarket chains. However, it would be misleading to give the impression that this sector only trains people to comply with outside pressures. As we shall see, there is a culture of training and development which pervades many companies across East Anglia.

### **3. Local Skills Research – Carried out for this Report**

There is a disconnect between what colleges offer and what businesses need in the rural economy. However some colleges appear to be more attuned to business need than others.

For this report we carried out both telephone interviews and company and college visits to gain a better understanding of the skills issues facing the rural economy. Findings from these interviews are discussed below.

#### **Telephone Interviews**

As part of the preparatory work for this work, we telephoned 25 farm, food and drink companies across Norfolk and Suffolk to find out their views about apprenticeships, skills in general, and local college provision.

It was revealing to find that not one respondent was able to identify their sector skills council – or seemed to know what sector skills councils do. Apart from a repeated mention of the shortage of engineers, no other skills gaps or shortages were mentioned. To what extent this was because of an unwillingness to talk about their own skills deficiencies or simply lack of awareness about skills gaps rather than an accurate perception of skills is unclear.

“We do food manufacturing and production, our apprentices are engineers. We have problems recruiting engineers but that's got nothing to do with the shortage of skilled engineers. Our engineering skilled workers shortage cannot be addressed through apprenticeships. We need qualified engineers now”. (Large Food Processing Company – Norfolk – which does employ many young apprentices).

#### Awareness of local colleges

Awareness of colleges was mixed. But interestingly West Suffolk was regularly cited positively. Certainly the 25 calls did not create an image of strong relationships between these businesses and the colleges, so communication lines between colleges and businesses like these could be improved.

A small number of the larger companies did mention using their local college for training courses, the most frequently mentioned was health and safety. The majority however seemed surprised by the idea of using the college for this and a large number felt they were too small to be doing any training of any kind.

#### Apprenticeships

Many of these businesses do not yet believe that apprenticeships are relevant to them. They believe they are for traditional trades, and for big companies. But even those food manufacturing businesses who currently have a shortage of engineers do not believe the answer lies in apprentices. They want ready qualified staff to employ

not young people to train. This, once again, suggests that a multi-skilling course for older unemployed engineers could be highly valued by employers in the region.

#### College promotion of apprenticeship schemes

A number of businesses said they would like to hear from colleges about this. Some felt that students wouldn't be interested in their area of work. A number didn't realise that students could come in and do office/admin type work as part of an apprenticeship, or that apprenticeships were not just for traditional trades – mechanics, construction etc.

Of the 25 businesses contacted only a very small percentage actually had experience of apprentices either currently or in the past. The most popular reason cited here was 'we're too small'. Several companies interviewed, were indeed micro businesses who felt they had neither the work need nor the skills level required to justify taking an apprentice.

However other companies were accepting students and young people for shorter training time periods, either as vacation work for local students and some students from abroad or young people coming in as part of work experience for their vocational qualifications.

On the whole the use and awareness of apprenticeships seemed poor; there seemed to be an assumption that apprenticeships fitted only the traditional trades. 'Oh I don't think that's for us' was a popular response.

A number of companies expressed openness to apprenticeships should the college put forward any willing candidates or make contact at all.

"If a good lad came to me looking for an apprenticeship I'd say yes, but it's about the quality of these candidates, someone who is going to be good and put in the work"  
(Pig farmer in Suffolk)

"our apprentices would need transport because of our location, the college seem to have quite a few individuals who would like to be on an apprenticeship but the location is a problem". (Drinks company in Suffolk)

"If there were young people who wanted to learn our trade - in fish - then we'd be interested, it doesn't seem to interest many of them though" (Fish Merchants – Suffolk)

## Visits to Companies

As part of this project, we also visited a range of businesses and training providers to gain a better understanding of the needs of the local rural economy. Below some of the key issues are explored.

### The Suffolk Agricultural Association

The Suffolk Agricultural Association was formed in 1831, and exemplifies an organisation which puts the rural economy at the heart of its activities. Chris Bushby is the executive director of Suffolk Agricultural Association and in recent years has focused attention on making the Suffolk Show one of the best in the country. The show is a vital part of the annual farming calendar – producing a multiplier effect of some £20m - £30m each year. Chris Bushby is also at the centre of a new cross county initiative encapsulated in a Food & Farming Enterprise Board which has 14 farmers from Suffolk and Norfolk coming together with several rural economy stakeholders (e.g. the National Farmers Union) to discuss critical issues which will affect farming now and in the future.

Chris Bushby is adamant that industry must do more to engage with education. Too often the farming community is quick to run down what the education system does but less inclined to get involved and talk to colleges about what is needed for their workforce.

Diversification is a key theme for farming but some counties have been much more active than others in successfully diversifying into other sectors, Chris cites Cornwall and the southwest as obvious examples of diversification into retail, tourism and office accommodation. But he also points out that diversification is a by-product of shrinking markets and in East Anglia, the flat land and high prices commanded for cereals has meant that many farmers have not needed to look at diversification.

Chris Bushby is a big supporter of apprenticeships but surmises that many don't stay the course. Equally he believes that many students coming out of college do not have the appropriate skills, aptitude or attitude for the farming sector, a theme taken up by several other interviewees.

However Chris does not see this as a simple one way equation. Farming businesses fail to sufficiently reward young people coming into the sector and the perception of farming continues to be poor – manual labour, long working hours, and few career prospects often cited by students as a reason for choosing other sectors. This in itself is interesting, since much farming work these days is mechanised, requires highly skilled labour and can command excellent salaries from day one. Tractor drivers, for example, may well start on a pro-rata of £30,000 per year.

## **Copella**

### Copella

Copella is part of PepsiCo, which owns the famous Pepsi brand as well as Walkers Snack Foods and Quaker Oats. Based at the Peake family farm, Copella has emerged from a cottage industry – pressing farm apples to make juice, to a multi-million pound enterprise pressing apples, mainly from the local area, to produce a supermarket staple – Copella Apple Juice. The factory, still situated on, but now independent to the family run farm, produces mixed fruit drinks as well, importing berries from across Europe. The business operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. 2 twelve hour shifts make up the daily routine; 93 staff work at the site, of which more than 60% are front line – General and Technical operators, specialists, Key Operators, and 10 Engineers. The staff profile is predominantly male mostly ranging in age from mid twenties to mid forties and the majority of staff live locally. The sector is challenging for teenagers to start in. Clothing (hair net, white coat, ear muffs and toe capped boots are mandatory across the site) and hygiene requirements are strict, working hours are long and the rural location is difficult to access, all of which may deter teenagers.

The food sector stands out as being extremely active in training staff on the job. Whilst there are still some food processing companies relying on unskilled labour, most food companies these days are highly efficient, mostly automated, and requiring highly skilled workers to operate complex and expensive machinery. Where twenty years ago one might have seen a production line of 20 or 30 people watching over a conveyor belt of passing fruit, companies such as Copella have completely mechanised the whole process so that one or two people can run a section on their own. But this obviously requires continuous training and Copella have developed a rigorous approach to staff development ranging from on site buddying for new staff, job mentoring and classroom based courses (including induction course; five day basic training on all key processes; and intermediate training on specific activities).

In addition to the highly structured competence training, Copella have a hygiene, health and safety regime which is embedded in all company activities and of course reinforced by consistent training for all staff.

One area where Copella have been less successful in recruiting staff is in multi-skilled engineers. The profile of an ideal candidate for Copella is someone who is an experienced mechanical engineer and who has upskilled to incorporate electrical engineering into their area of competence. Angela Wood, HR and Training Administrator for the Boxford Site, insists that there is a real lack of multiskilled engineers and that this is something other food and drink processing companies are also looking for. But she has had no success in trying to engage colleges in this discussion. Finding the right contact at the college, ensuring an appropriate learning environment for mature engineers wishing to learn new skills and being able to provide courses to fit around a 24/7 business, which might mean classes in the evening or early morning would enable Copella to find and create the talent pool that they need.

### **Suffolk Food Hall**

Oliver Paul from Suffolk Hall was interviewed as part of the tourism report in this series. Oliver's business is an excellent example of land based business diversification. The Paul family now have a portfolio of businesses ranging from farming, commercial property and retail to tourist accommodation and leisure activities. It has all been about managing risk – “under-utilised assets need to be resource efficient”, says Oliver Paul.

Winner of the BALE (Best Alternative Land Enterprise ) Award for Diversification in 2009 and a finalist in the Farmers Weekly Farm Diversification of the Year in 2011, the Paul family are trend setters in East Anglia, showing how profitable farming can be combined with other activities to bring about better resource utilisation and a greater spread of income streams to protect against single sector economic exposure.

Oliver Paul believes the future success of the rural economy lies in the proliferation of SMEs and that this is where policy intervention should be most focused.

Over the last 20 years employment on farms has significantly declined – a 2000 acre farm for example might have employed 15 labourers whereas now that land will require just one skilled worker. At the same time global crop yields have grown substantially (by 115% between 1967 and 2007 according to the Beddington Report - Future-of-Food-and-Farming 2011). Diversification is not just about increasing profits and managing risk; it is also an excellent way of creating employment. New Suffolk Food Hall employs 55 people – significantly more than are employed on the family farm.

And whilst the farm worker needs to be highly skilled these skills are unlikely to be sourced from the local college. Much more likely will be a combine harvester manufacturer providing direct training on the complex machinery. In the Food Hall however, there are plenty of opportunities for college involvement – with a range of traditional food skills required including bakery, fishmongery and butchery.

### **Meat Ipswich**

Meat Ipswich is a specialist butchery training provider with a national client base. Jane Dale, the owner of Meat Ipswich believes that their success is down to her focus on quality and a refusal to simply follow the funding. The Meat Ipswich core market is retail butchers and farm shops. The organisation offers apprenticeships, short upskilling courses as well as in-work vocational qualifications.

The average age of British butchers is 59 according to Jane. So there is a huge amount to do to ensure that the next generation of butchers are trained. However Jane Dale comments on the state of the retail butchers market by referring to the

change over the last 20 years. “In the 80’s and 90’s there were around 24,000 butchers shops in England. That number has now dwindled to just 6,000”. So whilst training young people in the trade is certainly important, the urgency is somewhat mitigated by the substantial fall in independent vacancies. Of course supermarkets will have their own butchery training requirements but much of the boning work is now done in meat processing factories by semi skilled meat labourers and those who train up to serve customers in supermarkets usually have to multiskill across a range of food preparation areas.

Specialist butchery, could become a dying art if independent butchers don’t find a new generation of willing apprentices to learn the trade and take over the retail businesses.

### **Bernard Matthews**

Bryan Hurst is Bernard Matthews training manager responsible for the personal development of 3,000 staff across sites in Norfolk and Suffolk.

“Marks & Spencer won’t wait for us so why should I have to wait for a college” is Bryan Hurst’s riposte when asked about working with the local FE sector. Bernard Matthews used to do more work with a local college but now much of that has either been taken in-house or has been contracted out to private providers. Responding to employers needs is rarely the key focus of a college (whose key client group are government funded full time students). So it is little surprise when they don’t manage to deliver training specifications at the right time or the right price. However EAGIT was signalled out for praise. Bryan has had five engineering apprentices through EAGIT and is pleased with the results; “very good, a change for the better” he remarked.

Bernard Matthews works closely with the Sector Skills Council on qualifications frameworks and is an exemplar company when it comes to training staff. Typical qualifications include the vocational and proficiency certificates and diplomas. Almost all of the skills relate to poultry - Poultry Meat Inspection at Levels 2 and 3. Food safety and health and safety training are also essential to the company and much of this is undertaken in-house by Bryan’s team of on-line and off-line trainers.

One can’t avoid the question of migrant labour when it comes to discussing training the workforce of the food processing sector. Around 95% of Bernard Matthews new employees are non UK, coming from Poland, Portugal and several other EU countries. If these workers stay, and from Bryan Hurst’s experience, many do then the investment in training (for example in adult apprenticeships) is worthwhile and a means of upskilling the future workforce of Britain. But if they return to their home countries within a year or two, then one has to ask whether the (government subsidised) investment has been worthwhile – especially given the shortage of public sector subsidies for the development of the future UK workforce. Even if one argues that UK workers are just as unlikely to stay in the same sector in the long term at least the skills base is retained and available to build upon in another sector.

So the question of subsidising training for short term EU migrant labour needs to be out in the open. It brings to the fore, the issue of the perception of the food processing sector, how to encourage young local people into the sector and how to influence employers so that they do more to provide clear employee benefits: this could include shorter working hours in the factory, guaranteed management training for those who want it; and subsidised travel for those coming from a distance.

It is interesting to note that the meat processing sector, especially the parts relating to boning, is still very much a manual sector with low levels of automation and a high degree of skill required to ensure that meat wastage is kept to a minimum. It takes six months to become a fully qualified meat boner at Bernard Matthews and 16 weeks to learn the basics. Whilst there are some UK workers who do this, the majority of workers are non UK workers from other EU countries.

A point worth noting here is that the Home Office list of skills shortage trades (which allows foreign nationals (i.e. non EU) to apply for UK jobs in specific sectors where shortages persist), included until recently, skilled meat boners where the pay is at least £9.00 per hour and skilled meat trimmers where the pay is at least £9.00 per hour. The November 2011 list no longer mentions meat boners as eligible for the scheme.

### **3 Musketeers - Suffolk**

John Patrick is one of three managers who run the 3 Musketeers – a marketing consortium involving six farms with a total of 30,000 acres along the southern coastal strip of Suffolk. The concept is about creating the selling power of a large farm, by clubbing together and selling as a single group. The venture started in 2000 and now turns over £16 million of cereal and other vegetable supplies.

John Patrick doesn't have a great deal of faith in the local student market. First, they don't have a good understanding of the sector, so they don't appreciate that much of the land based work is automated and undertaken by a single person and his tractor or combine harvester. So the key work is done in the office, in front of computers and on the phone – making the deals at the most advantageous price. Secondly, students from the local college don't appear to have the right attitude especially in terms of hard work. John suggests that many farms employ non-UK workers for tractor driving because they are willing to work hard and learn fast.

John Patrick suggests a breakdown of the farming labour market as follows:

- 50% older farm hands who continue to drive the tractors;
- 20% new young people coming into the sector, often with a family background in farming, trained at Harper Adams, and keen to become the new farming managers;
- 30% Eastern Europeans who provide manual labour – and are generally hard working.

If this is at all close to the actual breakdown of farm labour one has to ask how the FE sector can help influence young people to train up for the industry in order to minimise its reliance on non UK labour.

### **Meat Processor – East Anglia**

Training is provided for the 500 – 600 staff. Most of the workforce is Eastern European – possibly as much as 75% in Norfolk.

Getting multi-skilled engineers is a continuing challenge for this company. The company believes that older unemployed engineers who retrained to become more multiskilled could easily gain employment. The company employs more than a dozen engineers at any one time and is likely to need 2 or 3 new engineering recruits each year. The ideal profile for these vacancies is an older engineer who has retrained to provide engineering support across a range of functions.

This company has been in a position to be able to take advantage of subsidised training to skill up its largely Eastern European workforce. However some EU workers do stay and progress to become supervisors (50% of current supervisors are non UK Europeans). English language training was also free up until recently and new migrants have benefited from this and it has of course, accelerated the integration process.

## **Training Provision Visits**

It has already been noted that there appears to be a mismatch between what employers need and what colleges provide. The rural economy is an interesting case because there have been two training schemes aimed at providing employers exactly what they need: Beyond 2010 covers 10 sectors including food processing, and is aimed at SMEs with business critical skills needs. The Rural Development Programme has a scheme for land based businesses or businesses operating in the countryside, to train staff in anything they need. These two programmes are discussed in greater detail below along with mainstream provision delivered through colleges and private training providers.

### **Easton College**

Easton College is at the heart of the rural economy providing courses for young people who go on to employment in a range of sectors or into higher education for further study. But there are also many part time courses for those already in work; for example there were around 1500 self funded places during the 2009/10 academic year.

The Easton College long term vision is to achieve “outstanding academic performance across the institution,... strong on the quality of the student experience”, and at the same time ensuring, “a close and effective relationship with employers.”

David Lawrence, Principal of Easton College is under no illusions about the challenge ahead: “ It’s got to be a joint effort whereby employers get the choice of staff they need but at the same time they’ve got to get involved in training too. Employer engagement starts with a good reciprocal relationship and that means a commitment and an investment in time from the college, its students and employers.”

To this end David Lawrence has helped set up the Centre for Contemporary Agriculture, which aims to bridge the gap between employers needs, student aspirations and further and higher education provision. The Centre is in its infancy but has the endorsement of UEA, Easton College, the Institute of Food Research, the John Innes Centre, the Sainsbury Laboratory, and the National Institute for Agricultural Botany & the Arable Group (NIABTAG).

David Lawrence has spent many years balancing the needs of employers with the aspirations of students. Whilst the two aims have not always been mutually compatible, Easton College does provide an environment which is conducive to academic and vocational learning, as well as offering employers a working environment conducive to management and workforce development.

The college is keen to experiment with different models. A recent lean learning initiative will see teaching undertaken in two terms of the year so that students can be with employers for the final term. This is an ideal way of running a genuine

apprenticeship programme so that employers get the labour they need at the right time (Spring/Summer), and students get the college environment they need to gain the qualifications they want.

David Lawrence is constantly looking for solutions to employer needs. The college recently sat down with a group of companies to discuss higher level training needs and as a result has introduced a new BTEC level 3 award and started an ILM (Institute of Leadership & Management) award for aspiring managers.

A continual challenge for the farming industry is the availability of multiskilled agricultural engineers. Engineers are in short supply across several sectors and farming is often the sector of last resort for qualified engineers from a different industry background. This suggests that there is a case for running courses specifically for multi-skilling engineers for the agricultural sector. If this could be combined with the needs of the food and drink sector (see e.g. Copella above ), it may be possible to achieve viable numbers for course delivery.

With funded courses turning over some £9million and fee income accounting for an additional £1.2million Easton College is clearly a vital part of the rural economy skills equation.

But as David Lawrence concludes, “it is easy to come up with course ideas that employers like the sound of, but much more difficult to create a delivery model which is sustainable in terms of guaranteed volumes of learners.”

### **Otley College**

Philip Winfield is the Principal of Otley College. He sees the aspirant merger with Easton College as an excellent way forward and this is endorsed by employers who have been consulted in this report.

Otley College currently has a diverse employer engagement base spanning farming, horticulture, hospitality and many other sectors. The college also has a reputation for business management courses and has recent experience in delivering Business Improvement Techniques (BIT), to local companies. Philip admits that FE is not generally good at customer relationship management, owing to their commitments to full-time mainstream provision. However he believes the merger with Easton College will lead to a more responsive, cohesive and effective engagement with employers, and provide a sound marketing platform for employer based skills provision. The fact that Easton College will be able to provide residential courses means that recruitment can come from further afield than Suffolk and Norfolk.

Otley College has invested in specialist food product development facilities and Philip believes that this could be an asset for the merger, possibly leading to more food based apprenticeships. The advantage of having a laboratory on site at college is that students can experiment with product development without needing to be in on company premises.

### **LandSkills East**

Michael Mack is Manager of LandSkills East and Director of the Rural Enterprise Hub at Easton College, which includes bespoke training; a rural business advice service; the Rural Development Grants Programme; and the LandSkills training co-ordination programme. Michael Mack is an interesting case study because he began life as a student at Easton College before becoming a dairy farm herdsman. He later studied Agricultural Economics at reading University, and became Director of Easton College's Rural Enterprise Hub in 2006. Michael was awarded a Nuffield Farming Scholarship in 2008 to study "the Next Generation of Farmers".

LandSkills East is the training delivery vehicle for the Rural Development Programme's £4.3 million business training budget. It involves an East of England partnership of training providers including Easton College; Poultec; Anglia Rural Training (a consortium of 10 training providers operating in Herts; Beds; Essex; Cambs; Norfolk & Suffolk), and several other smaller providers.

The scheme offers grants to agricultural based businesses (defined as reliant on agriculture for at least 50% of time or income) or micro rural businesses (defined as those which contribute in some way to the rural economy).

For higher level skills the grant can be 70% of cost and 50% for other business related courses. The average grant rate overall is around 65%.

The programme has been immensely successful. Since its launch in 2009 the LandSkills East Programme has achieved:

6078 Level 2 & 3 training places equating to 6887 training days  
(with over 3000 people trained)

3218 Level 4 training places equating to 4737 training days  
(with over 1400 people trained)

### **Anglia Rural Training**

The Training Association West is one of the partners in the Anglia Rural Training (ART) consortium – a delivery agent for LandSkills East. Jo Bruce runs the training association and through ART, has been involved in the RDP training programme from its inception. She is wary of the drive for vocational qualifications among the workforce and suggests that employers are looking for specific skills delivered

through short courses as opposed to long work based assessments based on proving competence.

The Training Association does not offer apprenticeships because they don't currently fit in with the company ethos of delivering short upskilling programmes which employers seek. But Jo Bruce believes that training associations such as hers, could provide a vital bridge between employers and colleges especially for marketing apprenticeships. With a client base of hundreds of small rural companies, they are in an ideal position to market apprenticeships but Jo is concerned about the quality of the training on offer – and would need to be reassured that it was a good offer before taking it to her clients.

Training courses are wide ranging and include the BASIS (originally known as the 'British Agrochemical Standards Inspection Scheme' and relating to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986) Certificate; FACTS (Fertiliser Advisers Certification and Training Scheme) award; MIG and ARC welding; health & safety courses; risk assessment as well as fork lift; first aid; and tractor driving among many others.

### **Poultec**

Poultec trains over 3000 staff each year including 600 – 700 apprenticeships. Whilst much of their training provision has been traditionally centred around the meat industry Poultec offer skills solutions across many disciplines and has substantial links with the hospitality and tourism sector.

Butchery skills are taught at Poultec's impressive training base in Mattishall, which also provides conference facilities. However most training is undertaken in the workplace. Hospitality and Catering Apprentices also visit South Green Park to take advantage of courses in the new Masterchef studio.

As part of their apprenticeship drive Poultec has Skills and IAG vehicle which parks up outside the Forum in Norwich City Centre on one Friday every month. Neale McArdle, Training Director for Poultec estimates that an average of 7-8 young people join an apprenticeship every month as a result of this marketing operation. With additional funds the take-up of apprenticeships by young people could increase further.

### **Beyond 2010**

The Beyond 2010 Programme is a continuation of the Towards 2010 training programme and has been extremely successful in delivering the training that businesses want. The Programme could be criticised because it has deliberately not involved the public sector in delivery. At the time, EEDA's argument was that there were sufficient programmes such as Train to Gain delivered through mainstream LSC contracts (often involving local colleges) and that this initiative was intended to be totally demand led – providing business critical skills which the businesses needed – whether or not that led to a recognised qualification. Whilst this was an admirable aim, one could argue that this would have been an excellent opportunity to encourage colleges and universities to develop demand responsive courses – rising

to the challenge of using their considerable expertise and resource to deliver what was required.

Instead, Beyond 2010 (and its predecessor) have provided subsidies (up to 70% of cost) for training to small businesses. Many have found this extremely useful and have been delighted that they could not only choose the content of their training, but also the method of delivery, the timing, and the training provider.

The food sector is one of the ten sectors eligible for Beyond 2010 funding and Food East has been responsible for brokering training needs within the sector. The Programme has supported several thousand small businesses over the last five years and comes to an end in November this year (2011).

## 4. Skills Base

It's difficult to describe the supply and demand of skills in the rural economy in Norfolk and Suffolk without sounding contradictory. On the one hand there are few skills gaps or shortages, on the other there is a skills crisis just waiting to happen. How can both of these views be true?

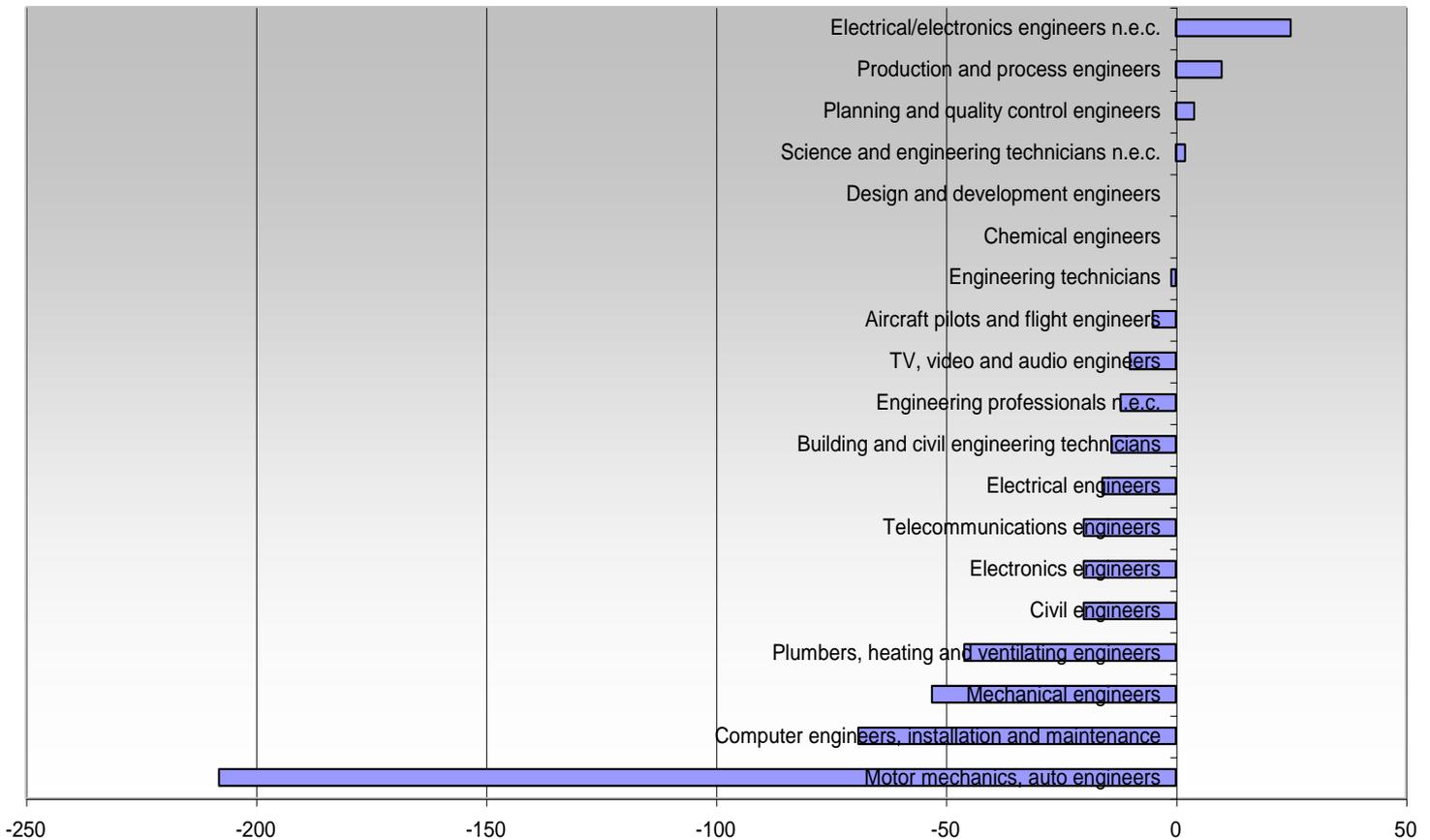
On the 'do nothing' side, the rural economy is less reliant on indigenous labour than ever before. Not only are complex machines (e.g. combine harvesters) doing the work of many labourers but migrant labour from Europe is plentiful. Add to this the fact that young indigenous students appear to have little appetite for work in any parts of the rural economy and one might well conclude that there is nothing to be done.

However this wouldn't be telling the whole story. Both the RDP training programme run by LandSkills East and the Beyond 2010 Programme administered by Food East attest to the huge demand for industry courses. Businesses from the rural economy are as keen as ever to up-skill, develop better management skills, and keep ahead of the legislative requirements for health, safety, pesticide control, animal welfare and other areas. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that many businesses in food, drink or farming are keen to recruit multi skilled engineers but find it difficult to find such skilled personnel.

Apprenticeships too, are popular among agricultural businesses and Easton College has suggested a new model of delivery which will benefit the students, the businesses and the college; teaching on site at Easton for two terms and spending the final term (Easter) entirely at the farm is surely a good step forward. So whilst a 'do nothing' approach is the least ambitious and the least costly, a more interventionist approach could substantially grow the Norfolk and Suffolk rural economy. This could include a series of actions around multi-skilling engineers. The demand from businesses is evident. Although the ONS figures for October 2011 show that there are almost three times as many jobs sought as there are vacancies in Norfolk and Suffolk (29,885 sought & 11,363 vacancies notified), it is important to note that multi-skilled engineers consistently come up as a need among employers.

Recent figures from ONS suggest that there is a large number of unemployed engineers from all disciplines. As the graph below shows there are currently not enough jobs to go around and almost every category shows a deficit measured by the difference between vacancies notified and positions sought. The one engineering discipline which shows a significant surplus of jobs (more vacancies notified than positions sought) is electrical and electronics engineers.

ONS Statistics - October 2011  
 Net Vacancies - job vacancies notified less positions sought in this category

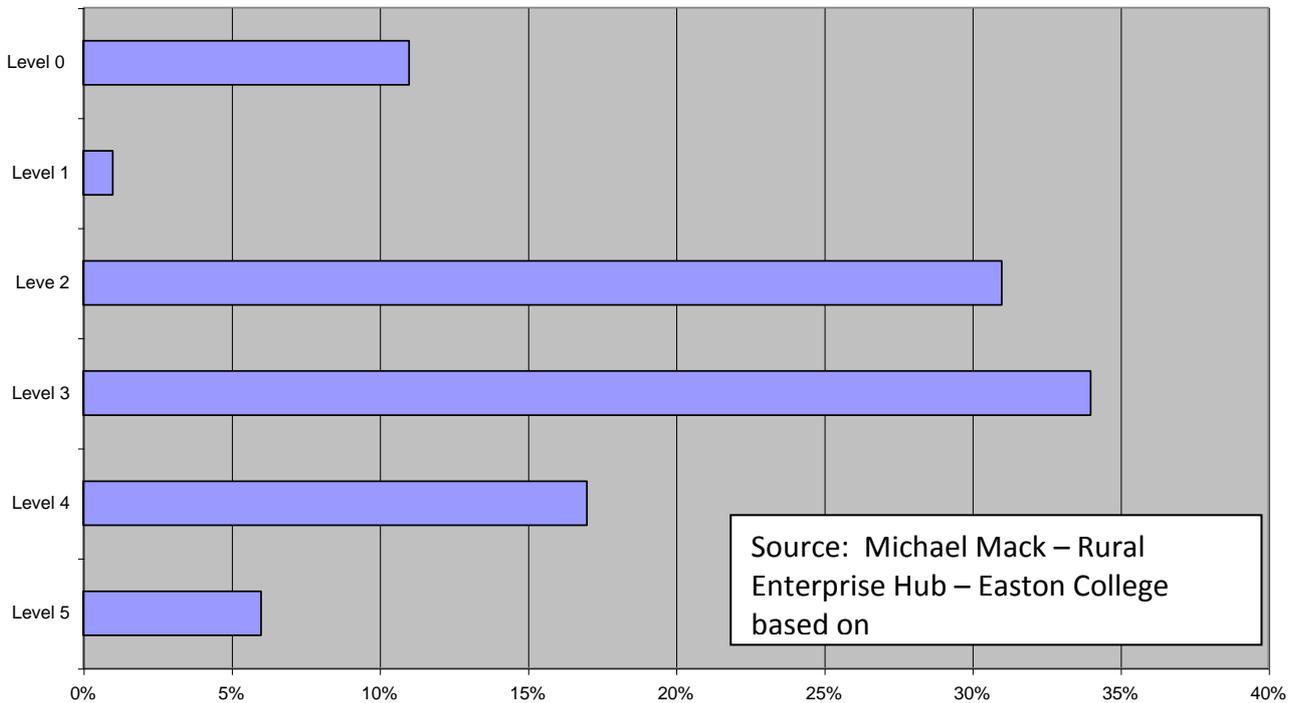


Lantra, the sector skills council for the land based sector, questions the need for ever increasing higher level skills at work, suggesting that there is not necessarily a correlation between quality of product/service and higher levels of skills in the workforce (see Lantra UK Skills Assessment Report 2010/11– Page 63).

Lantra is keen to point out that qualifications are not a good measure of the quantity or quality of skills in the sector, because national qualifications are not highly rated among businesses (England Skills Assessment 2010/11 Lantra page 62). The land based sector is however, highly trained and as shown in the analysis of short course provision in Norfolk (e.g. the RDP’s LandSkills Programme), business demand for upskilling is strong. It is just its appetite for national qualifications which is weak.

As Michael Mack (2007) has shown, the qualification level of farmers in Norfolk is actually quite high.

Qualification Levels of 412 Norfolk Farmers



However Lantra does suggest that there will be jobs available in the sector in the coming years: Across the UK - 44,000 in sales; 41,000 in management; and 39,000 in skilled trades (UK Skills Assessment Summary Report 2010/11 Lantra 2010 Page 9). The extent to which the continuing recession will impact on these projections is not known but caution regarding their likely accuracy is advised.

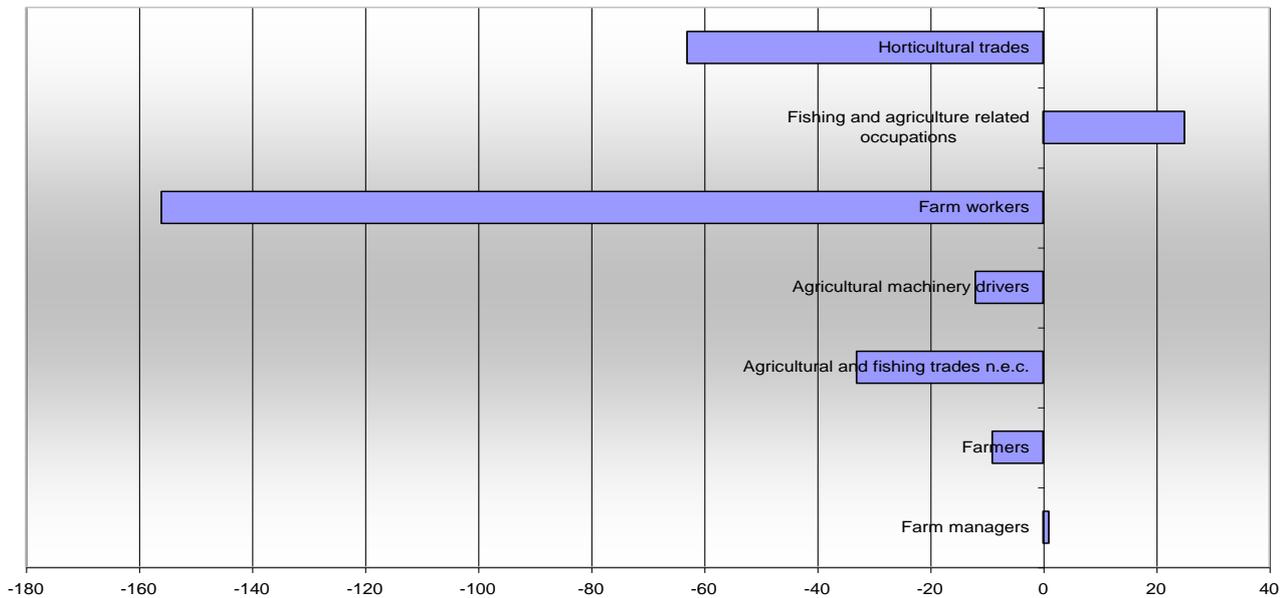
Improve, the sector skills council for the food and drink sector report that 13% of East of England food and drink manufacturers have vacancies compared to a national average of 16%. The majority of these vacancies are short term; only around 4% of jobs are deemed “hard to fill”. 11% of employers in the region state that they have skills gaps which are most prominent in the machine operative/ production line worker area (Improve – The Food and Drink Manufacturing Industry in the East of England – Labour Market Information Profile 2009/10).

As we have seen with other sectors, there are a range of sector specific “technical” and “craft” skills gaps reported for the sector; on the craft side, butchery, bakery and fishmongery skills are all identified as lacking in the UK as a whole.

For sales and customer service staff a range of familiar skills gaps are reported. These include: customer handling; technical; problem solving; team-working; oral & written communication skills.

Whilst migrant labour is justified on the basis that local people don't want jobs in the agricultural sector, it is interesting to note the recent ONS statistics on jobs sought and vacancies notified in Norfolk and Suffolk (October 2011). This clearly shows a net deficit (more jobs sought than vacancies notified) in all land based sectors apart from two – some fishing and agricultural occupations are needed and there is a small requirement for farm managers - as the graph below illustrates.

ONS Statistics - October 2011  
 Net Vacancies - job vacancies notified less positions sought in this category



## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has shown that the rural economy encompasses both high level and low level skills. As computerised equipment takes over from manual labour, there is a need for higher level skills, however both in farming and food processing, one finds little appetite for national qualifications and much more enthusiasm for short courses which achieve what is needed. This approach has been supported by two key programmes – the RDP LandSkills East training initiative, and the Beyond 2010 Programme delivered to food businesses through Food East. Together, these programmes have delivered subsidised training to thousands of rural companies in the East of England.

Whilst the colleges have significant involvement in the agricultural sector – and of course – LandSkills East is based at Easton College, there is much less evidence of further education with the food processing sector. Here one tends to find that companies have little experience with FE and tend to think of them as an irrelevance to their sector. When they have expressed specific workforce needs, such as multi-skilling engineers, the FE sector has been slow to react, not least because it is difficult to imagine achieving break-even on such a course when there is no guarantee of student numbers.

One of the key recommendations of this report is that the Employer Skills Board should look at the components required to create a course for engineers to enable them to become multi-skilled and fit for employment in a range of sectors – from food and farming, to manufacturing and energy. This would need to involve the following:

- ▲ Identifying the range of businesses who would participate in the scheme – as a minimum committing to taking on multi-skilled engineers in some capacity once they have been trained, and if possible encouraging them to take on trainees as part of the scheme;
- ▲ Identifying the likely number of potential students – older engineers out of work, liaising with Jobcentreplus as a start;
- ▲ talking to colleges to discuss the potential for course delivery – times, frequency, delivery method, etc.. and involving businesses in the design and delivery of the course.

As pointed out by Bernard Matthews training Manager Bryan Hurst, food companies have many kinds of job roles – from marketing and design, to accounting, HR and of course, training. But the sector often is seen as an homogenous entity – processing raw food materials into some processed form. Changing the perceptions of teachers students and parents about these businesses is a real challenge. It may be a good start to look at a rural economy marketing exercise, aimed at reshaping the image of farming, food and drink businesses to better reflect the changes that have taken place over the last twenty years.

This could lead to a new impetus for apprenticeships in the sector. Once young people can see the benefits of working in the sector and the broad range of skills required by businesses operating in farming, food and drink manufacturing, they may feel differently about working for one of these businesses.

The merger of Easton and Otley College also brings opportunities for re-branding and repositioning the education offer in the region. Many businesses we spoke to for this report referred to Harper Adams as the university of choice for young aspiring farmers – and many farming families in East Anglia rely on this kind of education to continue the family farming connection. However, with university education becoming more expensive, could there not be an opportunity for the new Easton/Otley group to deliver more higher education skills in short bursts ( to fit in with the pressure of the farm working year) and at much less cost than a full-time university degree course? Easton College already has high credibility in the market place – and presumably the Centre for Contemporary Agriculture could be an ideal vehicle to explore higher skills options for the farming community across the two counties.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

5. Co-ordinate the elements required for a successful multi-skilling course for engineers
6. Undertake a ‘rural economy’ marketing exercise to reshape the perceptions of the farming, food and drinks sector in East Anglia.
7. As part of the above, encourage apprenticeships in this sector working with employers to identify key benefits.
8. Encourage Easton College to take a lead in designing more short higher skills courses aimed at the farming community in East Anglia.