

## PhD Project Advertisement

**Project title:** *Novel transition pathways to regenerative agriculture*

**Project No:** FBS25-57-Lukac-rs

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**Project description:** Current food production systems are major contributors to climate change and biodiversity loss. To create a sustainable future, farming practices must adapt to enhance nature, reduce environmental impact, and ensure resilient food supply chains. Regenerative Agriculture (RA) is a transformative approach that prioritises soil health, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration while maintaining productive and profitable farms. This PhD project will uncover the challenges and opportunities of transitioning to RA, with Waitrose, a leading UK retailer, serving as a case study. Waitrose has committed to transitioning its UK supplier base to RA by 2035, presenting a unique opportunity to explore the impacts of this ambitious shift across the food supply chain.

The project will investigate how adopting RA affects various stakeholders, including farmers, processors, and retailers. Key questions to be answered are: How do the environmental benefits of RA translate into economic outcomes? What motivates different actors along the supply chain to adopt sustainable practices? How are costs, benefits, and risks shared among stakeholders? The research may focus on sectors such as dairy, poultry, fruit, vegetables, and arable farming, depending on student's interest, to analyse economic impacts, environmental benefits, and financial changes.



One of the groundbreaking innovations of this research is the holistic approach. While many studies focus on farm-level impacts of RA or on specific operations, this research considers the entire supply chain, recognising the interconnected nature of food systems. In collaboration with the practitioners, the student will identify potential barriers to RA adoption, unintended consequences like economic disparities, and opportunities for collaborative solutions. The student will work closely with Waitrose suppliers, using systems-thinking principles, interviews, economic modelling, and valuation methods to assess outcomes and develop strategies for a fair and effective transition.

The project builds on a strong partnership between the host Universities and Waitrose, that facilitates direct engagement with farmers and food processors. This collaboration ensures access to valuable data and real-world insights, allowing the research to inform practical solutions, such as training programmes and incentives, that support sustainability transitions. This PhD will investigate how systemic transitions work, showcasing RA as a model for sustainable food production. By highlighting the socio-economic and environmental impacts of RA, the project will contribute to UK food security, climate goals, and the development of resilient supply chains that benefit all.

**Training opportunities:** The student will receive comprehensive training in agri-ecology, regenerative agriculture, systems thinking, financial and business analytics, economics, and statistical modelling. We will undertake a learning needs analysis at the beginning to identify training needs. There are opportunities to access specialised courses, such as supply chain analysis or statistical programming. The student can attend relevant lectures and seminars from the School of Agriculture, Reading or Surrey Business School. We will train the student in a wide range of communication skills through presenting at internal and external seminars, conferences, and during interactions with Waitrose stakeholders. Hands-on insights into decision-making will be provided by a series of short placements with Waitrose producers, suppliers, and retailers. Participation in large multi-partner projects hosted by Reading and Surrey, will offer access to workshops, networking and collaborations with national and international experts. These experiences will significantly enhance the student's career prospects, equipping them with interdisciplinary expertise, industry connections, and leadership skills.

**Project supervision style:** Initially, bi-weekly supervision meetings will be held in person and online on Teams with the supervisory team to discuss progress, refine research questions, and establish key milestones. Meetings will focus on fine-tuning the research plan, conducting a literature review, and developing methodologies. Ad-hoc meetings with specific supervisors or experts will focus on research methods, data analysis, and sector-specific topics, and building foundational skills and networks within the academic community. Within the first 3 months, an introductory visit to the industry partner, Waitrose, will be arranged to meet key personnel, understand their RA goals, agree informal placements, and discuss how the PhD research aligns with their objectives. We anticipate that the frequency and focus of supervisory meetings will then adapt to meet the needs of the student and the project. Feedback will be provided immediately during meetings where possible, feedback on written work will be given within 5 working days after submission.

**Student profile:** The project requires strong quantitative skills and the capacity to work with multiple stakeholders. A good understanding of UK food production systems, agri-business economics or agroecology are desirable but not essential and training will be provided to support the student's development in areas where they are less experienced.

**Other information:** Waitrose will provide access to stakeholders and business-related information relevant to the transition to Regenerative Agriculture. It will also facilitate the short placement with stakeholders within its supply chains.

#### **Stipend (Salary):**

FoodBioSystems DTP students receive an annual tax free stipend (salary) that is paid in instalments throughout the year. For 2024/25 this is £19,237 (£21,237 at Brunel University) and it will increase slightly each year at rate set by UKRI.

#### **Equity Diversity and Inclusion:**

The FoodBioSystems DTP is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), to building a doctoral researcher (DR) and staff body that reflects the diversity of society, and to encourage applications from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. Our actions to promote diversity and inclusion are detailed on the [FoodBioSystems DTP website](#) and include:

- Offering reasonable adjustments at interview for shortlisted candidates who have disclosed a disability or specific learning difference.
- [Guaranteed interview](#) and [applicant mentoring](#) schemes for applicants, with UK home fees status, from eligible under-represented ethnic groups.

These are opt-in processes.

Our studentships are offered on a part time basis in addition to full time registration. The minimum registration is 50% FT and the studentship end date will be extended to reflect the part-time registration.

**For up to date information on funding eligibility, studentship rates and part time registration, please visit the [FoodBioSystems website](#).**