



IAgrE Landwards Conference 2026

Wednesday 21st October 2026
Harper Adams University, Newport

Automation in Agriculture: From Innovation to Impact

Conference Officers

IAgrE President	Kit Franklin
Conference Convenor	Kit Franklin
Conference Secretary	Sarah McLeod
Chief Executive	Charlie Nicklin
Press & Communications Officer	Marion King
Membership Secretary	Alison Chapman
Chair of Panel Discussion	Kit Franklin

The wi-fi username is **October2026** and
the password is **PumpkinHarvestAutumn**
Further instructions are available at the registration table

Thank you to our Sponsoring partners:



Automation in Agriculture: From Innovation to Impact

The Programme

9.00 am	Registration & Coffee
9.30 am	Kit Franklin – President IAgrE <i>Welcome & Introduction to the Conference</i>
9.40 am Technical session	Nestor Deniz – Principal Doctoral RA - Harper Institute of Technology <i>Technical development of humanoid robotics in agricultural engineering</i>
10.15 am Technical session	Dan Whitear – Lead Mechanical Engineer – Warwick Agritech <i>Technical development of robotic tree grading</i>
10.50am – 11.20 am	Coffee & Networking
11.20 am Commercial session	James Miller – CEO – Earth Rover <i>A strategic case study</i>
11.55 pm Commercial session	Rhian Griffith – Machinery Safety Consultant <i>Integrating Automation Safely</i>
12.30pm-1.30pm	Lunch & Networking – Field Demonstrations
1.30 pm Farm Adoption	Dermot Tobin – Managing Director Farming at PDM Produce (UK) Ltd <i>User Experience Talk – Robotti & Laser weeding etc</i>
2.05 pm Farm Adoption	William Mumford – CEO - AS Communications (UK) Ltd <i>User Experience Talk - AgXeed</i>
2.40 pm	Panel Discussion Chaired by Kit Franklin, President IAgrE <i>An opportunity to quiz our speakers and have your questions answered</i>
15.20 pm	Round up and thank you Kit Franklin – President IAgrE
15.30pm	Conference Ends – optional Networking

Automation in Agriculture: From Innovation to Impact

Ten years ago, the Hands Free Hectare at Harper Adams University led by Kit Franklin, now IAgrE President, set out to demonstrate that a crop could be grown and harvested without a person driving the machinery. Since then, agricultural automation has moved from experimental projects towards commercial reality, with autonomous and robotic systems now operating on farms around the world.

Autonomous machines are sold to farmers, and new innovative companies such as AgXeed, FarmDroid and Earth Rover have moved from prototypes into commercial deployment. The major incumbent agricultural machinery manufacturers are bringing increasingly sophisticated embedded autonomous systems to market, combining GPS positioning, computer vision and AI into machine control systems that are used by farmers every day. What was once an experiment is becoming an integral part of the machinery market.

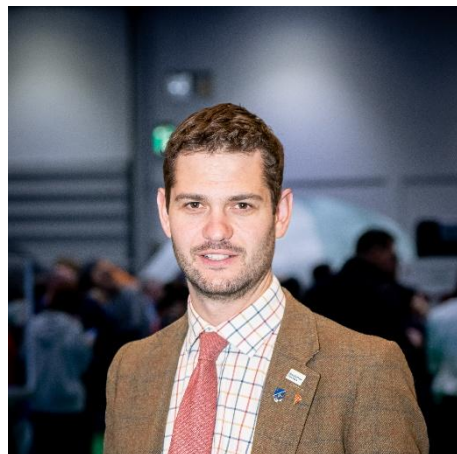
However, demonstrating that something technical can be done and even selling that innovation is very different from demonstrating that it delivers value.

The aim of this year's Landwards Conference convened at Harper Adams by Kit is to explore that journey from innovation to impact. What is happening at the cutting edge of engineering research today? What are the practical challenges that still need to be overcome? How are commercial companies developing viable business models around these technologies? And, perhaps most importantly, what are farmers actually experiencing — both the good and the bad — as automation moves from the laboratory and demonstration field into commercial agricultural businesses?

We have brought together researchers, technology companies and farmers to provide these different perspectives. I hope their experiences will challenge our assumptions, highlight where progress is being made, and expose where there is still work to do.

Ten years after the Hands Free Hectare, this feels like an appropriate time to ask not simply "Can we automate agriculture?", but "How do we make automation deliver real impact for agriculture?"

We hope for an enjoyable the conference, which aims to be informative, thought-provoking and inspiring.



Kit Franklin, IAgrE President, October 2026



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Our Speakers:

Technical Session

Nestor Deniz, Principal Doctoral Research Assistant, HAU

Nestor Deniz gained his PhD in Simultaneous Control and State Estimation for Nonlinear Systems Subject to Bounded Disturbances Using Moving Horizon Techniques from the Universidad Nacional del Litoral. He is currently working at Harper Adams University, specialising in humanoid robots for agricultural applications, autonomous navigation systems, and reinforcement learning.

Dr Deniz will be delivering a technical talk on his latest research into implementing dexterous manoeuvres in humanoid robots for apple harvesting



Technical Session

Dan Whitear, Lead Mechanical Engineer, Warwick AgriTech

Dan is Lead Mechanical Engineer at Warwick Agritech, part of WMG at the University of Warwick, where he develops robotic systems for agriculture, forestry and horticulture. His work focuses on creating autonomous technologies that help address labour shortages and improve operational efficiency.

At the IAgrE Conference, Dan will discuss the development of robotic tree seedling sorting systems designed to automate the assessment and grading of young trees in forestry nurseries. He will explore how robotics can improve productivity, consistency and scalability in nursery operations.



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Our Speakers:

Commercial Session

James Miller, CEO, Earth Rover

We are looking forward to hearing James Miller, CEO of Earth Rover; share a strategic, commercially focused case study on how robotics and AI are reshaping the economics of farming. From powertrain engineering to business process transformation, James has led projects across multiple industries — giving him a uniquely strategic lens on how robotics and AI can reshape agriculture.

James is a Chartered Engineer with more than 25 years' experience across the automotive, agriculture, rail and defence sectors. He has worked as a consultant and as Group CTO for one of the largest tractor manufacturers in the world, before joining Earth Rover, a company developing autonomous technologies for sustainable food production.



James will present Earth Rover's CLAWS™ robotic platform, which uses artificial intelligence, machine vision and real-time crop data to support autonomous field operations. Powered by batteries and solar energy, the technology offers a low-carbon approach to weed control and crop management, helping growers reduce inputs while supporting their net-zero ambitions.

Commercial Session

Rhian Griffith, Consultant, Flynt Technology

Rhian Griffith has been working in the agricultural industry since 2021, with roles focused primarily on mechanical design and product safety compliance. Earlier in her career, she gained experience in safety, reliability, and quality assurance through airworthiness projects in the aerospace industry.

At Flynt Technology, much of her work has focused on autonomous machinery, where she applies her knowledge to help ensure innovative products meet safety and compliance requirements. She enjoys tackling complex engineering challenges and finding practical solutions that enable products to perform safely and reliably in the real world.



Rhian's talk will explore how automation safety can be integrated into commercial manufacturing — turning cutting-edge technology into practical, safe, scalable solutions.



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Our Speakers:

Farm Adoption

Dermot Tobin, MD, Farming at PDM Produce UK Ltd

In his role overseeing the farming division, Dermot deals directly with the daily and long-term challenges of large-scale vegetable farming in the UK.

He has been a vocal advocate for bringing technology into the fields. Because almost all supermarket lettuce is traditionally cut by hand, he has helped lead PDM's involvement in agri-tech partnerships (such as the "Lettuce Project" funded by Innovate UK) to develop prototype robotic lettuce harvesters. He has frequently highlighted how Brexit, inflation, and changing work trends have caused severe shortages in seasonal farm workers, making automation vital for the industry's future survival.



PDM have been early adopters of innovative technology, investing in autonomy to improve quality and production. Dermot will review the on farm use of this cutting-edge technology and explain the benefits to the business.

Farm Adoption

William Mumford, CEO AS Communications (UK) Ltd

William Mumford is a fifth-generation farmer from Cambridgeshire and founder of AS Communications (UK) Ltd, which has provided agricultural technology solutions since 1989. With more than 30 years' experience in precision farming, GPS guidance and farm technology, he is widely recognised for helping farmers adopt innovative solutions that improve productivity, efficiency and sustainability.

As both a farmer and technology supplier, William brings a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing modern agriculture. Through ASC Automation, he is leading the introduction of autonomous machinery to the UK market, including the AgXeed range of driverless tractors.



At the IAgrE Conference, William will discuss the role of autonomous tractors in farming today, exploring how AI-driven machinery can support sustainable production, ease labour pressures and improve efficiency while integrating with existing farm equipment and systems.



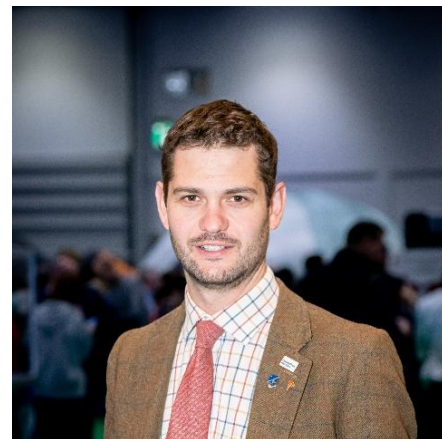
The Institution of Agricultural Engineers' Landwards Conference 2026



Automation in Agriculture: From Innovation to Impact

Panel Discussion chaired by

IAgrE President
Kit Franklin CEng MIAgrE



Kit is a Chartered Engineer, Senior Engagement Fellow at Harper Adams University, Adjunct Faculty member at Mississippi State University, and an independent AgTech and project consultant. Kit began his two-year term as IAgrE President in April 2026.

He led the world-first Hands Free Hectare project in 2016 and later became Principal Investigator of the 35-hectare Hands Free Farm, helping pioneer the practical use of autonomous machinery in agriculture. His expertise spans agricultural machinery design, precision farming, automation, and AgTech research projects in the UK and internationally.

A passionate advocate for agricultural engineering and sustainable AgTech, Kit is a regular media contributor, conference speaker, co-host of the Brash Ag podcast, and co-chair of IAgrE's Robotics Special Interest Group. He is a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society of England and recipient of the Farmers Weekly Rising Star Award (2017) and IAgrE President's Award (2021).

If you have a question that you feel will stimulate discussion please do make a note of it and hand it to Kit prior to the forum

The panel are as follows:

Nestor Deniz, Principal Doctoral Research Assistant , Harper Adams University

Dan Whitear, Lead Mechanical Engineer, Warwick Agritech

James Miller, CEO, Earth Rover

Rhian Griffin, Consultant, Flynt Technology

Dermot Tobin, Managing Director Framing, PDM Produce UK Ltd

William Mumford, CEO, AS Communications (UK) Ltd



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Delegates & Speakers:

First Name	Last Name	Organisation Name
John	Baines	Douglas Bomford Trust - Sponsor
Tom	Bennet	Harper Adams University Student
Martin	Boddy	Danfoss Power Solution
Stephen	Bonnett	Blue Bridge Engineering Ltd
Rob	Borland	Nylacast Group
Alex	Brawn	E P Barrus Ltd
Victoria	Bywater	Society of Agriculture
Charles	Carter	UK AgriTech Centre
Denis	Cartmel	
David	Clare	Harper Adams University
Jonathan	Cooper	Harper Adams University
Simon	Cooper	Harper Adams University
Andrew	Court	Court Farming Partnership
Hugh	Crabtree	Farmex
Alex	Parry	TiMotion - Sponsor
Matthew	Dempsey	RTKFnet
Nestor	Deniz	Harper Adams University - Speaker
Thomas	Evans	Consultant
Thomas	Evans	Harper Adams University
Declan	Flynn	
Matthew	Forbes	Harper Adams University Student
Kit	Franklin	IAgrE President
John	Gadsby	ADAS
Rhian	Griffith	Flynt Technology - Speaker
Daniel	Griffiths	Huffle Design Ltd
Graham	Higginson	Harper Adams University
Muhammad	Hilal Kabir	
Greg	Houghton	Landex
Les	Hurdiss	UK AgriTech Centre
Julian	Huxham	FlowTech - Sponsor
James	Huyton	Farmers Guardian
Edward	Jones	Autoguide Equipment
Robert	Jones	Caterpillar
Emily	Kanagasabay	Imperial College London Student
Ray	King	Flynt Technology
Alex	Lewis	AMRC
Oliver	Lloyd	Harper Adams University Student
Jim	Loynes	
Katie	Massey	



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Delegates & Speakers:

First Name	Last Name	Organisation Name
Matthew	Mayne	Topcon Agriculture
Kyle	McCrea	Harper Adams University Student
Hamish	McNeill	Imperial College London
James	Miller	Earth Rover - Speaker
Paula	Misiewicz	Harper Adams University
Mark	Moore	AGCO
William	Mumford	AS Communications (UK) Ltd - Speaker
Andy	Newbold	Landwards Editor
Charlie	Nicklin	IAgrE CEO
George	Nowell	Kubota
Will	Osborn	Wessex International
Sarah	Parsons	Harper Adams University
Marion	Pearson	Severn Trent Water
Sven	Peets	Harper Adams University
Giles	Pickford	University of Birmingham Student
Barnabas	Pickford	CNH
Oscar	Pizey	University of Nottingham Student
Marcello	Precoppe	Harper Adams University
Luke	Pritchard	Devonshire Group
William	Purcell	Imperial College London
Luke	Randell	Harper Adams University Student
Richard	Robinson	Autoguide Equipment
Mark	Sears	Caterpillar
Thomas	Smith	Cranfield University Student
Mike	Stephenson	
Morgan	Taylor	Harper Adams University
James	Thomas	Syngenta
Matthew	Tilt	Farm Contractor Magazine
David	Tinker	
Dermot	Tobin	PDM Produce (UK) Ltd - Speaker
Jonathan	Trotter	Agrii
William	Tuer	WST Rural Ltd
Alastair	Tulloch	
Stuart	Walker	
David	White	Douglas Bomford Trust/ HAU
Dan	Whitear	Warwick AgriTech - Speaker
Mike	Whiting	NewMac Safety
Lee	Williams	Harper Adams University
Stephen	Williams	

