Surrey Farming Innovation Accelerator - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

About the programme

Q. What is the Surrey Farming Innovation Accelerator?

The Surrey Farming Innovation Accelerator is a pilot programme supporting around 15 Surrey farmers and growers to adopt digital technologies that improve productivity, profitability, resilience and business growth. Successful applicants can apply for grants of between £10,000 and £35,000 alongside specialist business support and a structured programme of training.

Q: What are the key dates for the Farming Innovation Accelerator?

- Applications open: **15 July 2026**
- Application deadline: **16 August 2026 (Midnight)**
- On-farm diagnostic visits: **Early September 2026**
- **Course and training programme: September 2026 to March 2027**
- All grant funding must be spent by **31 March 2027**

Eligibility

Q: Who can apply?

Surrey-based SMEs whose primary activity involves owning, renting or actively managing agricultural or rural land. **Eligible sectors include farming, horticulture, vineyards, orchards, hops, forestry, bee keeping, and equine land-based enterprises.**

An eligible SME is an enterprise who has

- Less than 250 employees
- Equal or less than £44m annual turnover
- Equal or less than £38m annual balance sheet
- Received less than £315,000 in subsidy in the last 3 years

- Businesses whose trading address is in Surrey. To check if your address falls in Surrey, go to https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council and enter your postcode – the search must return Surrey County Council as your local authority.

Q: Does receiving other grants affect eligibility?

Receiving other public funding does not automatically make you ineligible, provided your total Minimum Financial Assistance (MFA) remains below £315,000 over the last three years.

Q: Are diversification projects eligible?

Yes, if they involve digital technology and deliver measurable improvements in productivity, resilience, sustainability or business growth.

Q: Are construction, vehicles or general farm infrastructure projects eligible?

No. These are ineligible unless directly enabling digital technology.

Q: Can multiple farms collaborate on a single project?

Yes, collaboration is welcome if each participating business meets eligibility criteria and the project delivers shared digital benefits. A single lead organisation must be clearly identified as part of your application.

Q: Can I submit more than one application?

Yes, provided each project is distinct and meets eligibility criteria.

Applying

Q: Where do I apply?

Applications must be made by completing an application form, which can be accessed on the Business Surrey website – add link.

Only complete applications will be accepted. You are not able to save and return to the online application form, so we recommend you draft your responses in a Word document and copy them to the form once you are ready to submit. You will receive an email to confirm your application has been submitted.

Q: What financial evidence is required for my application?

For application:

- Supplier quotes (where possible, applicants should provide two quotations for each significant item of expenditure.)
- Three years of the latest full accounts as evidence of financial viability

Q: Can I update my application after submission?

Minor clarifications may be requested, but substantial changes cannot be made after the deadline.

Q: Who assesses applications?

Applications are assessed by officers from Surrey County Council's Economy & Growth team, with final approval given by a panel of senior council officers.

Q: How are applications assessed?

Applications will be assessed against the Strategic fit with the programme; Business need; Expected impact; Value for money; Deliverability; Financial viability.

Q: Is there an opportunity to pitch in person?

No. Assessments are based solely on written submissions and supporting documents.

Q: What is available if I need additional support to submit an application?

If you require help to complete your application form because of a disability, please email us at economy.growth@surreycc.gov.uk

Grant funding

Q: How much funding can I apply for?

Between **£10,000 and £35,000** to cover eligible costs (see list in section below) within your project.

Q: Is match funding required?

No. However, applicants must demonstrate financial viability and ability to deliver the project.

If the project is over £35,000, then you must demonstrate available funds to cover the remainder of the costs.

Q: What types of projects are eligible?

Projects must demonstrate how the proposed digital technology will deliver measurable improvements in productivity, efficiency, profitability, resilience, sustainability or business growth.

Eligible projects may include (but are not limited to):

- **Farm & Crop Management**
    - Farm management software
    - Soil monitoring technology and sensors
    - Networked heaters, automated controllers and sensors

    - Precision agriculture equipment
    - Digital irrigation and hydroponic systems
    - GPS, GIS and land management technology
    - Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs), drone & robotic technologies
    - Livestock management systems
    - Hive monitoring technology
- **Processing & Production Technology**
    - Digital production equipment
    - Smart manufacturing systems
    - Processing, packaging and labelling equipment
    - Production management software
    - Barcode and stock tracking systems
    - Quality monitoring technology
- **Business Management & Digital Systems**
    - Business management software
    - CRM systems
    - Inventory and stock management
    - E-commerce platforms
    - AI-enabled business automation
    - Digital workflow improvements
- **Diversification & Visitor Economy**
    - Digital technology supporting diversification activities, including:
    - Online booking systems
    - Smart occupancy management
    - Dynamic pricing software
    - Farm shop EPOS systems
    - Customer management systems
    - Produce vending machine – with authorised and determined site
- **Enabling Infrastructure (only where directly linked to digital adoption)**
    - Tablets and laptops
    - Network infrastructure
    - Three-phase power upgrades
    - Solar panel, inverter and batteries
    - Specialist consultancy directly supporting technology implementation

Q: What types of projects are not eligible?

- Equipment that is leased
- General construction
- New buildings
- Vehicles
- Routine maintenance

- Tourism infrastructure
- Projects already started
- Projects without required planning permission

Q: Can grant funding cover consultancy or training?

Yes, but only where it directly supports digital technology adoption.

Q: Can the grant cover staff time?

No the grant funding cannot cover or pay for staff time or staff salaries or owner / manager time or salaries.

Q: Can the grant cover software subscriptions?

Yes, if they are essential to the digital technology being adopted.

Q: When can I start spending grant funding?

Successful applicants must not commit to expenditure until they have signed a Funding Agreement and received written confirmation from their Surrey County Council Account Manager that they can proceed with the purchase.

Q: How must the grant funding be managed?

Successful applicants will be required to keep grant funding ringfenced from their normal business finances and only use the funding for the approved project as set out in the Funding Agreement.

Funding will be reviewed through regular monthly progress reviews and applicants may be asked to provide financial evidence to demonstrate that expenditure aligns with the approved project.

If I'm successful...

Q: When will applicants hear about funding decisions?

Funding decisions will be communicated from late August 2026, following moderation and Investment Panel review.

Q: Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback?

Yes, summary feedback will be provided if you are unsuccessful.

Q: What happens if my application is successful?

Successful applicants will be invited to attend a mobilisation call during the week commencing 24 August or 31 August 2026.

This session will cover the Funding Agreement, programme requirements, grant payment process and next steps. Attendance is expected as part of joining the Accelerator and will enable projects to begin as quickly as possible.

Q: Will support be available during the programme?

Yes. Successful applicants receive:

- A business and technology adoption assessment
- A tailored business and technology adoption roadmap
- Monthly progress reviews
- Access to a structured set of business skills training modules delivered to cohort of businesses on the Accelerator programme
- Opportunities for 1:1 support from a Business Surrey advisor
- Peer learning and networking

Q: What commitment is expected if I join the programme?

Successful applicants are expected to actively participate throughout the programme. This includes attending the mobilisation session, monthly progress reviews, planned training sessions, work with specialist advisers where appropriate and provide monitoring information required under the Funding Agreement.

Q: When must projects be completed?

All projects must be fully delivered by 31 March 2027.

Q: Can I change my project after I have been awarded funding?

Projects should be delivered as approved. If changes become necessary, these must be discussed with your Surrey County Council Account Manager in advance. Approval is not guaranteed and applicants must not assume revised costs or activities will be eligible.

Q: What happens if I don't complete my project?

Grant funding is subject to the terms of the Funding Agreement. Failure to deliver the agreed project or comply with programme requirements may result in grant funding being recovered.

Monitoring and reporting

Q: What monitoring is required if successful?

- Participation in an onsite diagnostic visit
- Monthly online progress reviews
- Participation in at least 70% of planned training sessions
- Submission of invoices, proof of payment and photos of equipment in situ or email / screengrabs in the case of software programmes.

- A final project report

Eligibility and Suitability of Applications

Eligible applicants must be Surrey-based SMEs actively managing agricultural or rural land and projects must use digital technology to improve productivity, resilience or business growth.

Funding Structure, Grant Amounts, Payments

Grants of £10k–£35k are available, with no match funding required, though applicants must show financial viability and the ability to deliver. Funding can only be spent after the Funding Agreement is signed and written approval is received from the SCC Account Manager.

Project Delivery, Duration and Examples

Projects must be completed by 31 March 2027 and should focus on adopting digital technology that delivers measurable improvements. Examples include precision agriculture tools, digital production systems, business-management software and visitor-economy digital systems.

Multi Bids

Applicants may submit more than one bid as long as each project is distinct.

Proposal Updates and Application Support

Applications are submitted online and cannot be substantially changed after the deadline, though minor clarifications may be requested. Support is available for applicants who need help completing the form due to a disability.

Assessment Process and Investment Panel

Applications are assessed against strategic fit, need, impact, value for money, deliverability and financial viability, with final decisions made by a senior officer panel. There is no pitch stage; assessments are based solely on written submissions.

Monitoring, Feedback and Financial Records

Successful applicants must take part in monthly reviews, training sessions and an onsite diagnostic visit, provide invoices, proof of payment and evidence of equipment or software in use. Unsuccessful applicants receive summary feedback.

Eligible Use of Funds

Funds can only be used for approved digital-technology costs and must be held separately and ring-fenced from general business finances. Applicants may only make payments once the Funding Agreement is signed and written approval to proceed has been given, with monthly checks ensuring spending aligns with the agreed project.