Surrey Farming Innovation Accelerator

Guidance Handbook

Applying for a grant or to be part of a business support programme can feel unfamiliar. This handbook is designed to help you write a strong, fundable application, understand what the programme is looking for, and avoid the common mistakes that lead to rejection.

This is your practical guide to:

- What the Farming Innovation Accelerator is
- How to decide if your project is a good fit
- How to write compelling answers
- How to evidence need and impact
- How to prepare for diagnostics and delivery

1 Purpose of the Surrey Farming Innovation Accelerator

The Accelerator supports Surrey-based Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) whose primary activity involves owning, renting or actively managing agricultural or rural land to adopt digital technologies and modernise operations.

It provides:

- Between £10,000 and £35,000 investment
- Specialist consultancy (diagnostic + roadmap)
- Courses and training sessions
- Cohort learning and peer support
- Structured digital adoption planning

The programme aims to help you:

- Modernise systems
- Improve productivity
- Diversify
- Strengthen resilience
- Adopt digital tools confidently
- Plan long term growth

Your application must show how your project delivers these outcomes.

2 Rural Digital & Operational Growth

For this Faming Innovation Accelerator, growth means activities that enable farmers and growers to modernise, innovate and strengthen commercial resilience through digital adoption, driving diversification or operational improvement.

Strong applications show:

A clear problem → a digital solution → a measurable improvement

Examples:

- *"We currently walk fields manually. Drone monitoring will reduce labour hours by 10 per week and improve yield forecasting."*
- *"Our booking system is manual. A digital platform will reduce admin time by 40% and increase visitor capacity by 20%."*
- *"We have no stock visibility. A digital EPOS system will reduce waste by 15% and improve margins."*

Weak applications say:

- *"We want to modernise."*
- *"We want new equipment."*
- *"We want to diversify."*

These statements do not show impact.

You should clearly demonstrate how you project will deliver measurable improvements such as increased efficiency, productivity, resilience or innovation.

3 Eligibility Checklist

You must:

- Be a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) whose primary activity involves owning, renting or actively managing agricultural or rural land, based in Surrey
- Propose a project focused on digital adoption which drives operational improvement, innovation, or diversification
- Demonstrate clear potential for productivity gains, innovation, scalability, or wider rural economic impact
- Confirm you have not exceeded the £315,000 Minimal Financial Assistance limit

- Commit to participating fully in the Accelerator programme via diagnostics led by our specialist advisors, attend planned courses and training session, and engage in peer-to-peer learning

Quick self-check

- If your project does not involve digital technology, it is not eligible.
- If your project is construction, vehicles, routine maintenance or general farm infrastructure, it is not eligible.
- If your project has already started, it is not eligible.

4 Funding Available

Investment: £10,000 to £35,000

Funding supports digital adoption to drive operational improvement, innovation, or productivity initiatives such as:

- Digital systems
- Automation
- Operational software
- Production monitoring
- E-commerce capability
- Diversification technology

Funding is linked to an agreed transformation plan and roadmap developed through the diagnostic phase.

The Farming Innovation Accelerator offers grant funding between £10,000 and £35,000 to cover 100% of project costs. If the project is over £35,000, then you must demonstrate available funds to cover the remainder of the costs.

5 Strong Applications

A. Describe Your Business Clearly

A strong business overview:

- Explains what you do
- Shows your scale
- Highlights your operational challenges

- Sets context for your digital needs

Example (strong): *"We operate a 40-acre mixed horticulture farm producing soft fruit and vegetables. We supply local retailers and run seasonal PYO. Our operations rely heavily on manual monitoring and paper-based stock management."*

Example (weak): *"We run a small farm in Surrey with a mix of livestock and crops. We sell some produce locally and do a bit of direct-to-consumer sales. We want to improve how we operate and make things more efficient."*

B. Explain the Problem You Need to Solve

Funders want to understand, within the context of your application and the digital solution you are looking to implement:

- What isn't working
- What is inefficient
- What is holding you back
- What risk you face

Example (strong): *"Our irrigation decisions rely on manual checks, leading to inconsistent watering and higher water use. Labour shortages make this increasingly difficult."*

Example (weak): *"We want to improve irrigation."*

C. Explain the Digital Solution

Describe the technology in plain language:

- What it is
- How it works
- Why it is the right solution
- How it integrates with your operations

Example (strong): *"We will install soil moisture sensors linked to a digital dashboard. This will automate irrigation decisions, reduce water use, and improve crop consistency."*

Example (weak): *"We want sensors."*

D. Show Measurable Impact

This is where most applications fall short.

You must try to quantify:

- Productivity gains
- Efficiency improvements
- Cost savings
- Resilience benefits
- Diversification outcomes

Example (strong): *"Water use will reduce by 18%. Labour hours will reduce by 8 per week. Yield consistency will improve by 12%."*

Example (weak): *"It will make us more efficient."*

E. Demonstrate Deliverability

We need confidence you can deliver by March 2027.

Show:

- You have suppliers
- You have quotes
- You understand installation requirements
- You have capacity to deliver
- You have time to engage in diagnostics and training

Example (strong): *"We have two quotes for the system. Installation requires no planning permission. Staff will attend training and monthly check ins."*

Example (weak): *"We will investigate this once funding has been approved."*

F. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

❌ No numbers

We need measurable outcomes.

❌ No evidence of readiness

We need confidence you can deliver by March 2027.

❌ Jargon & Over-complications

Make sure your terminology and project are easily understood.

6 Successful Applicants

If successful, participants are expected to:

- Engage fully in diagnostics, planned course and training sessions and peer-to-peer learning
- Deliver the agreed transformation plan and roadmap
- Provide monitoring information and evidence of progress
- Share case studies and participate in evaluation
- Acknowledge Surrey County Council support where appropriate

7 What requirements are there to mitigate risk on the part of Recipients?

Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed digital or operational improvements will not place the business under financial strain or create commercial risk.

To mitigate risk, applicants should confirm:

- The business has sufficient working capital to deliver the project
- The investment is proportionate to business size and capacity
- The project will not compromise day-to-day operations
- Senior management or owners have reviewed and approved the investment
- Evidence of financial stability can be provided if requested

Surrey County Council may request additional financial information to ensure the project poses no undue risk to public funds.

8 How will funding awards be determined?

Evaluators will consider:

- the strength of the digital or operational improvement proposed
- the scale of impact relative to the funding requested

- alignment with programme objectives
- readiness and deliverability
- potential for wider rural economic benefit

Partial awards may be made where appropriate.

9 How to Apply

Applications must be submitted via the Business Surrey website.

If you have questions, please contact the programme team at:
economy.growth@surreycc.gov.uk

Please allow up to three working days for a response.

10 How will delivery be measured and monitored?

Monitoring will take place throughout the delivery period and may include:

- monthly progress reviews
- course and training programme participation
- cohort learning engagement
- evidence of digital adoption or operational improvements

All participants will be assigned a Case Manager and invited to an introductory meeting to discuss reporting requirements.