

Rt Hon David Davis MP
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union
The House of Commons
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Dear Mr Davis

Many congratulations on your appointment to your role as Secretary of State for exiting the European Union.

You will be aware that Britain's farmers are ambitious. With a growing population, declining food self-sufficiency and new export markets, I know there is huge potential for growth for the agri-food sector.

One of the immediate challenges we face, however, is with regard to the permanent and seasonal workforce on our farms and in our food supply chain. Whether it's working in fields, poultry sheds, vegetable packhouses or food processing sites, the reality is that you will find a proportion of overseas workers that are integral to delivering great British food, flowers and plants. This has been particularly driven by the increasing difficulty of recruiting a domestic workforce in recent years and the seasonal nature of agricultural and horticultural production.

It is particularly true of the sector that I represent, where horticultural producers across the country have a high demand for seasonal and year-round workers, and typically in low-skilled roles. Non-UK workers are vital to my business and my industry. This logistical problem has been resolved in recent years through the free movement of labour from the EU into the UK. It has also facilitated returnees, with seasonal workers returning to the same farm year after year. However, our exit from the European Union now creates uncertainty for farmers and growers. It is not unusual for horticultural producers to be planning crops up to 10 years in advance, yet these crops cannot be produced without good labour supply. While horticulture has been at the forefront of technical developments in the UK farming industry, it still remains hugely reliant on labour, particularly for hand harvesting high quality, class 1, fresh produce. These non-UK workers underpin a horticultural sector contributing £3 billion to the UK economy.

The NFU is currently carrying out the largest farming consultation in Britain for generations, and I know that many of our members have been heartened by your commitment to consult with the NFU in order to address any concerns. The workforce required in producing, harvesting, grading and packing horticultural crops means that labour availability is the Brexit issue that is critical to growers like myself across the country. With this in mind, I would like to extend an invitation to you to meet with myself and a horticultural business in your constituency so that I can further explain the challenges and outline the various options we face.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ali Capper', with a horizontal line underneath.

Ali Capper
Chairman, NFU horticulture & potatoes board