

# Innovation safeguarded Britain's food chain during a global pandemic

## Jim Moseley

Covid-19 has brought food supply into sharp focus – perhaps more so than any other time since World War 2. It has changed the way people are buying and consuming food, in ways that wouldn't have seemed possible a few months ago.

We have learnt a lot about our country, our supply chains and ourselves during the past five months. It united the food sector and garnered support for British Farmers, as they stepped up to help feed the nation in the face of adversity. This all took place as the demand for food reached levels only seen at Christmas but with zero notice.

The response of the public and the industry was in stark contrast to the torrid times of the 1990's, when after a spate of food scares, trust in British Agriculture was at an all-time low. It devastated farming and food businesses up and down the country and ruined livelihoods. One very important element of this journey to rebuild trust and improve farming standards has been Red Tractor.

With over 46,000 British farmer members and approximately 75% of British agricultural output Red Tractor Assured, it is the UK's largest food and farming scheme. Membership provides a route to market to some of the UK's largest food service customers, restaurant chains, pubs and supermarkets, in an industry that contributes more than £100 billion to the economy and employs more than 4 million people. Because of this, our mission is very clear – Protect the integrity of the food chain and agricultural standards, so that everyone in the UK has access to safe, affordable and responsibly sourced food.

We are yet to understand the true extent of the health and economic ramifications of this global pandemic. But with more than 8 million people struggling to get enough food on their tables, there is no more important time to safeguard standards and the affordability of food.

To achieve this, innovation played a significant part in two key areas:

- 1) The introduction of a new digital platform to allow members to shift from a paper-based system, to secure online documents.
- 2) The development of an alternative system from physical farm visits, to live streamed audits, thereby allowing assessors to have 'virtual eyes' on farm.

Both have been instrumental in allowing farmers to complete their assessments to either gain or maintain their assurance status throughout this period, whilst protecting the health of everyone involved in the chain.

To date, since the roll out of the Red Tractor Portal to all members, and the launch of the remote assessments protocol in March, more than 10,000 of our farmers have been able to complete their assessments safely and effectively. This important milestone has been reached, thanks to the herculean efforts of our technical team, our certification bodies and the resilience of farmers.

Together we have created a system that is fit for purpose for the times we are in, and a valuable asset for the future. Through innovation, we have delivered a solution for conserving a secure and traceable supply chain, that families across the nation can have confidence in. Now more than ever, is the time to uphold and not compromise on food standards.