



THE FUTURE'S SWEET FOR NORFOLK-BASED INNOVATORS

A company based in Norfolk, with plans to develop a system to enable exotic crop growth in the UK, have been awarded an Eastern Agri-Tech Initiative grant to support its Research and Development (R&D) project.

GroPod Ltd has identified market demand for sweet potatoes for crisping. These are currently air freighted from Florida and there is a local processor keen to establish a supply system in Norfolk.

The R&D project, which has been awarded a £54,106 grant, would seek to prove the concept of the Pod production on a pilot commercial scale and provide the evidence for upscaling this to meet the needs of the local processor. This would enable sweet potatoes for crisping to be produced in the local area, reducing carbon footprint and overall operating costs.

GroPod state that their Pod Project will deliver an innovative assembly that puts together a number of proven techniques for the first time. Looking ahead, GroPod has ambitious visions including; to grow a commercial operation to deliver sweet potatoes to crisp producers; manufacture and sell Pods as a complete 'plug-in' model; support educational providers by providing Pods in order to demonstrate plant growth principles; and to consider how other exotic produce could be delivered via the Pod system.

Upon successful completion of testing the commercial Pod prototype, the company would commence business from a site on Scottow Enterprise Park in North Norfolk to host its business operation. This would create four full-time equivalent jobs and local producers would be able to source crops locally thereby reducing food miles, carbon footprint and minimising the use of water, nutrients and pesticides.

Mark Reeve, Chairman of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership, said:

"The Research & Development that GroPod want to undertake, if successful, will revolutionise the way sweet potatoes are produced in the UK. Reducing the carbon footprint of food production, and allowing the creation of a local supply chain that is more efficient and beneficial to the local economy.

"Additionally, if the initial R&D goes well, the scope for diversifying the system to grow other exotic fruit and vegetables will help GroPod Ltd thrive. I look forward to seeing the results of their work."

Chris Starkie, Managing Director of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, said:

"This is an exciting innovation that has the potential both to reduce food miles and at the same time increase the resilience of the agriculture sector in the East. Not only that, but this project will deliver new jobs on a site that forms part of our Enterprise Zone at Scottow. We wish GroPod every success."

Dan Hewitt, joint Managing Director at GroPod Ltd said:



“Our Board is extremely pleased to have been awarded the Eastern Agri-Tech Initiative grant because it is not only an enormous financial help at this formative stage of our R&D project, but it also tells us that we are robust in our approach – the meticulous assessment before the panel interview proves due diligence and gives us confidence going forward for growth and investment.”

Guy Willets, joint Managing Director along with Dan, added:

“As an engineer it is great to have the opportunity to work on an R&D project that has so many interesting applications and engineering challenges to solve. With the Eastern Agri-Tech Initiative funding our team is able to push the boundaries of possibility of future urban agricultural systems. We can now viably provide a product and service that supports the wider economy, increases food productivity and helps manage and reduce the pressure on our resources. This is a very exciting project to work on.”

The Eastern Agri-Tech Growth Initiative is run by the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership (LEP) with support from New Anglia LEP, Norfolk County Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, and the local authorities covering this area.

Grants are available to organisations looking to invest in specialist equipment, new market and supply chain development, ways to improve productivity and efficiency, and the application and commercialisation of Research and Development.

To find out how the Eastern Agri-Tech Growth Initiative could help to grow your business, visit www.agritechgrants.co.uk or call the LEP on 01480 277180.

- Ends –

Notes to editors

1. The Initiative has two separate funds that are available for businesses. The first is an **Agri-Tech Growth Fund**, which will provide grants of between £10,000 and £150,000 to support improvements in agricultural productivity. Whilst the **R&D and Prototyping Fund** will provide grants of between £10,000 and £60,000 to support the development of innovative technology. Find out more at www.agritechgrants.co.uk.

For further information and interview opportunities, please contact Rebecca Knight at the LEP on 01480 277180 or email rebecca.knight@gcgp.co.uk.