



# GROWERS BRACE FOR SMETA 7.0

A major update to Sedex's SMETA audit has left a string of concerns over costs and how supermarkets will collaborate with their suppliers. **Michael Barker** reports

**S**edex's decision to update its SMETA audit with stringent new worker requirements has been one of the most controversial and talked-about developments of the year for growers. Already feeling the squeeze following several years of intense cost pressure and diminishing margins, the news that major changes to labour commitments were coming down the track was as unwelcome as it was unexpected for horticultural businesses.

SMETA is the ethical trade audit used by Sedex to assess performance

against labour practices set out by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), and most supermarkets require direct suppliers to complete a SMETA audit as a condition of trade. That's why it created such a stir when Sedex unveiled a major update in its version 7.0, launching on 10 September, which it said better reflected the practices contained in the ETI code.

## The changes

Chief among the changes are the requirements that collaborative supply chain action is required to ensure no recruitment or related costs be

incurred or charged to workers, and that workers found to have paid such costs – including, crucially, travel and visa costs – be reimbursed in what is known as the Employer Pays Principle (EPP).

In a further area of contention for growers, the new version requires employers to pay what is termed to be a 'credible living wage', adding that they must create a wage improvement plan to show how they will reach this goal within a defined time frame.

That had caused bemusement among suppliers given the fact the UK already has a National Living Wage (NLW) →