



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## Innovation: Resource Sheet for Food and Drink SMEs

This document includes information on where to go for support on innovation and resources that you can use, which we signposted clearly as (resource) and (support). If you have any questions or feedback on this resource, please email [foodanddrinkpromotion@defra.gov.uk](mailto:foodanddrinkpromotion@defra.gov.uk).

To make the most of this document, you will find in (resource) self-help documents that will guide you through options and routes, as well as case studies to illustrate what those pathways can look like. The (support) organisations will provide you with contact to teams, especially where there are processes for funding.

## Food and Drink Innovation Gateway

**Through their initial consultation, get advice on technology-based solutions tailored to your business.**

The Food and Drink Innovation Gateway is a one-stop shop that gives food and drink manufacturers of all sizes an opportunity to unlock access to the adoption of automation, digitalisation and new technology.

- Through a free consultation with the UK's world-leading experts, we will work with you to identify challenges, large and small, and offer technology-based, cost-effective solutions that can help to grow your business (support)
- You can access the Innovation Gateway here (resource)  
[Innovation Gateway | The Food & Drink Federation \(fdf.org.uk\)](https://www.fdf.org.uk/innovation-gateway)
- The Innovation Gateway has been developed by the Food and Drink Federation (FDF). The FDF are a membership organisation – to learn more you can go to their website or contact: [membership@fdf.org.uk](mailto:membership@fdf.org.uk). (support)
- Further FDF documents and research (resource)  
[Food and drink sector research | The Food & Drink Federation \(fdf.org.uk\)](https://www.fdf.org.uk/food-and-drink-sector-research)

## Innovate UK Business Connect

Use the [Canvas Tool](#) and the [grant guideline](#) to help you with funding and your business's route to innovation.

Innovate UK Business Connect provides business support, funding and connections to help businesses on their innovation journey. You can find out more about the support offered here: [How we help - Innovate UK KTN \(ktn-uk.org\)](https://www.ktn-uk.org/) and search current funding opportunities from across UKRI, research councils and Innovate UK here: <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/>.

Their website includes resources such as:

- **Grant Funding Application Guide** (resource)  
This is a guide to help businesses prepare applications for grant funding. While the guide has been produced with Innovate UK programmes in mind, the advice is transferable to most grant funding applications. You can access the guide here: <https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Business-Connect-Good-Application-Guide.pdf>
- **Innovation Canvas Tool** (resource)  
This is a tool that helps businesses to identify the most important challenges in developing an innovative product, service or process. You can use it to prioritise next actions and seek other views or advice. You can access the tool here: [Home – Innovation Canvas \(ktn-uk.org\)](https://www.ktn-uk.org/)

## Made Smarter Adoption

Apply to [Made Smarter](#) to get the most of innovative digital technology solutions supporting your growth.

Register through [this link](#).

Made Smarter Adoption is focused on boosting the competitiveness, productivity, and growth of manufacturing SMEs through the adoption of industrial digital technology (IDT).

- The support available for SMEs through this programme includes impartial advice, diagnostic and technology road mapping, as well as digital internships, leadership and management training, and match funded grants for equipment (support)
- Made Smarter Adoption is currently running in the North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and East Midlands in England; it will be rolled out to the whole of England in 2025/26
- The Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) works closely alongside the Made Smarter programmes; watch this video for a quick demonstration of how it can benefit you (resource): [Sustainability Linewalk with Lestercast \(the-mtc.org\)](https://www.the-mtc.org/)
- You can also view case studies from SMEs who have used the programme such as:
  - [English lakes ice cream case study.pdf \(madesmarter.uk\)](#)
  - [Firstplay dietary foods case study-1.pdf \(madesmarter.uk\)](#)

## The Institute for Food Science and Technology

Use these resources for innovation on sustainability and process.

IFST is there to recognise and empower food professionals by promoting excellence in science and its application throughout the food chain. Some of their key specific business support tools includes an innovation toolkit, a hub of self-help resources:

- IFST's open access Knowledge hub (resource)  
<https://www.ifst.org/knowledge-hubs>
- IFST SIG Innovation toolkit (resource)  
<https://www.ifst.org/food-innovation-toolkit>
- IFST start up journey map (resource)  
<https://www.ifst.org/sites/default/files/Starting%20a%20Food%20Manufacturing%20Business%20%E2%80%93%20Safety%20and%20Compliance%20Road%20Map%20A3.pdf>

## Local support on innovation

Check with your Local Authority about what innovation support is available locally.

### Food Innovation Centres (support)

There are many Food Innovation Centres across England. As an illustration, the one in Nottingham is hosted by the University of Nottingham, offering collaborative research, development projects and consultancy services to the food and drink industry both locally and nationally.

The support can take many different forms from help with product and process development or optimisation, problem solving, trials on pilot equipment, measures to adopt a more sustainable approach to production, formulate a more nutritious product or applied sensory evaluation.

Sometimes, the FIC can signpost SMEs to regional funding schemes to help pay for the support. These are advertised on the website and social media channels, as and when they are available.

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/fic/food-innovation-centre.aspx>

### Food Hack (support)

Contact the Food Hack where it has active communities to receive peer support.

Food Hack is a global community for FoodTech founders, funders and operators that has various regional groups and events to connect food tech founders with each other.

There is for instance an active community in London and around Nottingham. Learn more about their local work on your area: <https://www.foodhack.global/Food> .

### Food and Drink Forum (support)

Contact the Forum to receive technical expertise and dedicated business support driven by innovation.

The Forum supports small food and drink business across the UK with their growth journey, providing specialist facilities, technical expertise and access to funded business support.

The Forum is a not-for-profit organisation with food parks in Nottingham, Leicester, and Weston-super-Mare and provides technical expertise.

Their developments are available to members with a range of specialist equipment <https://www.foodanddrinkforum.co.uk/> and Food Works ([foodworks-sw.co.uk](http://foodworks-sw.co.uk))

## **How Many Beans' toolkit: Are you launch ready?**

**The key resource from How Many Beans is its free toolkit. Use this as a guide to accompany you as you develop a new product.**

As a sense-check whether you are ready to launch your new product.  
[Costing in the real world - How Many Beans](#)