



UK horticulture growth strategy

Revised February 2025



DELIVERING GROWTH FOR THE UK HORTICULTURE SECTOR

NFU'S 10 BUILDING BLOCKS FOR GROWING SUCCESS

The government's Farming 2050: Growing England's Future is a welcome and ambitious vision to make farming and growing more sustainable and profitable. For the horticulture sector to be ready to capitalise and increase its production of fruit, vegetables, plants and flowers, the NFU has identified ten critical building blocks that will be necessary to achieve productive, resilient and sustainable growth within the horticulture industry:

- 1. Access to labour:**
A long-term commitment to the Seasonal Worker Scheme with a minimum five years notice of any scheme changes, with suitable length visas, and no unrealistic cap on worker numbers.
- 2. Access to affordable and sustainable energy supplies:**
Greater recognition of energy intensive horticulture sectors within current and future energy support schemes, an expansion of grid infrastructure to support investment in renewables, and an increase of grid capacity to allow businesses to expand production.
- 3. Access to crop protection:**
An enabling crop protection policy which provides access to the plant protection tools the sector needs and ensures the UK is not disadvantaged against its global competitors.
- 4. Access to water:**
As the sector is vulnerable to drought and the challenges from reductions/revocations of abstraction licences, greater investment is needed in infrastructure to collect, store and distribute water both on farms and within and between regions.
- 5. Delivering environmental benefits:**
Government should review environmental schemes to make them more inclusive of horticultural production systems. Industry and government collaboration is needed to move towards peat-free in an environmentally and commercially sustainable way, with supportive legislation that promotes a level playing field.
- 6. Productivity investment:**
A replacement for the EU Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme which provides increased funding and sector-wide access, and no further delays in its development.
- 7. Enabling import controls for plants and plant products:**
Seek a renewed EU/UK SPS plant health agreement. In the meantime, minimise the barriers and costs for importing plants and plant materials – the foundations of all horticultural production – while maintaining high biosecurity and smooth trade flows.
- 8. Improving supply chain relationships:**
Address unfair trading behaviours through a statutory Horticulture Buyers' Code of Practice. It is critical that growers can have open discussions and fair negotiations on all terms of trading negotiations, including price inflation, with their customers.
- 9. Farm assurance:**
A streamlined and effective farm assurance landscape that removes duplication and excessive cost burdens while delivering value and market needs.
- 10. An enabling planning policy:**
Glasshouses of all types should be exempt from biodiversity net gain, and there should be greater consistency in planning decisions to support – not restrict – horticultural businesses' ability to grow.

INTRODUCTION

First launched in April 2023, the NFU UK horticulture growth strategy shines a spotlight on the opportunities to deliver the industry and government's ambition to grow a sector that accounts for just 2% of farmed land but delivers nearly 20% of the farmgate value.

Now under a Labour government's 25-year Farming Roadmap, there is a renewed opportunity for policymakers to deliver on this ambition for growth by unlocking the 10 building blocks outlined in this strategy.

Many of the policy measures identified in the NFU's strategy were acknowledged at the No10 Farm to Fork Summits in 2023 and 2024, but not delivered. The Independent Labour Review, published in the summer of 2023, and the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) 2024 report supported the NFU's key asks for longer-term access to workers and the Seasonal Worker Scheme. But delayed government responses to both means businesses again face uncertainty over labour

"GROWTH IN THIS SECTOR WOULD: BOOST HOME-GROWN FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTION, HELP TO FUTURE-PROOF THE SECTOR IN A WARMING CLIMATE, AND CREATE NEW SKILLED JOB OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY."

Government Food Strategy, June 2022

supply beyond the 2025 season. The government commitment to addressing contractual relationships in the fresh produce sector is very welcome and should provide an opportunity to identify measures to address the poorest behaviours in the supply chain.

But the lack of progress in developing a replacement for the EU Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme with one better tailored to the UK horticulture sector, leaves growers with no certainty of funding beyond the end of the year.

Even where progress is being made, there is still much more to do to build confidence in a sector which has faced a series of unprecedented challenges in recent years, from

labour shortages, exceptional inflationary spikes, extreme weather impacts and market disruption. Sector growth cannot be achieved without the right political and supply chain backing. Yet, many of the issues highlighted by the NFU's strategy are yet to be acknowledged or addressed. When the House of Lords Horticulture Inquiry concluded in autumn 2023 it astutely recognised that "the sector is under-prioritised and unappreciated by policymakers, leaving holes in the UK's food security and ability to meet net zero goals". This must change.

It is critical government understand that, to ensure future food security and environmental targets are met, we must grow UK horticulture.

- [Government food strategy - GOV.UK](#)
- [Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2023](#)



LABOUR

ACCESS TO A MOTIVATED AND SKILLED WORKFORCE

Accessing competent, motivated and skilled workers in the horticulture sector has been increasingly challenging over the last ten years, following the removal of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme in 2013 and the ending of Freedom of Movement following EU exit in 2020. Further restrictions on the movement of people as a result of the Covid pandemic and Ukraine conflict led to many businesses cutting back production or ceasing altogether because they could not secure sufficient numbers of workers.

The Defra Automation Review (2022), Independent Labour Review (2023), and Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) Review of the Seasonal Worker Visa (2024) all highlighted the sector's reliance on overseas workers, which is not expected to change in the foreseeable future, and that the most labour-intensive roles will not have technological solutions for many years. Without political backing, access to labour risks being a key limiting factor for UK food production.

Labour can account for between 40% and 70% of overall production costs in many fresh produce categories, so any unexpected or unforeseen changes to those costs can have business critical impacts. In April 2025, the National Living Wage will have increased 40% in five years. That, combined with the changes to National Insurance contributions and thresholds, will add an estimated 10% to employment costs from 2024 to 2025. For some individual businesses, this adds over £1 million in additional cost. These rises are unsustainable.



SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- Urgent commitment to a long-term extension of the Seasonal Worker Scheme, with a minimum five-year notice period for substantial changes to the scheme.
- Visas extended from six to nine months for those businesses that have longer-term requirements, and to give workers greater earning potential.
- Expansion of the Youth Mobility Scheme to cover EU countries.
- Grant support for agri-tech so the cost of investment in automation on farm is not prohibitive.

[Defra led review of automation in horticulture - GOV.UK](#)

[Independent review into labour shortages in the food supply chain - GOV.UK](#)

[Review of the Seasonal Worker visa \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

ENERGY

ACCESSING AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE ENERGY SUPPLIES

The UK horticulture sector is incredibly diverse but no part of it is protected from the impacts of rising energy costs, whether through heating glasshouses, running cold storage, the knock-on cost and availability of fertilisers, or running machinery, transport and lighting.

Glasshouses and cold stores are most acutely impacted, and at the peak of the inflationary pressures in 2022/23, some growers of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers cut production by as much as a third, while there were significant challenges storing produce like apples, onions and potatoes.

To deliver greater energy independence, many businesses have invested in renewables like combined heat and power plants, wind and solar. But investments have often stalled, in part due to the high capital investments required and the limited capacity to return electricity to the grid.

UK horticulture can contribute to UK energy security if grid infrastructure is developed and if there are fiscal policies to enable greater levels of investment. Moving to renewables also delivers environmental benefits through reduced fossil fuel use.

It is critical that food production is given proper consideration in government policy and energy support schemes. The NFU has continued to call for better recognition for high energy users, most notably heating for protected cropping and cooling for long-term storage, in schemes like the ETII (Energy and Trade Intensive Industries).

At the end of 2023, the government opened up the IETF (Industrial Energy Transformation Fund) to Controlled Environment Horticulture (CEH). While this is positive, there remains a long-term need to include other parts of the horticulture sector, most notably long-term storage.

SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- The Standard Industry Classification (SIC) code for horticulture to be re-evaluated to correctly recognise energy intensive production systems.
- Government to recognise energy-intensive horticulture subsectors within future energy support schemes.
- Development of National Grid capacity and network to enable growers to supply higher energy inputs.





PRODUCTIVITY

PRODUCTIVITY INVESTMENT

Horticulture continues to be the lowest subsidised farming sector, with businesses receiving on average only £1,700 in basic payments and £2,600 from agri-environment payments. This compares to an all-farm type average of £18,300 in basic payments and £10,600 in agri-environment payments. Many horticultural enterprises receive no income from either.

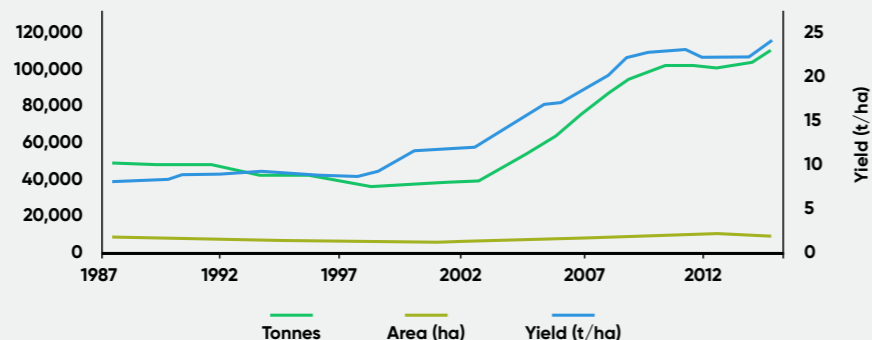
However, many growers in the horticulture sector have been able to benefit from the EU Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme, working collaboratively through Producer Organisations to invest in productivity and efficiency across the sector. The scheme has helped enable sector growth in a number of edible horticulture sectors, but it is not open to the ornamentals sector, nor viticulture, hops, or potatoes.

Defra's commitment to develop an expanded replacement for the EU Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme was welcome. But horticultural businesses are long-term

EU FRUIT AND VEG AID SCHEME

UK Strawberry production - 3 year rolling average

Source: Defra Horticulture Statistics 2015, Savills



investors, planning multiple years in advance. They need certainty. So it is critical that a new scheme is developed as soon as possible and that there is no gap in funding between the existing EU Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme and its replacement.

The NFU continues to call for increased financial support for

UK horticulture and potatoes growers, to enable investment, increase confidence, and drive productivity. In addition to a UK horticulture scheme, it is important that the Farming Investment Fund and ELMs reflect the diversity of growing systems across horticulture and provide genuine access to funds for all growers.

SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

For a horticulture productivity scheme to be successful in delivering increased productivity, sustainability and an improved market position, it must include the following principles:

- Increased level of financial support in direct proportion to the widening of its scope; approximately £200 million.
- Sector-wide scheme eligibility, to include all horticulture and potatoes sectors.
- Autonomy over investments covering a wide scope of outcomes.
- Be open to a range of collaborative groups, joint ventures and individual businesses.
- Multi-annual funding cycles and a long-term commitment to deliver long-term confidence.
- Exemption from competition legislation: For eligible collaborative groups, including POs, this exemption must continue, as allowed for by provisions in the Agriculture Act

[Farm Business Income by type of farm in England 2023/24 - GOV.UK](#)
[Latest horticulture statistics - GOV.UK](#)

CROP PROTECTION

ACCESS TO CROP PROTECTION PRODUCTS (A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD)

Pesticides are an essential, yet often misunderstood, part of current farming practice and crop production. Growers recognise their use may involve risks and proactively take steps to ensure they are applied carefully and appropriately.

Having left the EU, the GB pesticides regulation, which governs access to and availability of these crop protection products, needs to be implemented in a way that is fit for purpose – protecting the environment and the public, while effectively supporting productive and competitive horticulture and agriculture.

GB growers are facing a new situation where the cost of a standalone GB regulatory process, combined with the impact of challenges around the longer-term future of parallel trade and access to seed treatments (currently enabled temporarily by import of treated seed), could result in the availability of crop protection tools decreasing and the cost of those still available increasing.

A new holistic approach to regulation with clear, credible and consistent science-based risk assessment, maintaining or improving current measures, is essential. It needs to ensure availability of necessary plant protection tools and promote innovation in plant protection technology, to make safer, more effective and lower risk pesticides and crop protection techniques available. In doing so, we should be able to maintain and enhance UK food and plant security and improve competitiveness in the UK.

All of this should be delivered under a new National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides, which is long overdue.

SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- Clear legislation and a simple authorisation and renewal process. A risk-based approach with faster and more pragmatic decision-making than the EU, underpinned with service level agreements.
- Working with other global authorities to enable use of each other's regulatory assessments.
- Proper consideration of impact assessments and the effectiveness of the regulatory system, taking account of socio-economic benefits, and proportionality in the decision-making approach.
- An adaptable regulation, open to new technology, supported by government-funded research to plug gaps in crop protection and to improve IPM.
- Good provision for horticultural 'minor uses' and speciality crops. An effective Extensions of Authorisation for Minor Use process should be enhanced by all new actives, including consideration of minor use and speciality crops as part of the initial dossier planning.
- Simplifying the regulatory assessment for minor uses, biopesticides and low risk products.



WATER

ACCESS, STORAGE AND TREATMENT OF WATER SUPPLIES

The horticulture and potatoes sector is incredibly innovative. It invests significant sums into water management to ensure water is used as efficiently as possible, with rainwater collection and harvesting, on-farm reservoirs, and trickle irrigation systems commonplace. But the sector is vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Low or irregular levels of rainfall mean that irrigation is crucial, especially during drier periods. Where crops are irrigated, constraints can be imposed on abstractions from boreholes and surface waters, restricting growers from accessing the water they need.

The challenge ahead for the irrigated sector will be reduced water availability. More water needs to be left to protect the environment and, coupled with climate change and population growth, there are significant pressures on the water supply and demand for the horticulture sector.

The NFU's Integrated Water Management Strategy seeks to drive integration and collaboration for the future security of water for food production and for water for food to be recognised as an essential use.



SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- Long-term government funding programme for water storage and drainage systems, and support to remove planning barriers to fast track adoption of water storage, recycling, and treatment on farm.
- Regional water plans must take full account of horticultural demand to ensure fair access to the available water resources for agri-food abstractors.
- The regulation of abstraction must be improved so that it is more agile in permitting growers to utilise surplus water, takes advantage of smart monitoring technology and enables the sharing and trading of water among users.

The NFU has three key asks to support the horticulture sector through the challenges of proposed changes to abstraction licences and access to water:

- **Communication / Engagement:** Abstractors need to be engaged with at the start of any programme looking to change/vary abstraction licences.
- **Data:** It is important that the sector understands data source and modelling undertaken and accepts the information being presented for its sector.
- **Time:** It is important that the sector has the time to respond and react to any proposed water availability reductions.

[One hot, dry spell away from drought returning this summer, National Drought Group warns - GOV.UK integrated-water-management.pdf](#)



DELIVERING ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING SCHEMES:

The SFI scheme should be more inclusive of the horticultural sector. The limited numbers of actions have been targeted primarily at larger field-based crops. Many of the past and present schemes are based on taking land out of production, but this does not align with government's ambition to increase public consumption of fruit and vegetables.

There is an opportunity for the Labour government to revisit ELMs and ensure that it works alongside food production, not in conflict with it and better reflects the different growing systems within horticulture, such as protected cropping.

SUSTAINABLE GROWING MEDIA

The Growing Media Monitor Report 2022, supported by growing media manufacturers, AHDB, Defra and the HTA, shows peat use is now at an all-time low, with volumes falling to 0.95m³, down from 2.29m³ in 2020.

Government funding to support research and development has been challenging for the industry to access. It is critical that government offers the sector financial support through R&D funding to support a timely and sustainable transition away from peat.

Growers are keen to move to suitable, sustainable and commercially viable alternative materials, but it needs the right legislation to underpin the ambition, while also ensuring a level playing field with imported crops that are grown using peat.

The previous government's proposal to ban the use of peat-based growing media for professional growers by 2026, with limited exemptions between 2026 and 2030, is not achievable and places extreme pressure on businesses.

Defra must consider the unintended consequences to the availability of raw materials, the environmental footprint of alternative materials and how imports produced to lower standards will impact the competitiveness of British growers.



SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- An inclusive ELMs offer that better reflects the different growing systems within horticulture, such as protected cropping.
- Clarity is needed on the government's intentions and timeframe in relation to any ambition to ban peat growing media.
- Remove policy barriers to allow for sufficient and affordable access to consistent and reliable alternative growing media.
- Allow the industry sufficient time to transition away from peat and allow exemptions where alternatives are not commercially available.
- Provide support such as capital grants and R&D

funding into commercially viable alternative materials, adoption of non-peat-based production systems, and business adaption across the industry. Alternatives to peat can require a complete overhaul of apparatus and infrastructure e.g. irrigation and handling equipment. This is a huge business investment.

- Ensure a level playing field and that imports meet the same standards as domestic production.
- Government should conduct a thorough economic and environmental impact assessment before any timeline is established, and which considers unintended consequences and impact on trade.

IMPORT CONTROLS

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO IMPORT CONTROLS FOR PLANTS AND YOUNG PLANT MATERIALS

Plant health is a top priority for UK growers, who have implemented robust procedures to identify pests and diseases to minimise any potential outbreak.

There are significant industry concerns that the new plant health controls at Border Control Posts (BCPs) risk undoing this work. The Place of Destination inspection regime has worked well for growers, with checks conducted within an appropriate high hygiene environment and in a timely fashion. The new Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) sees checks at BCPs and raises concerns for the industry as this holds its own biosecurity risks.

Inspection regimes must mitigate any risk of cross-contamination between consignments, maintain crop vitality, and prevent crops from deteriorating or being damaged while undergoing inspections, including while placed on hold.

The NFU wants to see a renewed SPS plant health agreement re-negotiated with the EU, but in the meantime the government should enable a more targeted plant health inspection regime to be carried out at grower premises by either Authorised Operators or APHA inspectors.



SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- **Renegotiate a new SPS plant health agreement with the EU.**
- **Provide transparency on the pragmatic approach currently adopted, including communicating clearly with industry what percentage of inspections are being achieved and the rate of interceptions.**
- **Clarity of costs involved in Control Point designation, and a pragmatic mechanism to enable place of destination plant health inspections as an alternative to BCPs for eligible businesses and products.**
- **Flexibility in the Control Point rules to allow the 'glasshouse' to be an official quarantine area for product 'on-hold'.**
- **To adopt a risk-based inspection regime across all imported plants and plant materials, whether by primary producers or retailers, reviewed regularly and based on data and science around the probability of a pest or disease being found from a certain country.**
- **In the case of disease outbreaks, robust procedures should be in place as should a pragmatic and risk-based approach to inspections.**
- **Government must recognise industry best practice and ensure future policy inspection regimes do not add biosecurity risks and additional cost burdens on UK businesses.**
- **Clear communication with traders, with regular and real time updates as consignments move through ports, including when and why delays occur.**
- **Opening hours of BCPs must be aligned with just-in-time supply chains, with sufficiently resourced operations, including APHA inspection capacity, to avoid delays.**
- **Clarity on how the government proposes to inspect mixed consignments of plants and plant materials while not jeopardising biosecurity at the border facility.**



SUPPLY CHAIN

FAIRNESS IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

The government's "growth" agenda must be twinned with reform in the marketplace that levels up the balance of power within agri-food supply chains. British growers want to deliver on the government's vision for sustainable and profitable businesses. Only profitable businesses can be sustainable and can continue to invest in productivity and environmental outcomes.

A report commissioned by the NFU and published by Promar International in January 2024 shows increases in production costs of up to 39% over the previous two years, yet many growers face challenges in recovering these increases from their customers and maintaining a healthy margin.

The changes to the National Living Wage and employer National Insurance contributions, announced in the 2024 Autumn Budget add further significant pressure to businesses employment costs. Early estimates are that this amounts to approximately 10% wage inflation.

We welcome Defra's commitment to introduce contractual regulations in the fresh produce supply chain. However, buyers' behaviours must be addressed in parallel. A Horticulture Buyers' Code of Practice could address behavioural practices to the benefit of the whole supply chain and address the following areas:

- A fair dealing clause, similar to that defined in GSCOP.
- Prohibit unreasonable delay tactics/behaviours of buyers.
- Obligations on buyers that contractual agreements provide a mechanism to allow growers to renegotiate the price, mid-contract.
- Obligations on buyers to align the tender process and supply agreements with the long-term planning needs of growers.
- Prohibit additional and unexpected customer requests within the duration of the supply agreement, without a mechanism to re-negotiate the price.
- For supply agreements to provide an element of risk and reward sharing within the agreement.
- Obligations that all deductions are clearly itemised, and any defects communicated to the grower within a reasonable timeframe of delivery, with none subjected to ambiguity.

SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- **The proposed contractual regulations for the fresh produce sector must address unfair trading practices and behaviours, and improve all terms of trading so contracts can be freely negotiated without duress.**
- **Ensure appropriate enforcement is in place by extending the functions of the Agriculture Supply Chain Adjudicator's Office in line with the functions of the GCA.**
- **Embed the GCA's seven "golden rules" into GSCOP to address unfair trading practices in relation to cost price negotiation.**
- **The NFU ask buyers to:**
 - be fully equipped with in-depth understanding of the sector
 - respond to supplier CPI requests in a fair and timely manner – acknowledge receipt of a CPI request within 48 hours and commit to meet with the supplier within one week.
 - give longer-term commitments and certainty to UK grower-suppliers to allow robust business planning and confidence to secure the supply they need from future growing cycles.
 - New report warns horticulture growth is under threat – NFUonline

[New report warns horticulture growth is under threat – NFUonline](#)



PLANNING

AN ENABLING PLANNING POLICY

Business development and expansion can require new buildings or glasshouses, more/improved worker accommodation and facilities, water capture and storage such as reservoirs, and energy capture and generation. In each case there is an environmental, worker welfare, or productivity benefit to these developments.

Securing planning permission is resource intensive and costly, and without any guarantee of success, costing tens of thousands of pounds and taking many months, or even years, to conclude. Many businesses are reluctant to go through the process due to a lack of confidence that the permission can be achieved.

Reservoirs are often cited as particularly troublesome for gaining planning permission, despite the critical need to capture, store and treat water on farms and to reduce abstraction from watercourses.

Businesses also seek to improve worker accommodation and, where possible, reduce the occupancy rates of caravans. The sector's reliance on seasonal workers needs to be recognised within local planning frameworks.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Biodiversity Net Gain means that applicable building projects in England will need to restore any biodiversity lost during the building phase and deliver a 10% minimum boost to the area's biodiversity. Due to the high capital investments required for glasshouses, packhouses and other key infrastructure in the horticulture sector, adding more land to the construction price to satisfy BNG requirements will limit development and potentially drive production abroad.



NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

As a sector, horticulture and potatoes accounts for just 2% of farmed land but delivers nearly 20% of the farmgate value.

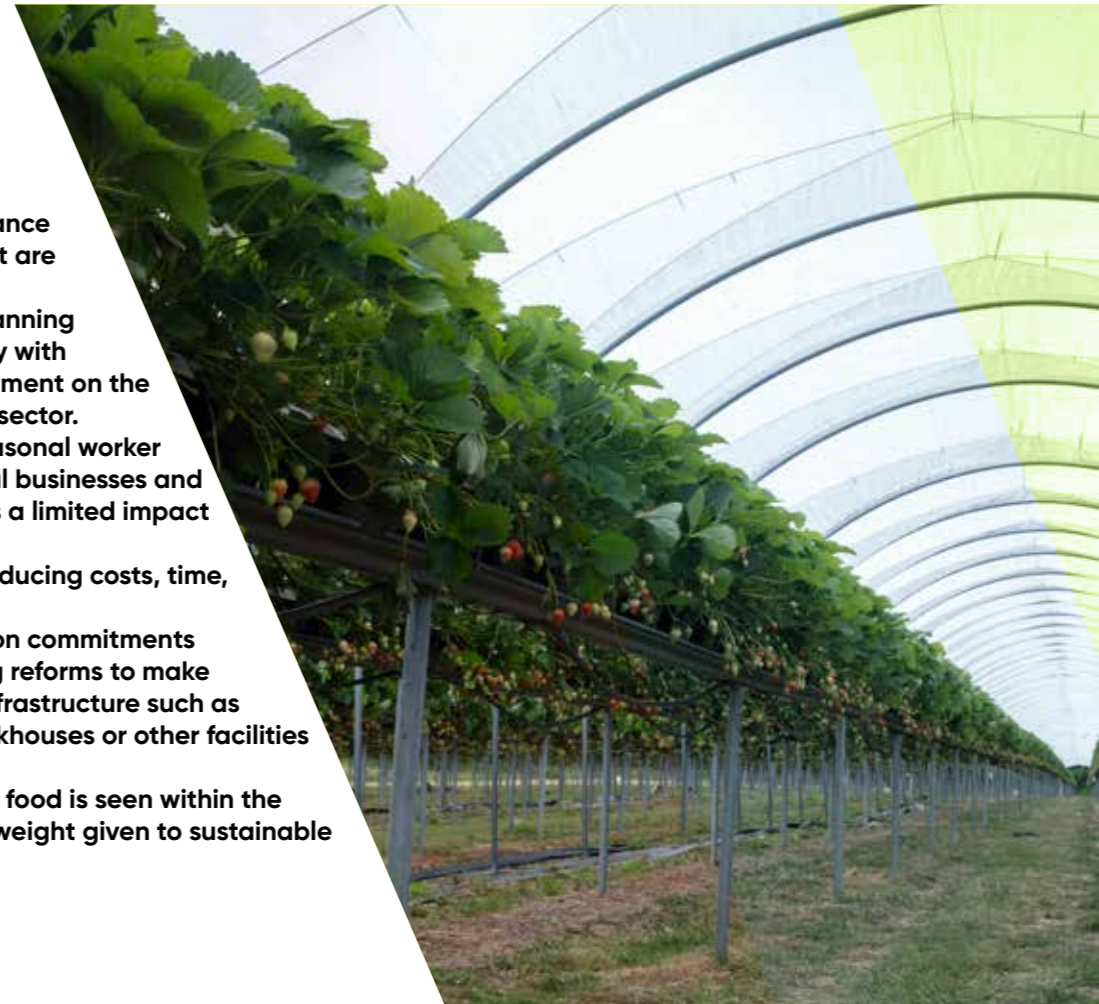
However, there is a limited amount of land available in the UK, and with an ever-increasing range of competing demands. For field scale crops, such as potatoes, the availability of land is becoming increasingly challenging as more is turned over to SFI.

It is important that government policies, including the Land Use Framework and National Planning Policy Framework, do not undermine our ability to produce food. The NFU response to the National Planning Policy Framework consultation in July 2024, highlighted several horticulture specific concerns around Green Belt designations and Previously Developed Land (PDL) designations.

Horticulture is already protected from speculative non-agricultural development; any changes could harm sites suitable for horticulture due to the size and scale required for efficiency. Operations that support and are necessary for, horticulture must be made clear as appropriate development in the Green Belt, to allow existing sites to expand and modernise as necessary. To support the delivery of horticultural sites in the Green Belt, an expansion of associated and ancillary operations must be supported by the NPPF.

SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- Exemptions from Biodiversity Net Gain for agriculture and horticulture.
- Local government to offer appropriate support and guidance for horticultural businesses that are looking to expand.
- Consistency of approach to planning applications across the country with guidance from national government on the importance of the horticulture sector.
- Recognition of the need for seasonal worker accommodation in horticultural businesses and that the worker population has a limited impact on local resources.
- A more streamlined process, reducing costs, time, and resource needed.
- Ensuring government delivers on commitments to consult on national planning reforms to make it easier to build, or expand, infrastructure such as greenhouses, polytunnels, packhouses or other facilities to be more productive.
- A fundamental change to how food is seen within the planning system, with greater weight given to sustainable food production metrics.



FARM ASSURANCE

Horticulture and potato growers are supportive of farm assurance and continue to be strong advocates of its purpose in playing a key role in delivering trust and integrity across the grocery market. Yet, the complexities of the sector, alongside commercial interests of retailers and assurance scheme providers, have led to an unsustainable situation.

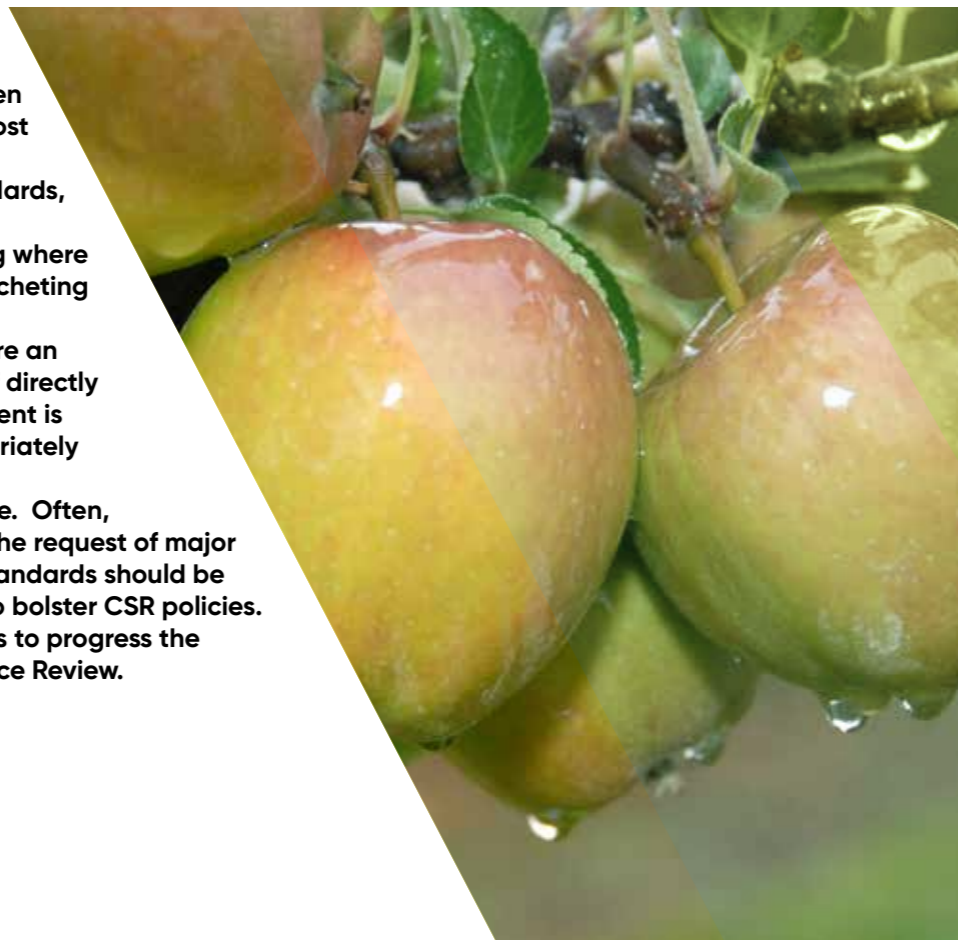
Summary of the key challenges

- **Duplication:** The audit landscape has grown out of control both in terms of scope and the sheer number of assurance schemes.
- **Proliferation of schemes:** The scope of schemes is ever expanding, and assurance schemes have lost sight of their original purpose. Growers have no confidence that either the grower or the consumer are receiving the intended benefit.
- **Significant audit burden:** With financial and operational pressures as high as they've ever been, a reset is needed to restore assurance to manageable levels and ensure it is delivering meaningful value to growers and consumers.
- **Governance and standard development:** While assurance schemes must find a balance between producers, customers and consumers needs in terms of development of standards, growers believe that some schemes have not got the balance right and are heavily weighted in favour of outside influences or of supply chain demands.



SECTOR REQUIREMENTS:

- **Greater use of earned recognition between schemes, as an effective way to reduce cost and the overall audit burden.**
- **A pragmatic approach to reviewing standards, where critically assessing standards and removing if unnecessary, and streamlining where possible to prevent mission creep and ratcheting up of standards.**
- **Greater use of modular approaches, where an additional set of standards only applies if directly relevant, and where a customer requirement is transparently communicated and appropriately rewarded.**
- **Standards based on science and evidence. Often, standards are increased or amended at the request of major customers with little or no justification. Standards should be science and evidence led, not just used to bolster CSR policies.**
- **Assurance bodies and supply chain actors to progress the recommendations from the Farm Assurance Review.**



FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The range of policies that impact on the ability for UK horticulture growers to invest and grow is wide and varied, yet interconnected. These areas are also important to consider in the round.

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR PRODUCTION STANDARDS:

With the UK importing half its veg, around 85% of the fruit we consume, and the majority of young plants and plant materials, it is critical that growers are not undermined and outcompeted by lower production standard.

CARBON REDUCTION:

The diverse nature of the sector poses a particular challenge for measuring the progress in reducing carbon outputs, and helping set benchmarks and targets. Unlike many other sectors, there is a lack of Lifecycle Assessment (LCA) data, without which it is difficult to create meaningful methods of carrying out carbon footprinting (CF) exercises and to establish baseline emissions data.

WASTE AND PACKAGING:

The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations, which require producers to bear the full net costs of managing the packaging lifecycle, including disposal and recycling, come into effect on 1 October 2025. They will impact farmers and growers, particularly those who supply packaged goods to the UK market, package products for other businesses, or use packaging to safeguard goods during transport, all of whom will need to comply with the new requirements.

SKILLS AND TRAINING PROVISION:

Estimates suggest that almost a third of the food supply chain workforce is set to reach retirement age by 2033-35. Add to this the limited profile the sector gets from careers advisers and through the national curriculum, and the sector has a significant challenge to attract the right talent. It is important for industry and government to get behind initiatives such as The Institute for Agriculture & Horticulture to provide a path for training within the sector.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT:

Government has a responsibility to ensure public procurement contracts uphold the same standards and obligations as required by UK food producers. There is also an opportunity to ensure fruit and veg features more prominently in public food catering.

ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE:

The UK Ornamental Horticulture sector can play a vital role in delivering government priorities of tackling climate change and improving the health of the nation. The Environmental Horticulture Group's 2024 report Mission Green Growth, alongside an updated Oxford Economics economic impact report, lays out the increasing body of evidence showing that plants, trees, and green spaces have a huge part to play in reversing the climate and biodiversity crisis as well as contributing to our mental health and wellbeing.

[ehg-green-growth-report-autumn-2024-final.pdf](#)
[oxford-economics-ehg-report-november-2024-final.pdf](#)

[Environmental Horticulture Group Mission Green Growth report, autumn 2024](#)
[Oxford Economics: The economic impact of environmental horticulture and landscaping in the UK, November 2024](#)

UK HORTICULTURE GROWTH STRATEGY

NATIONAL FARMERS UNION (NFU) 2025

National Farmers Union (NFU) HQ
Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park
Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, CV8 2TZ.

