The Institution of

Agricultural Engineers

Founded 1938 – Incorporated 1960

## The IAgrE Award of Merit

## Professor Simon Pearson

FIAgrE

Professor Simon Pearson is widely recognised as the person who has brought robotics technologies to solve problems in the agricultural and horticultural sectors. He is currently the Head of School of Agri-Food technology and Manufacturing at the University of Lincoln – a school that was founded in August 2024 and based on three sites including The Lincoln Institute of Agri-Food Technology at the Riseholme Campus, the National Centre for Food Manufacturing in Holbeach and the Universities Seafood Processing Centre in Grimsby. Simon is now responsible for the school’s growth strategy and securing its financial resilience – a challenging role particularly in at the present time.

Simon started his career by obtaining a first class honours degree in Horticulture and a PhD in Crop Forecasting at the University of Reading before joining the staff at the University as a lecturer in the School of Sciences. In this role he successfully conducted research for 41 companies and institutions, secured grant

income of £2.76m and supervised 12 PhD students to completion. In 1998, he moved into the commercial sector as Produce Technologist for Marks and Spenser plc where he was working within a retail buying team concerned with the supply and marketing of cut flowers. He managed six key suppliers involving more than 50 growers worldwide, ranging from Kenya, Isreal, Columbia to Europe and the UK.

In 2005, he joined Winchester Growers Ltd as Commercial Director becoming Managing Director in 2014/5. This company is one of the largest growers and packers of cut flowers in Europe and Simon managed four of their farming operations – 2 in Lincolnshire, 1 in Cornwall and one in Portugal.

In 2016, Simon became the Founding Director of The Lincoln Institute of Agri-Food Technology (LIAT) at The University of Lincoln. Since its inception, LIAT have facilitated over £110m of interdisciplinary agri-tech awards, collaborating with 133 companies and 86 research organisations. Renowned for its contribution to agri-robotics and AI, LIAT were awarded the 2023 *Queens Anniversary Prize*. The team has received substantial peer reviewed investments from UK research councils including for the AgriFoRwArdS Centre for Doctoral Training with the Universities of Cambridge and East Anglia which supports some 50 PhD students all in areas applying robotics to agricultural and horticultural problems.

Simon is an interdisciplinary scientist working to solve complex issues within the agri-food domain with expertise that builds on a sound knowledge of the farming and horticultural sectors in the UK formed from an early life in a farming environment.

In addition to his current University role, he is a member of the Food Standards Agency Science Council, chair of the Advisory Board of the £100m Innovate UK Bridge AI program, a trustee of The Douglas Bomford Trust and joint founder of CERES Agri-Tech involving the universities of Cambridge, Lincoln, East Anglia, Hertfordshire and Reading. He is a director of two spin-out companies from the University of Lincoln – Fruitcast.AI concerned with yield forecasting and Agaricus