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Lord Redesdale

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Dear Lord Redesdale,

Following the evidence session with the Special Committee on the horticulture sector on 9 March, I am writing to provide further information on the questions raised.

**1. What assessment has Defra made of the short-term nature of the seasonal workers scheme?**

The Government has commissioned an Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain, which is due to report in early summer 2023. Its scope includes the role played by seasonal, migrant labour alongside domestic workers and automation.

Agriculture has long relied on seasonal and migrant labour; a Seasonal Agriculture Worker's scheme ran from 1945-2013. In 2019 Government agreed to pilot a revised Seasonal Worker visa route, in recognition of the relatively low skilled, short term and highly seasonal nature of the horticulture sector's workforce needs. In December 2021 it was extended and expanded until 2024. Seasonal poultry workers were added in 2022.

Seasonal Worker visas allow horticulture workers to stay for up to 6 months in any 12-month period (or between 18 October and 31 December for poultry workers). The Seasonal Worker visa route only exists in recognition of the highly seasonal nature of the horticulture harvests and autumn poultry work, a factor that separates them from other sectors heavily reliant on lower skilled jobs. In addition, it is important to remember that this visa route is not a route to settlement for migrants. Workers staying beyond 6 months would become liable for the NHS surcharge.

As a result of war in the Ukraine, however, Ukrainian workers who arrived on Seasonal Worker visas can apply for the Ukraine Extension Scheme and stay for up to 3 years. In addition, since we appeared before the Committee, the Government has (on 16 March) revised the Seasonal Worker visa rules to exceptionally permit workers to re-enter the UK five months after their 2022 leave expired, rather than having to wait for the full six months cooling off period to elapse. This is a 'one-off re-set' to enable workers to return at the beginning of the 2023 harvesting season and the normal rules will apply to any leave granted for 2024 onwards.

## **2. What assessment has Defra made of the security of the UK's domestic production of fertiliser?**

Defra monitors the security and stability of fertiliser supply chains and works closely with colleagues across Government, Devolved Administrations and industry figures through the Fertiliser Industry Taskforce. The domestic sector sources fertiliser from a wide range of countries and produces ammonium nitrate domestically. While global fertiliser prices have risen over the last 18 months, the supply chain providing imports of fertiliser to the UK has remained dynamic. Fertiliser prices are currently falling. This has brought a degree of stability to the market, and we understand farmer fertiliser purchasing has increased.

CF Fertilisers continues to produce ammonium nitrate fertiliser from its plant at Billingham and has been successfully importing ammonia. The Government gave limited financial support to the company, for three weeks in 2021, to immediately restart its Billingham plant on Teesside.

CO<sub>2</sub> has many critical uses. The market has diversified since 2021 with increased supplies from anaerobic digestion sites, from ethanol production, as well as a wider range of imports.

## **3. What proportion of grants within ELMS are open to horticultural businesses?**

56% of the actions we announced in the ELM update at the end of January are available to horticultural businesses. This relates to land management actions. The actions that are not open to horticulture businesses mainly relate to grassland and moorland management. In addition, there is a range of capital grants available via the countryside stewardship capital grant offer.

## **4. What proportion of successful bids to ELMS came from horticultural businesses?**

We are unable to identify the breakdown of all horticulture businesses in the data that we hold.

Under the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) farmers do not have to declare what kind of business they are. Using the data that we have available from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the June Agricultural survey we believe that to date the SFI22 standards have been popular with those that grow field scale vegetables, but this may not directly relate to horticulture businesses.

Beyond ELMS, all Farming Investment Fund offers are open to both edible and ornamental horticulture. The Water Management Grant is dedicated to horticultural (including ornamental) and arable businesses growing, or intending to grow, irrigated food crops, ornamentals or forestry nurseries. We do not split the business type to that granular level so are not able to identify whether a horticulture business is ornamental or edible.

Within the Farming Innovation Programme, ornamentals have been in scope of Programme competitions, except Farming Futures R&D theme 3 which is focussed on food production.

Currently there are 15 live projects from a total of 47 projects within the Farming Innovation Programme focussed on the horticulture sector. These range in scope from supporting UK viticulture, to orchard monitoring technologies, peat alternatives and soft fruit harvesting innovations.

To date all successful horticulture projects have been in the edible sector, rather than ornamentals.

## **5. How simple is it for horticultural businesses to identify and apply for ELMS grants and how does DEFRA promote ELMS to horticultural businesses?**

Our aim is to make it simple for all eligible businesses to identify and apply for ELMS grants and we promote this through a variety of channels.

We proactively promote new schemes and farming policies to all types of farms, based on insight. For example, we provide information directly to farmers digitally through our social media feeds, e-alert news service and blog, as well as through the Farming Advice Service (FAS) newsletter. We regularly write directly to customers about key information on our policies and provide them with supporting material, such as our “New policy and payments for farming in England” booklet, which has been sent to all BPS claimants in England. We also provide updates and announcements through the farming press and other media.

Stakeholders across the sector also have a part to play in helping growers find the right schemes for them. We regularly engage with all the leading horticulture stakeholder organisations to ensure they understand the schemes and feel confident communicating the schemes to their members. That includes businesses who have a trusted relationship with farmers and growers, such as agronomists.

We are currently in the process of producing a series of ‘sector snapshots’ which will set out the funding streams available for specific sectors of the industry, including the horticulture sector. These will be available later this year.

## **6. How does Defra promote the arable and horticultural soil standard to relevant businesses?**

We promote the SFI soils standards to all growers through the full suite of channels mentioned above, including working closely with sector-specific stakeholders. The horticulture sector is included in this. When we open SF123 to applications this summer we are planning to expand our promotional campaign.

## **7. What update can Defra give on the progress of the 2020 green social prescribing pilots?**

The ‘Preventing and tackling mental ill health through green social prescribing’ programme was established in October 2020. Its aim was to examine how to increase use and connection to the natural environment through referral to green (nature-based) and/or blue (nature-based around water) social prescribing services within communities in England to prevent and tackle mental ill health. By effectively implementing green social prescribing, the programme was designed to improve

mental health outcomes, reduce health inequalities, reduce demand on the health and social care system, and develop best practice at a local level. The pilot concludes at the end of March 2023.

The programme has been successful, achieving over 6,000 referrals so far with an estimated 8,000 to be achieved by programme closure. It has also gathered a wealth of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of green social prescribing and how best to implement it. The programme was about pump-priming a longer-term change, and we are now transitioning into embedded delivery of green social prescribing. We remain committed to supporting and advocating for the scale-up of green social prescribing across England, as confirmed in the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, and a range of support will be available at local, regional and national levels after programme closure.

**8. Of the total identified to date, how many pieces of REUL are relevant to horticulture?**

The Department has, to date, identified a total of 19 pieces of REUL that directly reference horticulture or related products in the title. A broader range of REUL, for example covering phytosanitary and environmental requirements, will also be relevant to a greater or lesser degree. As referred to by Lord Benyon during the REUL Bill's Committee Stage, Defra is preparing to publish a draft list of REUL that it intends to remove, either via the sunset or revocation powers. We will be engaging with stakeholders on this list where relevant to seek feedback so that any concerns can be heard and addressed as needed.

**9. Please can you provide a statistical breakdown of the age profiles of people working in the UK horticultural sector?**

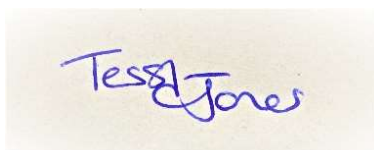
Our farm labour profiles are published here: Farm labour profiles from the England and UK farm structure survey - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). These include the number of farmers by farm type and age band for England and the UK. We only collect age information for holders or managers and not the entire workforce, so this data is limited. The holder is the person legally and financially responsible for the farm, the manager is the person responsible for the day-to-day management of the farm. In most cases the holder is the manager. We do not collect this data annually (roughly every 3 to 5 years), so latest data relates to 2016.

The table below shows the number of holders by age band on horticulture farms in England in comparison to those on all farms. This includes median age for both. The proportions of holders in each age band on horticulture farms are similar to those on all farms and that the average age of holders is the same.

England 2016	Age band					All	Median Age
	<35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+		
Horticulture (number of holders)	18	48	285	435	510	1,296	60
Horticulture (proportion of holders)	1%	4%	22%	34%	39%		
All farms (number of holders)	2,252	6,657	21,494	30,565	40,895	101,863	60
All farms (proportion of holders)	2%	7%	21%	30%	40%		

I trust this information addresses the Committee's questions. In addition, I would like to inform the Committee that we are reviewing the website for the Farming Innovation Programme where we will look at the ease with which horticulture content is signposted and accessed, following feedback during our evidence session.

Yours sincerely,



**Tessa Jones (Agri-Food Chain Director)**