

## Minutes CWLEP SME Supergroup meeting 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Sandfields Farm, Manor Farm, Luddington, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Warwickshire,  
CV37 9SJ

Sean Farnell

Lee Osborne

David from Gs

David Pearce WCC

Neil Johnson

Roger Scott

Luke Ryder

Sarah Pagan

Sarah Gambrall

Paul Rice

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS: G's FRESH & SANDFIELD FARMS**

David from G's Fresh started the meeting with a presentation of G's and Sandfield Farms

#### G's Fresh

Salads, Peas, Lettuce growers -based in Warwickshire – own set of accounts

Vision to align with growth of supermarkets, turnover grown in the last 10 years

Also own a farming business in Poland and Senegal. Funded by Sandfield Farms - cover winter production.

Investment in land levelling to mechanise business as much as possible

75-80% of seasonal staff are returnees from Bulgaria and Romania. Farm is dependent on manual labour. Machines unable to cope with the types of crops.

Shifts in the last few years – higher skilled staff (supervisors, truck drivers) come from Poland

It is competitive, a big part of retaining staff is welfare and ethics – keeping people happy. WiFi is expected.

Tools like social media – Facebook in particular– are useful to keep relationship with seasonal workers and get updates to them on what's happening in the winter.

Apprenticeship schemes – Colleges not up to speed with this.

Putting a structured training plan in place is a struggle with colleges.

Have apprenticeships running. Local recruitment is difficult e.g. taxi drivers.

Running an internal management training scheme.

**Sandfield Farms**

Operations across UK – Shropshire, Pershore, Kent  
Senegal – Choice of country due to environmental foot print, abundance of water, amount of labour, sea links.

**Strategy**

- Investment in Mechanisation (looking for grants and partners – working with Bosch around mechanisation)
- seasonal labour training and facilities
- Water obstruction – change of licences to permits
- Storage (reservoirs) winter abstraction → alleviating flooding by pumping water out to storage spaces. → seeing what grants are available.
- Need to have security of fulfilling orders running in the background
- No electricity in Senegal – generators

**Main challenges**

- EU- not knowing what’s going to happen
- Staff

**BOARD RESUMED**

It was noted that the growth story and potential of the above case study was not unique and that there were many other high potential agri-businesses across South Warwickshire (eg. Valefresco going into Hydroponics), however most packaging and consolidation done in Worcestershire. LEP by necessity has to focus on manufacturing but farm businesses cannot be ignored. Future lack of seasonal labour will be a pressing issue.

**2. MATTERS ARISING & BOARD UPDATE**

Due to low number of attendees some agenda items need to be moved to 7th November

Marie Ney review

LEPs – LEP chairs spoke out against West Midlands LEP. Teleconference to happen to review developments of LEP reviews over last two months

AP: Sarah P to send around portal information – membership fees

**3. FINANCE UPDATE**

DH left update on finance with his apologies for the meeting.  
Cov City Council: current grant programmes (business support, low carbon and innovation) are coming to an end. Low carbon is still taking applications but timescales for applying and claiming the grants are very tight. CCC expecting that new support programmes and grant funds will be launched in these areas in January.

**MEIF:**

RAB meeting was taking place Thursday following the meeting in Worcester. 3 awards gone to Cov & Warks SMEs worth a total of £400k –

this is not too dis-similar to other West Midlands LEP areas (the Derby, Leicester, Nottingham area has had higher amounts of awards than other areas), and therefore suggests a fairly slow start all round. It feels vital to start understanding why some applications have been unsuccessful and communication between the fund managers and intermediaries is vital.

There was agreement on the lack of demand for MEIF loans. Questions of SMEs are around short-term stock finances. Brexit uncertainty might have to do with that

RS mentioned that majority of lending goes into healthcare and property.

**NEXT MEETING: 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018**