

Christine Tacon CBE

Experienced executive and non-executive director and government regulator, working at Chair level in the food and farming industry.

Christine combines strategic leadership with a good, practical understanding of private and public sectors, she has a strong commercial background with deep experience of the food chain and environment, from farming and assurance through processing, branding, retailing and governance. She has worked at board level within a FTSE organisation, co-operatives, not for profit organisations and a charity. She was the first government regulator for the groceries industry as Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA). She has been recognised with a CBE; an Honorary Doctorate; Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Societies, international awards and is a Chartered Environmentalist.

As the first GCA Christine regulated the 13 largest retailers in the UK, achieving significant culture change across the retailers, initially addressing specific practices, then systemic issues and ultimately ensuring that retailers' own governance of processes for working with suppliers was fit for purpose. Stakeholders included suppliers from one-man bands to international businesses, trade associations, NGOs and politicians. She developed a collaborative approach and magnified the impact of her work through constructive engagement with the media to reinforce and communicate her messages. She investigated Tesco in 2016 and the Co-op in 2019, both year-long investigations led to binding recommendations and an improved understanding of the Code across the grocery industry. She used an annual supplier survey to flush out and prioritise issues: this proved a motivator for change and also demonstrated significant year on year progress across all the regulated retailers.

Christine was elected as a Member Nominated Director to the Co-op Group board in May 2024 which led to her standing down after 3 years as Chair of Assured Food Standards (ASF/Red Tractor) . AFS assures UK produced food from farm to retail pack and the Red Tractor logo is carried on £15bn of packs. Retailer and food processor demands for a higher environmental standard led to significant farmer opposition to Red Tractor and Christine led the organisation through a difficult and politically sensitive time which required strategic vision, tenacity and empathetic guidance.

Christine has held P&L responsibility in over 10 businesses, including managing her way through complex government funding, designing a methodology and raising a levy to pay for the GCA office, and working with both internal and external auditors, including the National Audit Office. She was on the audit committee at the MET Office and the Rural Payments Agency, both public bodies.

She has a reputation in the food and farming industry for being principled, fair, a disruptor for good and a visionary change agent.

Board and Committee roles

Co-op Group, Member Nominated Director (May 2024-present) 40 days p.a.

The £11bn turnover food, funerals, insurance and legal services business is owned by its 5m members. Four members of the board are elected from a pool of pre-screened candidates and a further four are independent.

MDS Ltd, Executive Chair (May 2016-2025 – ending about May) 50 days p.a.

A not for profit, member-owned organisation recruiting and training future leaders in the food and fresh produce industry. The >100 trainees undertake four 6-month assignments in 65 member businesses.

BBC Rural Affairs Advisory Committee, Chair (2005-present) 4 days p.a.

The meetings are attended by producers and researchers of programmes such as BBC News, Costing the Earth and Countryfile. The committee ensures rural coverage remains topical and accurate.

Women in Food and Farming, Founder in 2011 and organiser of network of 1000+ members

Regular meet ups, talks and a monthly newsletter to encourage diversity and support younger women in the industry.

The Farmers Club Charitable Trust, Trustee (2021-present) 3 days p.a.

A trust with funds and property interests generating income to fund educational endeavours and training for people connected with the farming industry.

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Previous Board Positions

Chair Assured Food Standards (Red Tractor) 2021-2024
NED The AF Group, farmer-owned purchasing co-operative Chair of RemCo and NomCo 2012-2021
Natural Environment Research Council Member 2012-2017
NED Met Office Member of Audit and Risk Committee, RemCo and NomCo) 2013-2016
Governor Harper Adams University 2012-2016
DEFRA Regulatory Challenge Panel Member 2011- 2015
Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) Business Advisory Board 2012-2014
Chair 2011 Oxford Farming Conference, Director 2009-2011
Member Rabobank Agricultural Advisory Board 2004-2011
NED Rural Payments Agency, Audit & Risk Committee member DEFRA 2001-2009
Member Implementation Group of the Strategy for the Future of Food and Farming DEFRA 2003-2006
Trustee Forum for the Future 2003-2006

Executive experience 1982 to 2011

11 years in the Co-operative Group as CEO Co-op Farms, and on Co-op Food Executive Board

12 years in fast moving consumer goods: brand management with Mars Confectionery and Vodafone and Marketing Director at Anchor Foods (now Fonterra, the New Zealand dairy co-op)

5 years in engineering with Coats Viyella (Germany, France, UK) and Redland Bricks (Redland plc)

Awards/Qualifications

Visiting Professor Cranfield University 2021
Accredited Mediator February 2020, MCI Arb
Women in Agribusiness Demeter Award of Excellence (Awarded in Denver, USA) 2018
Honorary Professor, Harper Adams University 2016
Doctor of Science, Honoris Causa, Cranfield University 2014
CBE for Services to Agriculture 2004
Chartered Engineer, FIMechE, FRSA, FRAgS, Chartered Environmentalist
MBA Cranfield University
MEng and MA Cambridge University, Production Engineering
Fluent French and German speaker, basic Spanish