

NFU Horticulture and Potatoes activity update

12th May 2017



The NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board and the NFU Potato Forum work tirelessly to make a difference for growers of fresh produce, plants and flowers. This document is a snapshot of recent successes and an overview of the current work activities in key policy areas.

Top stories

[Dealing with unexpected external influences](#)

NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board chairman, Ali Capper, considers the impact that unexpected external influences have on businesses; such as weather extremes, the B&Q neonicotinoid ban and surprise GM revelations. [Read more...](#)

[GM petunias found in UK removed from sale](#)

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has emailed importers and producers of petunia plants and seeds in England and Wales, making it clear that GM plants must not be marketed. [Read more...](#)

[Brexit must not leave British farmers at a disadvantage](#)

British farmers must not be placed at a disadvantage compared to European counterparts as a result of leaving the EU, NFU President Meurig Raymond said at FPJ Live. [Read more...](#)

[EFRA Committee 'wonky veg' recommendations backed by NFU](#)

An EFRA Committee report looking at food waste has recommended that supermarkets are flexible with specifications to allow so-called 'wonky veg' to be included in more lines. [Read more...](#)

Read more news at www.NFUonline.com

Successes

[NFU secures business rates change for nursery growers](#)

The NFU secured confirmation from DCLG Minister, Marcus Jones MP, that the agricultural exemption from business rates will continue to apply to nursery growers and that the law will be amended as appropriate to ensure no further ambiguity. This follows the NFU's long-running battle to address a wording issue that would have resulted in damaging and widespread implications for the nursery growers and the wider horticultural industry which depends on them. Read more [here](#).

National Living Wage (NLW)

The NFU continues to attract widespread media coverage of the challenges facing horticulture and potatoes from the NLW. Meetings with the Treasury continue (though the general election may prevent further progress until after 8th June).

[Fit for the Future](#)

With retailers and food service companies already engaging with the NFU's Fit for the Future initiative, the NFU has been working closely with the Food Foundation to launch a fresh challenge in 2017 which will ramp up the public profile for the campaign and harness celebrity endorsements. Find out more [here](#).

Plant Health Fees: The NFU challenged Defra's plans to increase plant health fees as they move to full cost recovery, resulting in a delay which saves the industry £205,000, or the equivalent of over £270 per plant health 'client'. Defra has been working with the NFU and other stakeholders to ensure plant passporting fees are calculated accurately and to identify further efficiencies. As a result, there will be savings made under the new system.

[NFU challenges lack of transparency on payment deductions](#)

The NFU has received widespread support after it wrote to 30 potato packers and processors in February, calling for total transparency on payment deductions and delivery rejections. A series of follow up meetings with packers and processors began in March and continue through to May. Read more [here](#).

[Backing British Blooms](#)

The NFU launched a new report in June setting out the key areas that need to be tackled to remove the barriers to growth for this budding sector and secure the revival of the British cut flower industry. The report received widespread media coverage as well as reaching tens of thousands of consumers through social media. [Read the report here](#).

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Policy updates – in brief

[Access to labour](#)

What are we doing? The NFU continues to have regular dialogue with Defra and the Home Office to develop a new seasonal workers scheme which will support the sector's labour requirements. The NFU is calling on government to introduce measures that will ensure UK farmers and growers have sufficient access to labour post-Brexit. The Home Office minister has said a seasonal scheme for 2017 will not be implemented. To support our case, the NFU monitors the availability of seasonal labour with an End of Season Labour Survey and an in-season survey of labour provider's. The frequency of the in-season survey has been increased so that the NFU can gather real-time information and provide evidence to government which demonstrates the urgency of the need.

[National Living Wage](#)

What are we doing? The NLW for over 25's came into force in April 2016. The NFU continues to call for measures to minimise the impacts. These include the introduction of a new seasonal workers scheme for students, reduction in employers national insurance contributions, and removing the need for pensions auto-enrolment for seasonal workers.

[Brexit](#)

Alongside Labour, Trade, and Plant Health, the NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board has prioritised 'crop protection' as a critical issue to address during the Brexit negotiations. The NFU is in regular dialogue with Defra and the Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) to work up a new UK plant protection policy which takes into consideration the UK climate, the types of crops we grow, and the needs of consumers, so that UK growers have the right products available to produce the crops consumers want. To support his work, the NFU has increased its staff resource in this area.

[Fruit and Veg Pledge](#)

What is it and how will it benefit members? The Fruit and Veg Pledge is a charter for best business practice in the fresh produce supply chain. It was created in 2012 as part of the NFU's Catalyst for Change initiative and three retailers have signed up (Aldi, Lidl and Co-op). Further discussions are progressing with a view to obtaining more signatories in the coming weeks. Though the Pledge is not legally binding, by making a public commitment, signatories will be keen to ensure they are meeting its terms. Members should, therefore, contact the NFU if their customers are not dealing with suppliers in the spirit of the Pledge and we will raise issues anonymously on their behalf.

[Fit for the Future](#)

What is it and how will it benefit members? In 2015 the NFU commissioned a study to gather evidence on what works in delivering increased consumption of fruit, veg and potatoes. The findings were summarised in the NFU's Fit for the Future report, released in April 2016, along with 34 'options for action' for industry and government to implement. The NFU is making encouraging progress and industry engagement has been greater than anticipated. In Autumn, Waitrose launched new 'meal kits,' providing a full meal solution for consumers with plenty of fruit and veg, and in the summer, Co-op took direct action on the back of the report by introducing discount vouchers for fruit and veg in stores. This year, Tesco will be introducing new measures in store to encourage sales and Sainsbury's is trialing new store layouts to encourage greater sales of plant based foods.

Red Tractor Fresh Produce Standards

The NFU has been a key contributor to the consultation for the next edition of the Red Tractor fresh produce standards. With a high volume of changes originally proposed, the NFU has worked to ensure that changes are kept to a minimum and focus on the key objectives to ensure the food we produce is safe and traceable. An updated NFU Audit Pack will be produced in time for when the new standards to come into force in October.

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Recent board and team activities

Horticulture and Potatoes board chairman, Ali Capper, spoke at FPJ Live, highlighting the opportunities for increasing fruit and veg consumption, and discussing the challenges to deliver a positive outcome from Brexit. This week, Ali joined NFU Adviser, Lee Abbey, in a meeting with Tyrrells Crisps to discuss potato deductions; attended a meeting to discuss the future of the PO scheme post-Brexit; attended a stakeholder meeting to discuss future developments of the UK viticulture sector, and attended the NFU Potato Forum meeting.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, and Potato Forum chairman, Alex Godfrey, met Nick Vermont, Bill Bartlett and Dan Metheringham at McCain, followed by Martin Cockerill and Rufus Pilgrim at R S Cockerill later the same day to discuss transparency over deductions and rejections. Alex also met with Jenny Stanberry at Tulipland on the same issue.

This week, Alex chairing the East Midlands Horticulture & Potatoes Board, attended the NFU Potato Forum meeting, where he was re-appointed as its chairman, and met with Sophie Churchill, the new AHDB Potatoes Chair.

Horticulture and Potatoes board members, Tim Papworth, attended the NFU Potato Forum meeting, at which he was re-appointed as its vice chairman. Tim also attended a McCain Grower conference in Newark and joined Alex Godfrey in a meeting with new AHDB Potatoes board chairman, Sophie Churchill.

In the local community, Tim has been very active once more, the highlight of which was a lunch with TRH Prince and Princess Michael of Kent at the Archdeacons Charge, Wolterton Hall, where he and his wife discussed a number of agricultural topics with them including seasonality, the potato market and Sugar Beet.

Chief Horticulture and Potatoes Adviser, Hayley Campbell-Gibbons, attended FPJ Live where the NFU was the headline sponsor. Hayley also spoke up during a discussion on labour, setting out the NFUs' challenge to government to ensure sufficient access to non-UK labour post-Brexit.

Horticulture and Potatoes Adviser, Lee Abbey, attended FPJ Live and met with new Sainsbury's agriculture manager to highlight the key issues within the fresh produce sector. This week, Lee met with Tyrrells Crisps and Tulipland to discuss transparency over deductions and rejections, and hosted the NFU Potato Forum meeting.

Horticulture Adviser, Amy Gray, attended FPJ Live, met with new Sainsbury's agriculture manager and managed the NFU's response to the discovery of GM petunias in the UK. This week, Amy attended a meeting to discuss the future of the PO scheme post-Brexit and attended a stakeholder meeting to discuss future developments of the UK viticulture sector.