

Using an Agricultural Innovation Systems Approach to Explore the Barriers to Innovation in UK Fresh Produce

Jonathan Menary¹

¹Warwick Crop Centre, University of Warwick, Wellesbourne, CV35 9EF, UK
j.menary@warwick.ac.uk

Keywords: *fresh produce, agricultural innovation systems, barriers to innovation, systemic problems, horticulture*

Abstract

The UK fresh produce industry faces a number of challenges: rising costs, issues associated with access to and cost of rural labour, the loss of pest control products and climate change. A further issue stems from the changing agricultural R&D regime in the UK and elsewhere, which is increasingly being organised along demand-driven lines. “Innovation” has been promoted to meet these challenges. However, the functioning of the fresh produce ‘innovation system’ has yet to be explored. Adopting an *Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS)* approach, this paper investigates the barriers to innovation in the industry, and reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of using the AIS approach to examine complex agricultural problems.

A number of ‘systemic problems’ have been identified. The diminishing return to growers in a retailer-dominated market is driving consolidation across the sector, resulting in diverging innovation agendas and levels of influence between larger- and smaller-scale farmers. Increasing competitiveness has led to a lack of willingness to share knowledge. At the same time, the diversity of crop types represented by those responsible for funding horticultural research results in diluted institutional support for innovation. Farming knowledge has been “locked away” or lost through both the exclusivity of certain projects and loss of expertise due to changing national funding arrangements.

The AIS approach has provided a robust framework for pinpointing and interrogating barriers to innovation, whilst the associated literature points towards potential solutions to the problems identified in this project.