

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, from growing through processing, branding, retailing and governance. She has worked at board level within a FTSE organisation and co-operatives and was the first government regulator for the groceries industry, founding the role of Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA). She has been recognised with a CBE; an Honorary Doctorate; Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Societies and international awards.

At the start of her career, she worked as an engineer in Germany and France. Since then, she has been UK-based but the GCA role was internationally pioneering, in post she worked with the European Commission and since leaving office, has done consultancy for Canada, Ireland, Denmark and New Zealand as they strive to implement similar regulation and has now been approached by Defra in relation to regulating the farmer to supplier chain.

As the first GCA Christine regulated the 13 largest retailers in the UK, a strategically challenging role but she achieved a significant culture change across the retailers, initially addressing specific practices and systemic issues and later ensuring that retailer governance 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 re-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 which demonstrated significant year on year progress across all the regulated retailers.

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 industry for being principled, fair, a disruptor for good and a change agent. She is keen to ensure synergy between the roles she has in order to make a difference in the food and farming industry and to influence the climate change and sustainability agenda.

Board and Committee roles

Assured Food Standards (Red Tractor), Chair (Jan 2021-present) 30 days p.a.

An independent body owned by the UK food chain which manages and promotes assurance on behalf of the food industry and communicates the importance of the standards and British food to consumers.

MDS Ltd, Executive Chair (May 2016-present) 50 days p.a.

A not for profit, member-owned organisation recruiting and training future leaders in the food and fresh produce industry. Trainees undertake four 6-month assignments in member businesses. There are 100 trainees and 65 member companies; most trainees are graduates but the programme has just been extended to include non-graduates and those on second careers.

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 600+ members

Monthly webinars with LI and Facebook audiences of >3000 and twice yearly meet ups in London.

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

Recent role

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Groceries Code Adjudicator, a BEIS Ministerial Appointment (2013-2020)

The role was established to encourage, enforce and monitor adherence to the Groceries Supply Code of Practice by the large UK grocery retailers in dealing with their direct suppliers, following Competition and Market Authority investigations. Christine was the first independent regulator and had the power to launch investigations and impose sanctions, including penalties up to 1% of UK turnover.

- Statutory reviews concluded the GCA was an “exemplary modern regulator with an international reputation” and was “highly effective”
- Improved compliance in all retailers - demonstrated, and encouraged, through annual surveys
- Pioneered working in a collaborative way as a regulator, as well as using investigative powers
- Considerable public profile achieved, building awareness amongst suppliers to raise issues
- Completed investigations into Tesco plc in 2016 and Co-operative Group in 2019
- Arbitrations conducted as required
- Reduction of suppliers experiencing Code breaches from 8/10 to 3/10 (YouGov survey).

Previous Board Positions

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 2012

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 Marketing Director, 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