

Field visit to August Farms by Students from UCL STEaPP- 20th July, 2022

The visit to August Farms proved to be eye opening and thought provoking for the cohort. The visit began with a conversation with the founder, who shared the evolution of his own approach towards sustainable farming and the many milestones along this long journey. The group engaged in discussions on the evolution of technology used, the pressures on modern farming in the UK, and the agriculture sector's place in the net zero movement.

The group was then taken along the farm and shown around by Nick and his team, exploring the fields as well as the warehouse and the machines that make it all happen. It was eye opening to learn how difficult it is to ascertain the carbon footprint of an agricultural field, given the inability to calculate the carbon sequestered naturally in the soil strata. This led to discussions on what strategies might be best suited for different sectors to help meet climate commitments. The group thoroughly enjoyed moving around and seeing for themselves the technologies at work on the farm.

This was followed by an engaging presentation by Nick, detailing the varied approaches followed by the farm to boost both sustainability and productivity, for example the use of auto steer, section control, and data management practices on the field. In the end, the group walked away with a practical and renewed understanding of the many dimensions of technology use for agriculture, as well as a greater appreciation of tremendous effort and dedication it takes to bring food to the table in an ever changing world.

Some reflections from group members:

"The trip to August farms was very informative, and insightful. More specifically, the knowledge I gained enhanced my understanding of the similarities and differences between organic and conventionally grown crops, and their maintenance. Nick was kind enough to show us around his family's work of progress which has been going on for decades. The trip was well-rounded as it was the perfect mix of practical and theoretical information, which were both well-planned and organised. Lastly, our group had the opportunity to see a combination of rural and suburban parts of the town which made the trip fun and worth repeating."

"It was nice going on the field trip with fellow students and I learnt how technology is utilized to produce insightful data for farmers. I was particularly interested in the benefits of using technology to reduce waste in crop harvesting and to assist with fertilization (precision vehicles)."

"The field visit to August Farm was very insightful. Being able to gain first-hand experience on the farm, seeing the machinery upfront and seeing how technology is being used to help with the optimisation of farming processes and the creation of a yield maps was very interesting. Hearing about Nick's experiences and the pitfalls he faced during his journey in precision farming and following a sustainable path also helped us to get perspective to the challenges with this technique."