



# Horticultural Sector Committee

## Corrected oral evidence: The horticultural sector

Thursday 16 March 2023

10.30 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Redesdale (The Chair); Baroness Buscombe; Lord Carter of Coles; Lord Colgrain; Baroness Fookes; Baroness Jones of Whitchurch; Lord Sahota; Baroness Walmsley; Baroness Willis of Summertown.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 21 - 40

### Witnesses

[I](#): James Barnes, Chair, Horticultural Trades Association; Clare Matterson, Director-General, Royal Horticultural Society; Minette Batters, President, National Farmers' Union.

## Examination of witnesses

James Barnes, Clare Matterson and Minette Batters.

**Q21 The Chair:** Good morning. Can I thank our witnesses for coming in today? The committee, due to the wonders of our transport system, has become slightly virtual this morning. Can I welcome our witnesses? We have James Barnes from the Horticultural Trades Association; Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers' Union; and Clare Matterson, director-general of the Royal Horticultural Society.

We will be asking a number of questions today and I will try to direct the questions to the right people online. This question is for all members of the witness panel. We know roughly the value of the horticultural sector. Could you give us your views on its value to the UK? Is the sector growing or contracting?

**James Barnes:** I should start by talking about the definition of horticulture. I am slightly conscious that sometimes the word gets conflated and has different meanings. I represent what is commonly known as ornamental horticulture, which is very distinct from edible horticulture.

When I talk about the value, I am talking about that broader natural capital piece of horticulture rather than edible horticulture. The value to the UK is estimated to be about £28 billion. Yes, it is growing. From a productive point of view, the growth rate over the last five years has been circa 2% in real terms and probably slightly more than that at retail level.

In addition to that economic value, there is a far bigger value in terms of mental health, well-being and how our sector contributes, will contribute or can contribute to that whole climate change agenda. In fact, our research tells us that over half the policies in the Government's 25-year environment plan can be delivered only with a robust ornamental and environmental horticultural sector.

**Minette Batters:** Many thanks to the committee for inviting me in today. I would concur with what James has said. We are at a pivotal moment for the future of horticulture. As I see it, it is the one sector I represent that has enormous opportunity for growth, with uncharted and untapped potential. It is extremely sad to see it contracting at the level it is at the moment.

There are three compounding factors: leaving the European Union, the global pandemic already driving inflation and then the war in Ukraine. That has left cost inflation for farm inputs at a record high. Energy is up 165%; fertiliser is up 40%, workforce costs are up over 13%. Much of this is not being reflected in contractual relationships, so growers are carrying a huge proportion of the risk.

In all our intentions survey work we are seeing contractions in sectors that really should not be contracting. The protected crop sector is a

classic case in point. This sector is tomatoes, cucumbers and aubergines, the crops that have to be grown in a controlled environment. We will see the lowest level of production in tomatoes this year. Many people are reeling from the salad shortages at the moment. Quite honestly, this has to change. I know you will come on to it in questions, but I was really disappointed to see that the protected crop sector was not part of the ETII in the Budget yesterday.

The sector is contracting, but I should be very clear with you that, with the members I represent and our horticultural board, we have just published a strategy for growth. We need to work with government and the supply chain to grow this sector and make sure it shows its full capability. There is clear market demand for it. We have the climate, we have the ambition, and, indeed, we have the moral high ground of not continuing to put pressure on other parts of the world. We absolutely must grow this sector.

**Clare Matterson:** Likewise, I am very pleased we are having this inquiry. Thank you, everybody. As James did, I am going to talk more based on the RHS's expertise in the ornamental horticulture sector. As we get into the questions, I hope we can also have a bit of a conversation about concept, definitions and language, because they are confusing for people, but we can come on to that.

There are five main areas of value. One is economic, as James has laid out. There is a very good 2019 study by Oxford Economics, commissioned by the OHRG, which you will have.

The second is leisure and tourism. In 2022, leisure and tourism from the gardens sector was around £2.9 billion. The ALVA statistics are out today. It is interesting to see that three of the top 15 are gardens as opposed to indoor tourism and visitor attractions. The UK's national gardens do not really get the understanding and recognition that our indoor museums get. Both are important, but we could do more to celebrate and promote our expertise there in the UK.

The others are secondary positive effects. One is around biodiversity. We can say more about that, but, with the huge loss in biodiversity, we now have a lot of evidence for the increases in biodiversity that gardens and gardening can bring. Another is climate—cooling, insulating, carbon sequestration and flooding. Once again, the cultivated landscape has a hugely valuable part to play there.

The last is health in its very broad aspects, whether it is specifics of noise and air pollution or mental, physical and social health. There was a good YouGov survey in 2022 that asked people about the mental, physical and social benefits. Over 70% said that gardening had a positive impact on mental and physical health. People are recognising more and more its importance in social health and community cohesion as well. I would say those are the top five.

**The Chair:** We took evidence from Defra last week, which seems to have the same problem of defining horticulture as a sector. Do you believe that the Government, and especially Defra, have their heads around this? Is this slightly fragmented in government thinking?

**Clare Matterson:** It is fragmented. I came into this sector relatively recently and I still find the terminology confusing. When you talk to people, you can be talking slightly at cross purposes. We have ornamental and edible horticulture, and then we have conceptual language such as cultivated and native species. There is a lot of misunderstanding when we talk about the importance of native species. Cultivated species are incredibly important to our landscapes and increasingly important in understanding what species of plant we need for climate resilience in different aspects and different parts of the country.

There is quite a job to be done to unpick some of this language and get more clarity around it so that we can have sensible conversations.

**James Barnes:** I would like to underwrite completely what Clare is saying there. This is one of the key reasons our sector feels a little bit misunderstood and misrepresented. Again, I watched Defra give evidence last week. I could tell there was a conflation of definitions. It is not fully appreciated or understood how radically different environmental and ornamental horticulture are from edible horticulture. That is critical.

**Minette Batters:** I would absolutely agree with what Clare and James have said. I would also add that there is probably little excuse for any confusion. They have highlighted really well the environmental, health and well-being opportunities. The sector I represent is made up of a lot of crops. You have berries, top fruits, salads, protected crops and on and on you go. This is part of our national food security. It is so often referred to almost as an allotment industry. It really is part of our national food security.

We have 70 million people on an island, with just-in-time distribution of what we grow here. We are really feeling it right now. We are the market of last resort in Europe. We should be producing much more here, but we are in a situation where we are producing much less. That can change with the right government ambition and the right policies in place. It is really disappointing to see that has not happened yet.

This is a sector worth 20% of total farm-gate value. It is an extremely valuable sector to our economy and to our health and well-being. I do not know whether the health part has really had a light shone on it. It will do our nation huge good to be producing much more here. Many of you will have seen orchards being ripped out. That is where the crossover is with edible crops, biodiversity and carbon sequestration. This sector can do everything, really.

Q22 **Baroness Willis of Summertown:** Can I just ask for a further point of clarification? Does the NFU represent ornamental horticulture as well? This is where a lot of the confusion comes in. Last week we were talking

to Defra, which does not use the word "horticulture" a lot on its website. When you dig down to the grants that seem to be available, they stop at the farm gate. To me the words "farm gate" seem to suggest edible horticulture rather than ornamental horticulture.

I would agree with you. We should be growing more of our ornamental plants here as well rather than importing plugs of plants on a massive scale. I was just interested to know where the NFU stands on that.

**Minette Batters:** It is both for us. My horticultural board chair, Martin Emmett, is very much in the ornamental sector, but he is the board chair. He represents a very wide variety of growers in this country. For us, ornamentals are an important part of that package. As the NFU, we focus perhaps more on food production, but I really want to stress how much plants are a vital part of that.

For our members, there is a lot of diversification, particularly into native species. It is a big part of our membership. It might be a slightly smaller part, but it is a really important one. It is not either/or for us; it is both. It really is important to stress that point.

**The Chair:** Who is responsible for defining horticulture, then? That question comes up again and again. Is it for the industry, for an outside body or for Defra?

**James Barnes:** That is a very good question. The definition has evolved from the 1800s to where we are now. We are engaged, through the OHRG, in a process of looking to redefine it and to replace the word "ornamental", which to most people suggests temporary beautification. It does not really get to the heart of what we do.

We are looking to do that, and I do not want to pre-empt that exercise, but the science and art of improving the world around us through the use of plants and trees feels like a far better definition of environmental horticulture. That is something we are working on. It will be a very useful exercise to try to get this distinction and avoid this confusion.

**The Chair:** Minette, should potatoes still be part of the horticultural sector?

**Minette Batters:** I can see why there is a level of confusion. I have to be very careful in my job. I represent farmers and growers. That is quite a defining difference. Those in the horticultural sector very much see themselves as growers, not farmers. As James says, these things have evolved over a very long time.

In the context of the NFU, the potato sector is a part of our horticultural board. It very much does fit in there. We should not necessarily get too hung up on what sits where. I can understand your frustration with Defra colleagues perhaps not being succinct about this.

There will be new crops that we can grow, given the challenges of climate change and innovation. In Holland, microgreens are becoming a massive

part of the health agenda. The ability to medicate yourself by what you are eating is a huge opportunity for the sector. It will evolve, and quickly. We need to embrace what it has to offer rather than getting too hung up on what sits where.

**Clare Matterson:** I do not want to throw more confusion into the pot, but I sort of am. This is the discussion around green skills. Horticulture currently is not really in the definition of green skills. If you look at the opportunities there are, particularly in the context of climate, managing biodiversity, research and science, and land management skills, a whole range of horticultural expertise and skills can come in.

There is an opportunity to expand the definition and really think about it much more broadly. We will come on to some of the questions we have about career opportunities, attracting young people into this type of career and what they think it is.

**Q23 Baroness Fookes:** Just to conclude on the question of definition, would you all agree that it would be better if horticulture was never described as such again and was always divided into ornamental—or, as I prefer very strongly, environmental—and edible? If you can agree that as the basis for future arrangements, can I now ask you what the key challenges are to your part of the edible or horticultural sectors?

**James Barnes:** I completely agree with what you have said about definition. That would be immensely helpful.

As to challenges, in the short term—this would apply to many sectors—the cost of doing business right now is a key issue, given input costs and energy costs. In the medium term, legislation and regulation are to the fore. I spend a lot of my time discussing and pushing back on regulation and legislation that is potentially harmful rather than having a conversation around what is potentially helpful.

Examples of that would be a lot of the phytosanitary controls around our imports and exports, the antiquated systems in CITES that impact us, and a fear about where legislation might end up on the removal of peat. That is something we support, but the law of unintended consequences does bear down on us there.

Then there is the sheer weight of legislation, particularly environmental, that is facing not just our sector but UK plc. There does not appear to be any helicopter view of the overall impact of that combined legislative agenda and any kind of phasing of that. There are some big dangers not just for our sector but for the UK overall.

In the longer term, there are two things for us. One is recognition. That comes back to that discussion we have just had on definitions. The environmental horticultural sector needs greater recognition in government. Our policies, whether that is Defra policies, trade policies, planning policies or climate change policies, could be far better defined, more focused and more beneficial, if that recognition was truly embedded.

One specific long-term point is about water and water resources. I sit on the National Drought Group. A lot of the discussion is about demand mitigation and resilience. That is all vitally important, but it does not feel like the debate is moving towards long-term cross-regional infrastructural solutions. I know that is complicated and probably involves looking at the financial infrastructure of some of our water companies, but that is a key initiative that we should not leave out.

**Minette Batters:** It is fair to say that access to people has been the biggest barrier for a number of years now. It has been incredibly hard to achieve the current seasonal worker scheme. The sector is in desperate need of some certainty here. We need to see a five-year rolling programme so businesses can plan ahead. This is definitely a big part of what has led to the contraction to date. We need certainty on access to people.

Automation is most definitely happening on farms, but it is not going to happen overnight. We have to build bridges to get to this new world. It will also require massive investment. It is fair to say that we are probably in the top 5% of countries for automation. We are leading the way in a lot of this research, but it is not there, and people are fundamental. That has been one of the greatest challenges.

Without doubt, cost price inflation has been another massive challenge. We are still seeing energy accounting costs that are 50% up. There is a lack of certainty in the policy framework and about the future of the environmental land management scheme. Food production has to be part of that. It is very heavily weighted to delivering for the environment, almost at the cost of food production. We keep pushing for them both to have a symbiotic relationship.

There is also a lack of certainty over the future of the producer organisation scheme. That is due to end at the end of 2025. We need to make sure that there is a successor scheme. As I have said, this is basically an unsupported sector, so the continuation of a future producer organisation scheme will be critical. My team has been very involved in working up what that could look like, but here we are in 2023 and we have no idea of what the future will look like.

This is a long-term sector with long-term investment plans. They need to be given that certainty now. Otherwise, I fear we will be facing another cliff-edge situation. Access to people, certainty on what the policy landscape will look like, and how we manage these very high input costs, are the three things we need to factor in.

**Clare Matterson:** Using those definitions, I would be more on the environmental ornamental side than the edible side, but there have been some similar themes coming through.

On people, the sector is really struggling to fill vacancies at the moment. There is a poor perception of horticulture in schools and colleges, perhaps linked to it not being integrated well into that idea of green jobs, which

we know young people are more enthusiastic about. Certainly, I want the RHS to be able to do more to help there. If we work together, that could be a very positive thing.

Linked to that is succession planning. In particular, there are a lot of nurseries across the UK, often run by older people or families, where we are not seeing succession. How can we support those smaller businesses? They often have very specific and important technical growing skills around particular species and cultivars, so there is a danger of losing those things.

I will add a couple of other challenges. One is a much broader point about the importance of cultivated green space and gardening. That is not integrated well into government thinking and policy-making. It often seems to get missed out.

Access to R&D funding for environmental horticulture is another challenge. If you look at the grant schemes that are out there, they tend to be more focused towards agriculture and farming. That is incredibly important, but it is very difficult to find ways to access funds for important R&D, which I know we will come on to in greater detail later.

**Q24** **Baroness Willis of Summertown:** Let us pick up from that point about the Government's package to support horticulture businesses. The question here is about the current economic challenges, but I would like to change that slightly. What would good look like in terms of government support for the horticulture industry? Is it to have a separate funding stream? Are there particular areas where horticulture needs to be flagged up? I would really like your views on that.

**James Barnes:** It comes back down to this definition piece. Through a lot of schemes there is support for horticulture, but a lot of those support schemes specifically exclude ornamental horticulture. I know of no government support that is easily accessed by the ornamental sector. It is fundamental that there is an understanding and a recognition of what environmental horticulture is. That would give us access to some of these existing funding packages.

The farming equipment and technology fund lists 91 pieces of equipment you can obtain with grant support. Only three of those—it is very specific—relate to ornamental horticulture. Some of those funds specifically exclude ornamental from access. There is a big gap there.

**Clare Matterson:** I do not have a lot to add, other than that I agree. As I was saying, the RHS has the opportunity, working with the horticulture industry and universities, to act as a bit of a hub for new R&D developments, where there are all sorts of opportunities. We have difficulty in accessing funding pots. As I say, Defra money tends to be focused on the farming and agriculture side and not the ornamental side.

In the UKRI funding pots, horticultural science is very much an orphan science. Once again, if you look at all the definitions across the research councils, there is no clear route through. It is probably the BBSRC, but

this is not in its strategy. We appear to be a bit of an orphan area. Where we are successful, it is often through private individuals or private foundations.

**Q25 Baroness Buscombe:** We very much appreciate you all coming to join us. For the benefit of the committee and everyone who is tuning into this session, which is tremendously important, each of you three has a pivotal role to play, but to what extent do you work together to act as one strong voice for the industry? We are talking about the challenges and feeling like maybe the Government are not responding or listening. If there are too many voices, it is too easy to set you aside, if I can put it that way.

My interests are very simple. I am secretary of the Gardening and Horticulture APPG, and a member of the Royal Horticultural Society.

**Minette Batters:** I would say that we are very complementary to each other. As clearly outlined, we have different roles to play in this area, but I do not see it as a competitive area; I see it as one where we are complementary.

I remember doing a lot with James in Covid when garden centres were being pushed off a cliff. It was really important that we came together to collaborate. Whenever we can and need to collaborate, we do. We stick to our job spec, effectively, on behalf of the people we represent. I would say there is no competition. We have purely complementary roles.

In the edible sector, one of the critical things we need to resolve is a fair contractual relationship. Growers in this very savage marketplace, where we live with a constant retail price war, operate on fixed price contracts. That is very different from the relationship growers have in Europe. In many parts of Europe, they are clearly very well hedged and well organised. They are managing their cost of energy. Some companies are passing on those costs directly to consumers.

We are seeing a very challenging environment emerge in the UK. Quite simply, growers are not getting a fair return for what they are producing. That is leading to a lot of the contraction. If growers cannot reclaim the huge costs they have had to put into their businesses, it is no surprise that we are seeing this level of contraction.

That is something only government can resolve. We have seen it in other sectors that have contracted, particularly in the intensive sectors. There will be an important push for us to make sure legislation is put in place to deliver full transparency and fair terms of trading practice.

**James Barnes:** We come together as an industry through the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group. We produced a growth plan 18 months ago. That was the combination of input from the RHS, the HTA, the NFU and other bodies. There is a mechanism for that "one voice" piece.

**Clare Matterson:** I completely agree with James's point about the grouping, which is incredibly important. As Minette has said, we all have

slightly different interests as well. Coming together through that group is incredibly important.

Since I arrived at the RHS, we have also recognised the importance of the external visitor-facing set of organisations that have important national and cultural gardens. In fact, next week the RHS is bringing a group of chief executives and chairs together to talk about what we can do collectively. There is a range of ways of looking at this, but we do a lot, and there is more we can do, to have a clearer single voice.

**Q26 Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** I wanted to pick up on the point Minette made about the need for fair contractual relationships between growers and retailers. It is a huge problem. We can all see that it is a system that is not working at the moment. We can all see that growers are being squeezed and it is becoming unviable for them.

This is probably specific to Minette. It is easy to say that government needs to sort this, but we need to know what actions we need to take. I also wondered what your view is of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, which is meant to be there to intervene when supply chains fall apart. The Groceries Code Adjudicator might not have the resources or the clout, but it certainly does not seem to be helping growers at the current time. Is that a role that could help resolve this problem in the future? How would it need to change to do that?

**Minette Batters:** That is a great question. Something to look at is the dairy contracts work that has been traveling through Parliament for quite a long time now. That will set a blueprint for other sectors, with full transparency in how these contractual relationships will work.

One of the frustrations has been with the Government taking back control from the EU and the powers they gave themselves in the Agriculture Act. As an example, when the egg sector was going through so many challenges, we wanted them to use Section 20 in that Act, which gave them the power to look at exceptional market circumstances as to what could be done.

I would say we have exceptional market circumstances right now in fresh produce. The Government have the powers to look at this situation, and yet they have so far failed to use them at all. For pigs and poultry, and now for growers, they have not used the powers they have.

It is very clear to me that the retail environment will become only more distressed, with the rise of the discounters and the challenge for others to keep up with them. Last week we saw a situation, which has been in the public domain, with Tesco asking for fulfilment fees. We are seeking clarity on this, and they are now saying that this was not meant to be going to their growers at all, but it did, which caused a huge amount of alarm as to what those costs were going to mean.

The role of the Groceries Code Adjudicator is up for consultation. We are very opposed to it becoming a part of the CMA. I would say there are now clear signs that the GCA needs to be given some serious teeth.

**Q27 Baroness Walmsley:** I am a member of the RHS as well, and I have recently become a member of the committee of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, which I will add to my declared interests this week. That is what leads me to ask another question about possible sources of funding. I am just wondering whether there are sources of funding to do with heritage. Many gardens are of heritage and, as Clare has just mentioned, cultural interest. Of course, there are heritage species as well.

I was just wondering whether any of your members are eligible for funding under heritage umbrellas rather than science, Defra or other funding.

**Clare Matterson:** That has been a good source of funding. The RHS and other organisations with heritage gardens have had funding, particularly through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which is incredibly welcome. That fund is opening itself up more and more to the importance of the cultivated landscape, not just the natural landscape. That is what is important.

It comes back to this definitional piece. We can use words very casually and then not realise that we are excluding great, big and important aspects. That area of funding is important, and it is easier to come by. We really struggle on that R&D piece.

**James Barnes:** I would agree with Clare on the heritage piece. I would agree that the biggest gap is accessing R&D funding.

**Baroness Walmsley:** Minette, is this relevant to any of your members?

**Minette Batters:** I would be very keen to say that the edible sector does not see itself as any better off than anybody else in this field. As I say, it has been an unsupported sector for a very long time. It has lacked any public investment.

On the heritage side, that does not work. For us, it is front and centre of the future agricultural policy and whatever that will look like in the sustainable farming incentive and the environmental land management scheme.

**Q28 Baroness Fookes:** I want to ask a question that need not be answered now. It would be very helpful to the committee if there could be a list of grant-making organisations from which ornamental/environmental horticulture has been excluded where you think it should be included. That would give us a very precise idea of where the lack is.

**James Barnes:** We can certainly provide that list.

**The Chair:** We will approach people for that offline.

**Q29 Baroness Willis of Summertown:** You have picked up the question I was about to follow up on. We had the Budget yesterday. What is your view on the support for the horticultural sector in that?

**James Barnes:** I am not sure there was anything specific that really impacted our sector. It was really a Budget for the broader macroeconomic piece. I cannot necessarily see anything in there that is specifically beneficial to our sector in particular.

**Baroness Willis of Summertown:** Minette, you made a comment earlier about particular areas being missed out.

**Minette Batters:** I am beyond frustrated, quite honestly. I am a huge fan of the Royal Botanic Gardens, and I am delighted that they are part of the ETII scheme, but the protected crop sector being left out of the ETII scheme poses an enormous challenge.

When we are facing into so many challenges of salad rationing, why would we be preventing our own growers from entering a scheme that would make an enormous difference and would give them some security? We have many glasshouses now that are mothballed or being used for storage when they should be growing our salads. I am at my wit's end, quite honestly, with the lack of commitment to the warm words about taking this sector forward.

For poultry, horticulture and protected crops in particular, entry into the ETII was absolutely needed. It is being left out, and I am just astounded, quite honestly. At the end of the day, consumers are facing these rationing events across most retailers now. They cannot buy what they want to be able to buy, and growers are not being given the signals that would help them produce it.

I do not see this situation changing any time soon. We will see the lowest levels of production for tomatoes and cucumbers since records began in 1985. The Government had the opportunity to act. They have acted for a sector that is not producing food. Why did they not act for a sector that is producing food?

**Clare Matterson:** There is nothing specific that supports horticulture as a sector. The only aspect we are interested in, to see whether it will help, is childcare provision. It is a very low-paid sector. We know from our own staff that all of those costs are very difficult. It is those kinds of things that are useful, but that is more general than specific to horticulture.

Q30 **Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** I want to move on, please, and look at the Government's support for achieving net zero. The first question is to Minette about the environmental land management scheme, which is the Government's flagship project to deliver on all of that. Is there enough in the current ELM scheme to encourage people to diversify into growing more horticulture and edible goods rather than the big standard crops and pastureland?

You talked about people getting out of the sector, but is there something in ELMS that would encourage people, with the right subsidies, to get into the sector and produce more of our own food? That is the first question.

To James and Clare, would you expect government support to help you

on the road to net zero? I presume both your organisations agree with it in principle, but what legislative or financial support are you looking for to encourage that among your own members?

**James Barnes:** To touch on the ELMS piece, there is very little in there for the environmental or horticultural sector other than the fact that it may encourage more tree planting. There is nothing specific.

It is more about what the sector can do for the Government. That comes back to my recognition issue. It is about understanding that what we are producing is something that absorbs carbon and gives off oxygen. Cross-departmental recognition in government of what we can do to help climate change and to embed that in policies across the piece is important.

As a sector on our own, we have a very strong desire to be sustainable. We have our own roadmap for dealing with water resilience, plastics, energy and peat. Where the Government can help—again, it gets repetitive here—it comes back to research and development into growing media alternatives, experimentation and support for things like that. It is back to some of the same issues that we have discussed previously.

**Minette Batters:** In short, it is finding the successor in the ELM scheme to the producer organisation scheme, so a new productivity scheme. We need certainty and clarity on what that scheme would look like as soon as possible.

It is very easy to focus only on net zero. I get more and more alarmed at the lack of focus on water security. Some 70% of the water content of the fruit and vegetables that we eat come from extremely water-stressed parts of the world. As everybody knows, we have too much water in some places and not enough in others. The ability to move and store water and have a totally different approach to not wasting water into the North Sea is essential. We are continuing to put more pressure on other parts of the world to feed us. We had Italy declare a state of emergency, Portugal with 95% drought. We should be stepping up to the mark on water and not wasting it as we are now.

**The Chair:** I should declare an interest at this point as chair of the Water Retail Company, but that is a water retailer, not a supplier.

Q31 **Lord Colgrain:** My question is to do with labour. What are the skills and labour supply issues impacting the horticultural sector and how can these be addressed?

**Minette Batters:** Labour, as I have outlined to date, has been an enormous challenge. I hear people say that this is a low-paid sector. It is a highly regulated sector. It is not a low-paid sector that I represent. We have to be absolutely compliant with national living wage. Indeed, when the scheme was introduced last year, the payment rates were set above our national living wage for seasonal workers to be coming into this country.

We have to look at a long-term approach and, as I said, a five-year scheme that takes the needs of this sector into account. We have long talked about the need for 70,000 people to pick, pack and grade our fruit, vegetables and flowers. That figure has not changed.

We were relieved to see the Government commit to a scheme of 45,000, with 10,000 extra if needed, which takes us to 55,000. We should be under no illusions as to the huge costs of people coming here and the challenges for labour providers going forwards, with people coming in from very difficult, challenging and vulnerable parts of the world. Do not forget that, when we were in the EU, the UK was the most favoured destination for seasonal work. We have long lost that title. If you are in Europe at the moment, it is much easier and more straightforward to go to Germany or other countries.

This remains a real challenge to resolve. It is not just about seasonal workers. Lack of access to people is probably the greatest challenge that our economy faces. I am often asked why people who are unemployed in those areas cannot do the work. There is a challenge with moving people around the country. If we take Herefordshire as an example, you have fewer than 500 people unemployed and a requirement of over 2,500 seasonal workers, so it is about making sure that we have people in the right place. This is a really challenging situation.

**Clare Matterson:** There are a number of areas here. The first I have mentioned before around not recognising horticulture as a green skill. It is a key profession that can have a really positive impact on a lot of the environmental issues to do with mitigating harms, good land management, understanding right plant, right purpose, and therefore saving considerable amounts of money in what is planted across new development sites et cetera. Recognising horticulture in that green skill space will be really important.

The other big issue of skills and supply is the diversity of the sector. It is a very un-diverse sector with respect to ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. We have not done well as a sector. Once again, we need to pull together better and do more. We need to get into schools to show why this is not just a low-paid job but one that can lead to future career opportunities. We are doing some things there at the RHS through some New Shoots initiatives, but we need to do more and think about how we get that into the school curriculum to show these as positive career routes.

We have real challenges at every level. At the science level, we are one of the few employers of horticultural scientists. The people that we employed for the last two posts were non-UK; they came from overseas. We could not find people with the right horticultural scientific background in the UK, because there is such a limited amount of that.

It is about how we shift that perception of these kinds of technical, land-based jobs as low-skilled and low-paid. We have to shift that in

order to change the dial and make this a positive, rewarding and fulfilling career, whichever route you go through, whether it is ornamental, into farming or whatever it might be. There is a big job to be done there.

**James Barnes:** I will try to add value rather than just repeat here, because I agree with what Minette and Clare have said. That shift in perception is fundamental and a lot of that is down to the industry. This change of definition from ornamental to environmental will help fundamentally.

The fact that our sector is left out of the Green Jobs Taskforce is a surprise. If we can achieve that status in government, that will be really helpful, because it underwrites what we are about and excites people more. I am very surprised that a sector that is growing plants does not have that status in the Green Jobs Taskforce. That would be an ask for now; it would make a difference and start to shift perception.

In terms of the labour supply issues, I welcome the increase there from a migrant labour point of view. There are two changes that we would put to government there. The six-month limit does not really allow for a full season's work to happen if those migrants are allowed to stay for only that length of time. Then there is an issue about re-entry and the period for which you cannot get people back in again. Those are two tweaks to that system that would make a fundamental difference.

There is something that can help from an apprenticeship point of view. My personal experience in commerce with the levy payments is that that money goes out, but it has been very difficult to understand and access how you get those apprentices back into your business. It is very complicated, difficult and costly on the return side of that. Some kind of look at levies and levy reform would be very helpful.

**Lord Colgrain:** Could I follow up on a comment that Minette made about continental Europeans, the UK having been a sort of target of first choice for them and that no longer being the case? Who has replaced them? Is it now eastern Europeans who are coming in, or is it people from further afield? Given the way the Government have been operating the permits and increasing them at very short notice, has that presented a problem in getting people to come at short notice?

**Minette Batters:** Yes, without a doubt it has. They are coming from much further afield, from countries like the Philippines. It is a lot more complex than it was, with a lot more cost that has been added to it. For the labour providers, many of you will be aware of what has happened. It is proving very difficult and very challenging for people. The Government do not want to see asylum seekers coming through this scheme, so the procedures in place are costly, bureaucratic, for understandable reasons, and time-consuming.

It has led to a totally different cost structure to what we had before. You bring all of that in, and I have talked about cost inflation with inputs, contractual relationships and wage inflation. Wage inflation is not just

payment rates when they get here. It is payment rates for getting here in the first place that are adding real challenge in this area.

- Q32 **Baroness Buscombe:** I probably ought to declare my past interest at this point as a Minister at the Department for Work and Pensions. This is a two-pronged point. First, we have several million people in this country at the moment who are capable of working but are unemployed and on benefits. Surely it would be easier and cheaper to move some of them, for example to Hereford, albeit on a seasonal basis, than to bring people from much further afield.

There is definitely a link here, which should be developed more strongly, with work and pensions in order to assist this situation, not only in terms of the seasonal work. We have several million people, not just a million or whatever—we have a million job vacancies but also the seasonal worker situation—who are capable of working who are not being tapped for this.

Secondly, is there not a role for more synergy between you and the Department for Work and Pensions in shifting the way people perceive this industry into thinking of the green future for this country, the fact that your industry creates amazingly interesting jobs and the fantastic opportunity for upskilling? I know there are many people in the department, including those who work out in the field, as it were, who care very much and would love to encourage more people into your sector to work and have apprenticeships and so on. I feel that there is a huge gap here, which I never heard about when I was working, until relatively recently, as a Minister. Minette, would you like to respond, because of your point about Hereford, for example, and the larger point on skills?

**Minette Batters:** I completely concur with your thoughts on DWP. There is probably nobody better placed to resolve that than the current Defra Secretary of State, Thérèse Coffey, having led DWP herself. I would absolutely support that. The challenge, though, is really deep-seated, cultural and many other things. Over many years, we have educated people out of doing these domestic jobs. They simply do not want to do them. There are issues with universal credit. If you come off and you have had a seasonal job, you cannot go back on. That is something that DWP could resolve.

The challenge is that, although this can often be talked about as low-skilled, it is absolutely not. I remember taking Ranil Jayawardena, when he was in very briefly, to Phil and Liz Maddocks' salad business. You had pickers there who were cutting iceberg lettuces in a rig. Each of them was cutting nine iceberg lettuces every 60 seconds. With 10 people in a rig, that is a lot of lettuces being cut every 60 seconds. You are not only selecting it; you are cutting it and putting it on the rig.

This is really hard work and highly skilled. People in some cases have the misconception that this is low-skilled work. I said to the Minister, "I'm sure you would struggle to keep pace for an hour", with which he agreed. That is not to say that this cannot change, and for young people going forwards we should have a real push for saying, "This would be a

fantastic way, when you leave education, of really increasing the work ethic, being outside and providing health and well-being benefits". It would be a great start for many people, but we have literally disincentivised people from wanting to do these jobs and wanting to work in business sites, effectively, that are not outside.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Is it not true that a lot of these people, although in their heart of hearts they want to work, do not have the confidence or the background of work? Your sector is a huge opportunity for this. Clare, would you agree?

**Clare Matterson:** I would. The RHS has been very involved with the introduction of apprenticeships and T-levels. These are fantastic, but although in principle they can be studied flexibly, it is quite hard in practice. Perhaps we need to look at that more.

Also, perhaps there are other flexible and shorter qualifications. That is partly, as you say, perhaps giving people more stepping stones and building up that kind of expertise and confidence. I completely agree with Minette that we have to shift this from this idea that it is low-paid and anybody can do it. Actually, there is a whole series of different technical skills and knowledge. Then there are pathways through to careers and jobs in all sort of areas. That is what is missing.

**James Barnes:** I would agree with what Clare says. There is a huge opportunity out there. It comes on the back of this shift in perception. That whole range of environmental sciences that is sitting out there should and can be a major attractive force for bringing people into our industry. A lot of that is down to how we sell that and how we define ourselves in getting that out there.

Q33 **Lord Sahota:** I have no interests to declare whatever. My question is about science, research and technology. What opportunities are presented to the sector by research and development in science in technology, given the fact that government aims to turn the UK by 2030 into "a global science and technology superpower"? Will this improve workers' productivity?

**James Barnes:** There are a number of bits to that question. One of them perhaps comes back to what we have talked about before such as access to R&D funding, automation and the encouragement of all that in our sector. That is critical. At the moment, as I previously stated, there is none, or it is very difficult to access.

There is huge potential to develop that in our sector, simply because of how far it leans into the whole climate change agenda and all the science that is required around that to understand what green cities and open spaces mean to people. There is a huge agenda out there from a research, development and innovation point of view that directly leans into the environmental horticulture sector. At the moment, as far as I can see, that does not exist.

**Clare Matterson:** I will put a bit more flesh on those bones. I completely agree with James. For context, through our RHS Plant Finder, the RHS has documented about 80,000 cultivated plants in the UK. We believe that there are probably around 400,000 in the UK. If I could put that into context, there are about 1,500 native UK plants.

That shows us the huge genetic plant diversity that we have in the UK, which is absolutely tremendous and not well understood. We have been collecting it, documenting it and storing it. We have the herbarium. It has all been funded thanks to RHS members and donations. It does not have government funding. Also to put it into context, there are about 800,000 hectares of garden, green space, and about 30 million gardeners out there.

There is an opportunity for the UK to be a real leader in some of the most important things to us around climate, so with the transition to peat-free, in thinking about what different healthy growing media, we need and understanding the cultivated plants that work well with those growing media and the climate-resilient plants. We have now had to move plants from one bit of the country to the other because of the changing climate just in our country. What are the cultivated landscapes that we need for climate mitigation and adaptation? We have to understand that plant diversity from the 400,000.

Biosecurity and plant health is also incredibly important. What are the best plants when it comes to the management and control of pests and diseases? How can we minimise the use of pesticides? We need to have much more research on the extraordinary cultivated plant resource that we have. Similarly with biodiversity, how do we use cultivars to deliver the global plant biodiversity strategy that has been agreed in Montreal? More research is needed to understand cultivated plants. There is growing evidence of how they will then also support important biodiversity.

There is a huge opportunity there. The slight frustration at the moment is getting access and having real recognition that the cultivated plant genetic diversity that we have in this country gives us a huge opportunity to become that global research leader.

**Minette Batters:** I do not think we should be under any illusions as to the challenges we face with research, whether that is managing pests and diseases, automation and robotics, or lowering our carbon footprint. We should be really proud that we are global leaders, effectively, in our use of plant protection products, with a really precision agritech approach to how we deal with those challenges.

I also see huge levels of innovation coming online. For instance, one of our largest tomato growers has developed a system whereby they are managing to use the vine to make the packaging, so using the whole plant. What many would see as the cardboard packaging and the film that goes over the top are all being produced from that one plant. These

things are coming online more and more, but we need to be collaborating and working together on this green investment in the future of R&D.

The UK has an enormous opportunity, having been the first developed nation to legislate on net zero, to provide the solutions for what the world is looking for, for not only how we produce our food but how we lead sustainable lives and produce sustainable packaging. I see incredible things going on with that new innovation. This is an area to be extremely excited about.

**Lord Sahota:** James, you touched on the funding. You said that not enough funding was there. My second follow-on was whether there was enough funding for this innovation. You do not think that there is.

**James Barnes:** I do not think that there is. We have zero access to R&D funding.

**Lord Sahota:** Last week, I was listening to a Radio 4 programme from Bristol where somebody said that the farms are moving indoors. I was quite intrigued and taken aback by that. Is that a part of the technology, science and so on? I am not a farmer. What does he mean by that?

**James Barnes:** That is probably referring to vertical farming, which is quite exciting. It is in its infancy in the UK. A lot more research and experimentation probably needs to be done there, but I see that as a growth opportunity.

**Minette Batters:** It is part of it. For herbs and leafy salads, there is definitely a role for it. At the moment, the costs are high. The costs of LED are of course coming down. We tend to have a lot of excitement about vertical farms. You will never be as cost effective in a vertical farm approach, certainly for the foreseeable future, as you would be growing salad ingredients outside in soil.

It is very much suited to countries with enormous challenges, such as Israel. Vertical farming is working well there. With the vast opportunities of growing that we have here, we are not going to be growing our cauliflowers, leeks, carrots or potatoes in a vertical farm. They have a place, but it is a relatively small place.

**Clare Matterson:** I can add a specific example to highlight the difficulty with the funding piece. One of the biggest issues that we are facing in the horticultural industry is this transition to peat-free. We are absolutely committed to it. RHS is committed to removing peat from all our activities by the end of 2025, but it is difficult. Peat has had a hugely positive impact on quality and consistency, so there is a lot to be learned about new growing media and how we will do things differently.

If I look at other areas where there have been big transitions in the support given across the industries, talking perhaps about climate and energy, there does not seem to be the same level of support. We now have a £1 million grant that we are working on, £125,000 of which was from Defra. The rest came from the industry and fundraising that the

RHS has done. We are grateful for that £125,000, but it feels quite small in the grand scheme of things, given this really important shift that has to take place. We are talking about relatively small money in the UK R&D context, but we seem to be getting the crumbs of the crumbs at the moment.

**Q34 Baroness Willis of Summertown:** I am slightly curious about your responses about us being a global leader in this space. We were. As a research scientist myself, dealing with students daily and looking at the number of students going into doing research in this area, it is declining year on year. I wondered whether we are slightly glossing. I do not know what the right word is, but we are saying, "We are a global leader", whereas, if you ask somebody else in another country, I think they would say that actually we are not.

The ability to collaborate with international partners is being severely disrupted through the Horizon 2020 funding. Whatever we think about that, it is having an impact. I sit on one of the ERCs and I see this stuff coming through, but it is not coming through from the UK researchers.

I want to link it back to the previous thing about whether we have enough people going into this sector. There are many students who want to go into the horticultural sector, but there are not the apprenticeships for them to do so because the funding mechanism means that someone has to provide, I understand, 50% of the funding up front. There are few organisations that can do that. Do you really think that we are a global leader in this? What are those challenges?

**Clare Matterson:** I was suggesting that we could be a global leader because we have so much potential, not that we are a global leader at the moment. Interestingly, we are a leader in many of the plant biosciences, through many of the universities, but there is no strong sense of horticulture across the university sector. We do not then have that joined up, whether it is through apprenticeships or undergraduate courses, with the people coming through the pipeline. My point is that we have all the ingredients but we are not joining it up well.

**Baroness Willis of Summertown:** I totally agree, but all the horticultural programmes that are run by Reading University no longer exist. I really struggle to see how we are a leader in biosciences when we have all these programmes shutting down. It is a big issue for the sector at large.

**James Barnes:** I would agree. I do not think we are a leader. Having aspirations to be is excellent. If we set our stall out for trying to land on Mars, we might get to the moon. I always think that is a good approach. We certainly look to the success that has been achieved in the Netherlands as a halo sighting there, but that has taken a number of years and is a highly collaborative, integrated government, commerce and academia approach. That would be a lovely place to get to.

That comes back to this whole point about recognition and cross-departmental government recognition. If we had an ambassador

and expert in every government department who understood environmental horticulture, we could achieve a great deal more. That collaborative and integrated approach that the Dutch have been so successful with over many years is what is required, but that is a process of evolution.

**Minette Batters:** I absolutely share the frustrations, but I think we have been. I still see fantastic examples when I am at Rothamsted, NIAB East Malling or the John Innes Centre. We have achieved huge amounts globally and are well recognised for it. We must continue to strive to reverse what has been a downwards trend.

A lot of this comes from not taking our own food security seriously. We are losing really good people and really good research, so we should be doing everything we can to keep it here. Many of the growers I represent are global businesses. They will have businesses in Europe and in Senegal as well.

A real sense of urgency is needed, because we could be global leaders. We have had a huge footprint in this area globally that we are well recognised for, on soils and plant breeding. We must turbo charge it. I hope that it will be a significant part of what this committee is doing, because it is an area of research that we cannot afford to lose. We really should be turbo-charging it, because we have the capability. I agree that we are losing it. We cannot afford to lose any more.

Q35 **Baroness Buscombe:** That brings us neatly to my question. We have covered this to some degree, but it is about the future, as we are now post Brexit. What opportunities and risks does post-Brexit trade offer the horticulture sector? Can we focus purely on post Brexit and the future, without leaning on the really tough situation we are in right now in terms of cost of doing business? Let us be optimistic and imagine war in Ukraine is over, et cetera.

**James Barnes:** I wish I could be optimistic here, but the UK horticultural industry was the first industry to face into going from zero to a hundred in border checks and controls. The whole sanitary and phytosanitary regime that we had with Europe disappeared overnight, which has presented, and continues to present, major issues for us as a sector.

Those border checks have probably cost us £30 million, and it will probably rise to £50 million or £60 million when we have to deal with the border control posts as currently planned. The horticultural sector will actually be the biggest user of border control posts and that fact is not fully recognised. We are the biggest user of CITES requests to bring artificially grown orchids into the UK. The Brexit piece has had a major impact on us as a sector, both importer and exporter. We cannot export.

**Baroness Buscombe:** That is really important. It is export as well, is it not?

**Minette Batters:** I completely agree with what James has said. Plants need a different approach from proteins, effectively. We need to see an

authorised operator model, which would enable imports to go straight to the place of destination, and for businesses to be trained to carry out plant health inspections to the same degree as an APHA inspector. The dangers of not getting to that model are enormous. We all know the damage that can be done to plants if they are left around. We feel that there needs to be a very different approach here.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Clare, before you answer I know that certainly at the outset there was a real problem with regard to exporting seeds. Is that still the case?

**Clare Matterson:** I do not know the answer to that, I am afraid, so I can come back to you on that. What I would say is just mirroring others. We believe that the plant health strategy, and Defra has done some good work there, is incredibly important. There are risks if we do not ensure that what we bring in and what goes out protects us in the UK in terms of plant health and plant disease.

Having said that, we need to make sure that we have that good flow of genetic material so that we continue to have a broad diversity of plant material for all the reasons that we have been talking about, but also because of longer-term resilience, whether it is climates or pests et cetera. It is balancing those two really well and making sure that we have that good balance right.

The other one links very much. The opportunities if we get it right and the risks if we get it wrong are about what those are and whether there could be some new collaborative R&D opportunities in Europe, but beyond Europe and into the US. Places like Singapore are doing some really interesting work. How can we make sure that we have some opportunities to collaborate and learn from others as well through our R&D?

Q36 **Lord Carter of Coles:** Both Clare and Minette were keen to draw our attention to the contribution of the horticultural sector to health and well-being. In the interests of time, could each of you suggest possibly three aspects of government policy that would have a significant effect on improving the contribution of horticulture in serving both the public and the workforce healthcare programme?

**Clare Matterson:** What we are learning now, which we need to build on, is about the different types of horticulture and people's interaction with that green space. We can then begin to get a really good evidence base of what precisely we are talking about that supports different types of mental health and well-being. That is one. We must continue to evolve that.

We also then need to get to that translation piece, so that we can look at it in the context of urban living. With more than 80% of people living in cities, what type do we need, what interaction do we need, where and how do we have it in cities, including inside the workplace, where we now know that it can be very beneficial, and in schools?

It is about doing the research, and there is a lot more research to be done, developing those blueprints and making sure that we have different ways through different departments, whatever it might be, so that these things are actually put into place. Then we can create a really great natural buffer and support to the NHS, showing how it links and should alleviate some of the issues that the NHS is having to contend with.

**Lord Carter of Coles:** That is most helpful. Thank you.

**Minette Batters:** It amazes me how far removed we have become from the food we produce. It really struck me, and it is no criticism of the man who is now our Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, that, when I saw him when he was chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, he said, "You'll have to forgive me. I know nothing about your sector". I thought, "We all eat, so we should know something about our sector". He highlights a challenge that we face. We have separated production, effectively, from consumption.

There is enormous opportunity by joining up across departments. In Henry Dimbleby's food strategy proposal that has now led to the White Paper, he talked about all age groups. Whatever age group we are in, we are not eating enough fruit and vegetables. There is a clear demand from every part of society that we should be eating more fruit and vegetables. That means join-up across departments. Much of what we have talked about today goes right across many departments.

We are part of the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group. From the evidence we have produced, the health benefits of plants, flowers and, indeed, the green gym, getting out into green spaces and what that has to offer, are very clear. If nothing else, we need join-up across departments and better understanding and correlation of the production element to the consumption element to the enjoyment element—how much better it makes us feel and how much better it is for our health.

It is continually surprising to me that, through education, we are not doing more to make the links between environment, what we eat and what we learn. We must learn to value our food, because this is, do not forget, a sector that we waste a huge amount of, so education is needed as well. All those departments have a critical role to play in the future of this sector. There is a huge benefit, above all else, to gain from a closer relationship.

**James Barnes:** If I had to pick one area of government policy that could make a huge difference here, it would be planning. By that I mean how that impacts the landscape. Landscaping has always been seen as the last bit to a construction project, whether that be commercial, central government-procured or local authority-procured, but it has such a fundamental influence on all those things that we are talking about.

So much of this is impacted by planning guidelines: green cities, garden sizes, local community green spaces. It can be easily influenced by

planning guidelines. It does not need any primary legislation here, and that can make a fundamental difference to all our lives.

**Lord Carter of Coles:** It is improving infrastructure through planning, basically.

Q37 **Baroness Walmsley:** Talking about policy-making, what is your assessment of the retained EU law Bill and its implications for the sector? I have noticed, Minette, that you have mentioned more than once that the sector is a long-term sector. I can imagine that the timing of putting this lot through by the end of the year provides a certain amount of uncertainty, but you may also want to mention phytosanitary issues and pesticides, which are regulated by EU law. For growers who package and label their own produce, there will be issues in that sector as well, but there may be others.

**Minette Batters:** You are absolutely right to touch on all those areas. We now know that there are indeed 1,800 pieces of legislation for Defra alone to consider, and it is fair to say that it is still finding more. That is, quite honestly, impossible to resolve in the time allowed. Effectively, the three buckets that they are thinking about are what we want to retain, what we want to get rid of and what we want to make better.

There is a real problem in what we want to make better that the time is simply not there, so you end up with the other two buckets of what we want to get rid of and what we want to keep. That makes you ask the question, "Why is this Bill on its journey?" Surely the whole idea is to have better regulation. If we were just going to retain it, there would be obvious things that we could get rid of, which are non-applicable to this country. We join many other organisations in saying that the time is not there to do this properly and this should be pulled.

**Clare Matterson:** I do not have anything to add. I completely agree with Minette. It is about making the right decision. Let us use the proper amount of time to get there. That is the issue.

**James Barnes:** I completely agree with Minette. It is a potential nightmare. The law of unintended consequences could be huge and the opportunity cost of dealing with all of this in this timescale, ahead of any positive, constructive legislation, is an issue.

**Baroness Walmsley:** Lord Chair, you wanted our witnesses to be brief and they have been, and in complete agreement too.

**The Chair:** It is a subject in the Lords that is taking an inordinate amount of time, and will do going forward.

Q38 **Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** I will attempt to be equally brief. This has been a bit of a running theme—the idea of how much influence your organisations have in the different government departments. There are myriad committees that I am sure you are all invited to sit on, but do you think your voice is really heard? Are you able, with all your expertise, to really shape government policy now or going forward? Do they have the

right mechanisms in place to take your expertise into account?

**James Barnes:** There are some great relationships and some great pockets of excellence in Defra, but I do not think that we are recognised across government or in government. That was part of the discussion we had earlier. Our views and perspectives are not fully taken account of, and that is one of the key issues, as an industry and a sector, that we face. It comes back to that recognition, definition and understanding argument. If we had, as I said earlier, ambassadors in every department, we would be in a very different place.

**Minette Batters:** We were, and we are to a certain extent, unprepared for leaving the EU and what we want to look like on the world stage. It was particularly challenging for Defra. After all, 70% of the country is rural. It is often forgotten that these are businesses, fundamentally, and we almost need Defra to become an economic department if we are to achieve the huge opportunities that we all feel are out there.

Too often, there has been this divide, with the rural economy seen as this rural idyl that will carry on regardless, and it will not. The opportunity now for genuine green growth resides out in rural Britain, but, to a certain extent, politically it is misunderstood as to what is there. There is not a lot of time on our side, so we really need to drive a different approach. The message I have would apply to all parties, because we are at a crossroads as to where we want to go and what we want to look like. Having Defra as an economic department that is really representative of the environment through the lens of what businesses have to offer would be a really positive step in the right direction.

**Clare Matterson:** Environmental horticulture and then, through that, into gardens and gardening should be seen as not just a nice-to-have for the lucky few but a fundamental that makes such a difference to people's lives. Therefore, you are looking at education, health, levelling up, science and innovation, as we have.

We have not done a good enough job at being heard and having our arguments really well honed, so that we have good access into those departments. We need both. We need to hone our arguments and be very clear about the evidence, but we also need a way in and to know who will listen to those and have the conversation with us.

Q39 **Lord Carter of Coles:** I think this committee is getting a sense that certain other countries, or the Governments certainly, have been a great deal more enthusiastic and effective in supporting the horticultural sector. Where would you encourage us to look? These are complicated issues. I do not want to diminish our understanding of that, but where would you direct us in order to find people who had woven these complex issues together to an effective set of policies?

**Clare Matterson:** Others might want to talk about the Netherlands, so I am not going to talk about the Netherlands, because it is often brought up. I would like to mention Singapore and looking at it as a green city. It

is a really exciting exemplar where policy and planning for a green city is part of the national plan, as is focusing on health and well-being.

It really is something that you may want to look at and go into. It has this real ambition. One thing it has done is create the best living environment through nature conservation, greenery and recreation, in partnership with the community. There are some really interesting things that we could learn from Singapore.

**James Barnes:** I would refer back to the Netherlands, and I guess the statistics are there to prove it, and what floriculture and horticulture are as a percentage of GDP—they make one of the biggest contributions to GDP in the Netherlands—and as a percentage of exports. Exports are not just physical product but science and technology—all the environmental technologies that are now being demanded across the world. It leads the world in environmental technology.

As we have discussed, we have some of the assets here to be able to work towards trying to capitalise on that ourselves. I would look to the Netherlands and how it has achieved and developed that over time, with an integrated government approach and connectivity between academia, schools, education, universities, colleges and the commercial sector, as well as how that has been supported by government.

**Lord Carter of Coles:** Minette, perhaps you might like to comment on what we might learn from the devolved Administrations as well.

**Minette Batters:** I concur with James on the Netherlands. My background is as a chef and I see some amazing businesses. We have British asparagus in store in February this year. I would urge you to look at the asparagus grown in the UK, which is by far and away the best in the world, the salad production that we have here, soft fruit and the berry sector. We are pretty much self-sufficient in berries from April to November. We have the ability now, with the insetting of carbon, to produce strawberries potentially in greenhouses throughout the year.

We have enormous opportunity with top fruit, field veg and protected crops. Please go and visit these businesses. We will quite happily put you in touch with them. You will still learn more from UK production than you will from anywhere else in the world.

We are the United Kingdom. We are four nations, one country. Particularly as far as Great Britain goes, we all share the same challenges. There are different parts of the country to be growing in, but if you are growing in Pembrokeshire or Scotland, you are growing much of the same things. Joining up is politically very difficult but absolutely essential for this country, so that we can have a framework of agreement.

**Lord Carter of Coles:** Not to dwell on that for too long, but are you saying that we know how to do these things but we cannot disseminate that knowledge into effective production quickly enough? Is that what

you are saying?

**Minette Batters:** We absolutely know how to do it. You will get the best examples here. Going back to labour and contractual relationships, it is a really high-risk sector right now. There are a lot of things that can be done. Covid was a classic case in point where the Netherlands put a lot of direct aid into its growers to get them through that big bump in the road. Our growers never experienced any of that here.

We need to join all of this up. The capability is there, the climate is there. What is missing is the strategy and the policy for how we will do this. You bring people in as well and this sector can fly here.

**Lord Carter of Coles:** That is most encouraging. Thank you.

Q40 **The Chair:** We come to our final question. It has been a bit of a marathon for our witnesses, and I apologise for that. This is the magic wand question. If there was one thing you could ask of government, what would it be?

**James Barnes:** As you might expect, there is no silver bullet. Our growth strategy consists more of 100 one-per-cents than one whole single thing. Even if we started to deliver on some of those, it would build confidence that would have a rolling impact.

If I have to use just one word, it comes down to recognition, but it is recognition with legs. It is R&D funds that do not exclude environmental horticulture. It is the Department of Health and Social Care recognising the genuine benefits of green spaces. It is the Department for Education recognising the needs of environmental science. It is the business department recognising the size of our sector—that £28 billion. It is net zero. It is the Cabinet Office recognising that some of its ambitions cannot be delivered without environmental horticulture. It is all those things. That is how I would try to describe it in one thing.

**Minette Batters:** I know that when our horticultural board chair, Martin Emmett, visited you he left you with our 10-point plan for growth, effectively. Wherever there is a problem, we have tried to work up a policy solution. I would urge you to look at that and share it as much as possible.

The single thing that could make a real difference right now is the Prime Minister being able to fully commit to what he laid out in August on the future of domestic food security, and that was to define a self-sufficiency figure. We would absolutely want to be putting into that the schedule of growth in the horticultural sector. He said that he would define that figure and put a statutory reporting duty on that.

Defra has it within its gift, in the land use framework, to make sure that there is a statutory figure in place. Then wherever there is a problem we would be looking for how we sort this out. At the moment, we do not have that and there is a real danger that food production, particularly this

sector, is becoming the poor relation to everything else. That is the single thing that could and should happen.

He also said himself that he would host a domestic food security summit every year. I have shared with the Prime Minister this plan for growth. I am assured that he will host that roundtable and that really needs to happen. It would join up across other departments. He looks like a man who means business and is getting things done. This is really important to get done.

**Clare Matterson:** I will say the same thing as James, but in a very slightly different way. Let us not keep ornamental horticulture, or environmental horticulture, pigeonholed in Defra but join it up so we have the value and benefits, whether it is education, health, levelling up, science, leisure and tourism or innovation. We need to be able to join it up, see its value and recognise that value with joined-up policy-making across government.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much for an extended session—almost two hours of facing us. Thank you very much for the information provided. If there is anything further you want to provide, please contact the clerks and we can add that into the report. On that basis, thank you very much.