**A Unique Opportunity for the Potato Industry: Fully Funded PhD Research**

The potato industry now has an extraordinary chance to shape its future by setting the research agenda for up to 12 fully funded PhD students. This initiative offers an invaluable platform for addressing the sector's most pressing challenges. With direct industry involvement, these projects will be tailored to deliver practical solutions that align with real-world needs.

**Fully Funded PhD Studentships with Industry Support**

The BBSRC, a prominent UK science funding body, is providing full funding for these studentships, covering £120,000 per student over four years. To support the collective management and training of the students, industry partners are asked to contribute £6,250 annually over the four years (£25,000 total). This modest investment grants industry partners the ability to direct high-impact research addressing the issues that matter most to their business and the potato sector as a whole.  An industry partner could fund one entire student or be part of a group funding a student.  You can take whichever approach is best for you.

**Bridging Academia and Industry**

Collaboration is at the heart of this programme. Industry will determine the research focus of the student to ensure their projects align with commercial priorities. Additionally, for each student the partner or partners funding the studentship are expected to provide a three-month placement for their student, covering expenses such as travel and accommodation. These placements will immerse students in the commercial environment, preparing them for a career in the potato industry while addressing critical challenges facing the sector.

**Leading Organisations and Research Collaboration**

GB Potatoes has taken the lead on the potato-focused component of this programme, working alongside the overall lead, the Scottish Whisky Research Institute. Research projects will primarily be based at the James Hutton Institute and the universities of Dundee, Harper Adams, and Nottingham. Additional institutions with specialised expertise may also contribute as needed to ensure projects meet the objectives set by industry.

**Addressing Industry Challenges**

Stakeholder workshops conducted in February 2024 highlighted key challenges within the UK potato industry, including an ageing workforce and a shortage of "tech-savvy" individuals. These PhD studentships aim to address these issues by training a new generation of skilled professionals who bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions. The research outputs from these projects will also provide practical benefits to help the industry thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

**Research Themes**

Industry partners have the unique chance to determine project ideas in collaboration with academic groups, tailoring research to the needs of industry. Workshops conducted for the proposed national potato innovation centre highlighted key challenges within the UK potato industry. Some or all of these could be potential themes for research

* Developing new, climate-resilient potato varieties resistant to pests and diseases.
* Enhancing pest and disease monitoring and control systems.
* Improving soil health and water use efficiency.
* Innovating low-carbon growing methods and regenerative agricultural practices.
* Creating decision support tools for growers.
* Exploring novel products and identifying new market opportunities.
* Join Us in Shaping the Future of the Potato Industry

This initiative offers an unparalleled opportunity for the potato industry to lead cutting-edge research while nurturing the next generation of experts. By partnering with academic institutions and supporting PhD students, you can help solve critical challenges and secure a sustainable future for the sector.

If you’re interested in participating or would like to learn more, please contact:

Scott Walker (GB Potatoes) Email: scott.walker@scconsultancy.uk