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Training The Next Generation of Agricultural Scientists

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ABSTRACT

Food security is one of the greatest challenges we face in the 21st century. To feed the growing population with safe and nutritious food we need highly trained agricultural scientists that not only understand the science but the many challenges the industry faces. We developed an innovative PhD training programme. The programme was led by the British supermarket Waitrose and brought together three academic institutions, a research institute and more than 20 fresh produce suppliers. Over the course of 8 years the programme has trained 28 PhD scientists in a broad suite of topics relevant to the sustainable production of fresh produce. These included natural pest control, soil erosion, microplastics and air pollution. Students were all jointly supervised by academic and industry supervisors and presented their work to all suppliers on a regular basis. At the same time they all undertook placements with their industrial partner, spending time learning about the business, they visited suppliers and learned about the industry through talks and discussions. Our students have been very successful and have gone on to a range of roles including some who are now working in the fresh produce industry.

Keywords: Food security, industry collaboration, PhD; sustainability, training programme