

Christine Tacon CBE

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Experienced executive and non-executive director, regulator and Chair

Christine combines strategic leadership with a good, practical understanding and likes to get into the detail and engage with stakeholders at all levels. She has worked in both private and public sectors, co-operatives, education and the charitable sector. She has a strong commercial background, starting off in engineering working overseas, but ending up with deep experience of the food chain and environment, from farming and assurance through processing, branding, retailing, government policy, and governance. 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; 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 joined the board of the Co-op Group in May 2024 as an elected Member Nominated Director. She is reinforcing the importance of supply chain security and relationships but also getting involved with the many community initiatives sponsored by the Group, many of which are focused on providing opportunities for youth. Co-op Group is a diverse £11bn turnover business with food stores, funeral homes, insurance and life services businesses and is run with strong adherence to co-operative values and principles.

Christine was Chair of MDS, a graduate recruitment and training business for 9 years: the business grew four-fold and its use of flexi-apprenticeships was recognised as an exemplar, with the CEO being asked to chair a government committee.

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 grocery and farming industries 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 business is owned by its 6m members. Four members of the board are elected from a pool of pre-screened candidates and a further four are independent.

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

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 and a monthly newsletter to encourage diversity and support 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 education and training for people connected with the farming industry.

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Previous Board Positions

MDS Ltd, Executive Chair 2016- 2025

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 plc

Awards/Qualifications

Honorary Fellow Harper Adams University 2025

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