

Written evidence submitted by British Summer Fruits (LS0076)

Monday 17th January 2022

I write as Chairman of British Summer Fruits, the UK berry industry trade body, representing over 95% of commercial British berry producers.

I have attached the British Summer Fruits Members Labour Survey November 2021. I appreciate that I did submit this report to you just before the autumn EFRA meeting on seasonal labour on 14th December but as the report was only just finished and it had missed the official deadline for evidence for the meeting I have re submitted for the sake of completeness.

I would also like to confirm our position re the Seasonal Labour Visa Scheme for 2022. We welcome the surety that the three year confirmation of the scheme provides to growers, and the extra 10,000 Visas offered if needed. We believe our survey shows an immediate need for at least this number, and nothing we have heard from our members since the survey of November 2021 has contradicted this. The four Scheme Labour providers are already informing growers that they are over-subscribed, and we are sure all the evidence in the coming weeks will prove a definite need for the further 10,000 visas.

We would ask the Committee to press the need for rapid decisions and then action from the Home Office in agreeing these extra Visas this Spring. Once the Visas have been agreed organising the recruitment of staff and the actual granting of their individual Visa takes time and we do not want to see a repeat of last Springs issue where the two extra Scheme Operators were not announced until May. It then, as expected, took them many weeks to start to recruit staff and get the recruits individual Visas in place, thus the staff were late in arriving, and for some time the Home Office very mistakenly took this as evidence that our industry might not have needed the extra Visas.

We did, and they were all taken up by the end of 2021.

We would like to thank the Chair of the Committee and its members for their support for the UKs Horticultural industry and our British berry growers. As stated above, rapid decisions and timely action from the Home Office regarding the extra 10,000 visas will be hugely helpful.



British Summer Fruits Members' Labour Survey

NOVEMBER 2021

British Summer Fruits (BSF) is the industry body representing 95% of all British grown berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries) purchased by the UK's supermarkets and retailers.

This document summarises the results of a labour survey of BSF members conducted in November 2021. At the request of BSF, the British Growers Association gathered the data directly from BSF members via an online survey.

British Summer Fruits Members' Labour Survey

Respondents and survey scope

Farms were asked for their actual staff numbers for 2019, 2020 and 2021 by source (EU resident, Seasonal Worker Scheme (SWS) worker or UK resident) and their actual waste numbers that were directly as a result of lack of labour.

In total, 60 farms responded. Six farms did not have expected numbers for 2022. These farms are excluded from the labour summary below (labour summary represents 54 farms) but are included in the waste summary (60 farms).

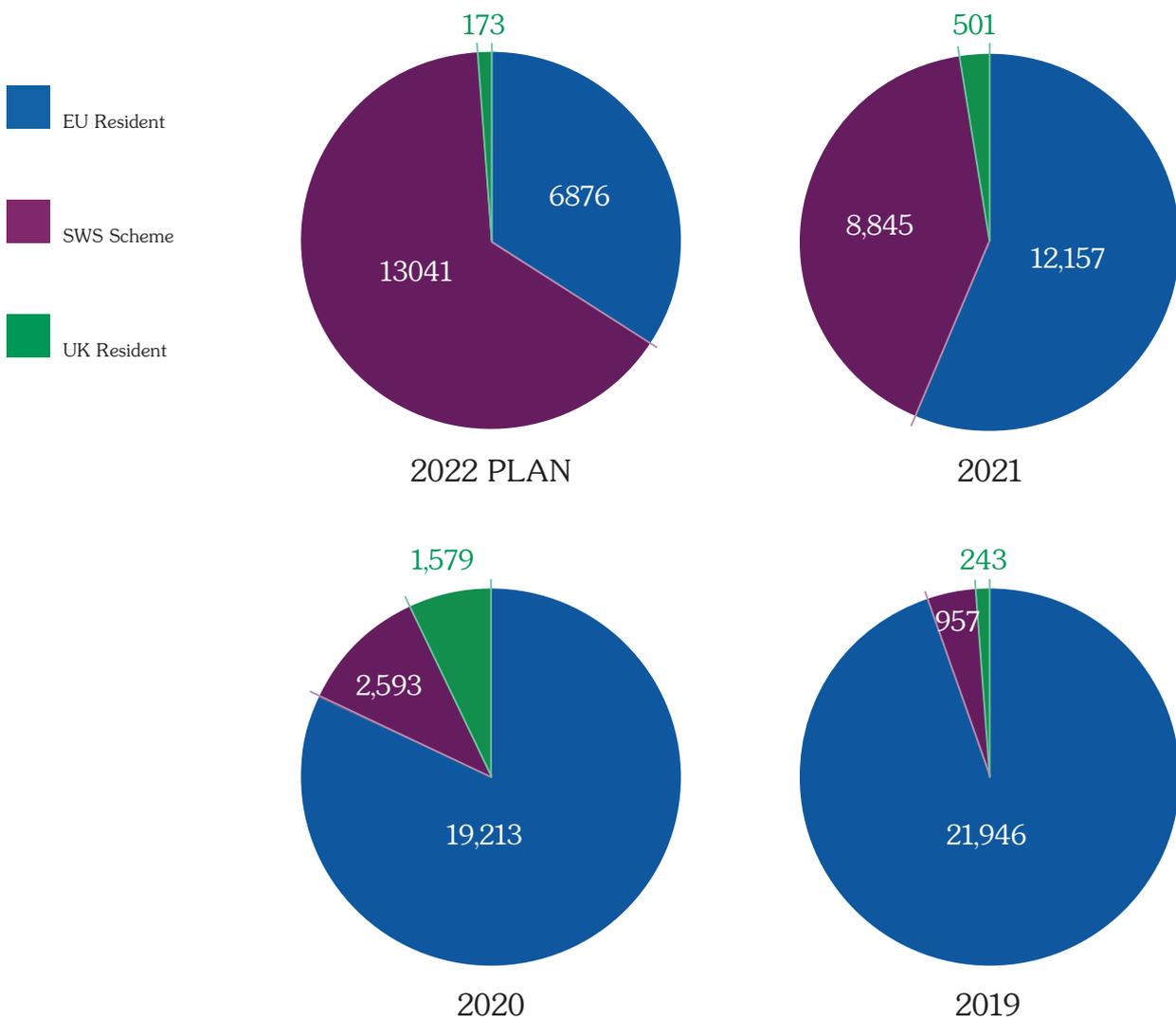
For 2022, farms were asked for the number of EU resident workers who had worked on the farm in 2021 and who had agreed to return in 2022, the number of UK residents expected and, finally, the number of SWS staff they were asking for, or planned to ask for from the SWS Labour Providers.

Seasonal labour results

There has been a large (37%) fall in EU workers from 2020 to 2021 (now all pre-settled status). The expectation is for an even larger fall from 2021 to 2022 (43%) as no new workers can be added to the EU Settlement Scheme and inevitably past workers move on to other countries or jobs, remain at home, etc.

There is a high confidence in the accuracy of this predicted fall as farms have contracted virtually all their EU pre-settled status staff by the time this survey was conducted and will have a good view of 2022. Berry farms employ virtually all their pre-settled status EU resident staff directly i.e. not through a labour provider.

Survey Respondent



British Summer Fruits Members' Labour Survey

Given that this survey represents can be taken as an accurate reflection of the whole berry industry. The pro rata rates of labour are as follows:

Pro rata for whole UK industry	2019	2020	2021	Expected for 2022
EU Resident	33,763	29,558	18,704	10,578
SWS Scheme	1,472	3,989	13,608	20,064
UK Resident	374	2,429	771	266
Total	35,609	35,976	33,081	30,908

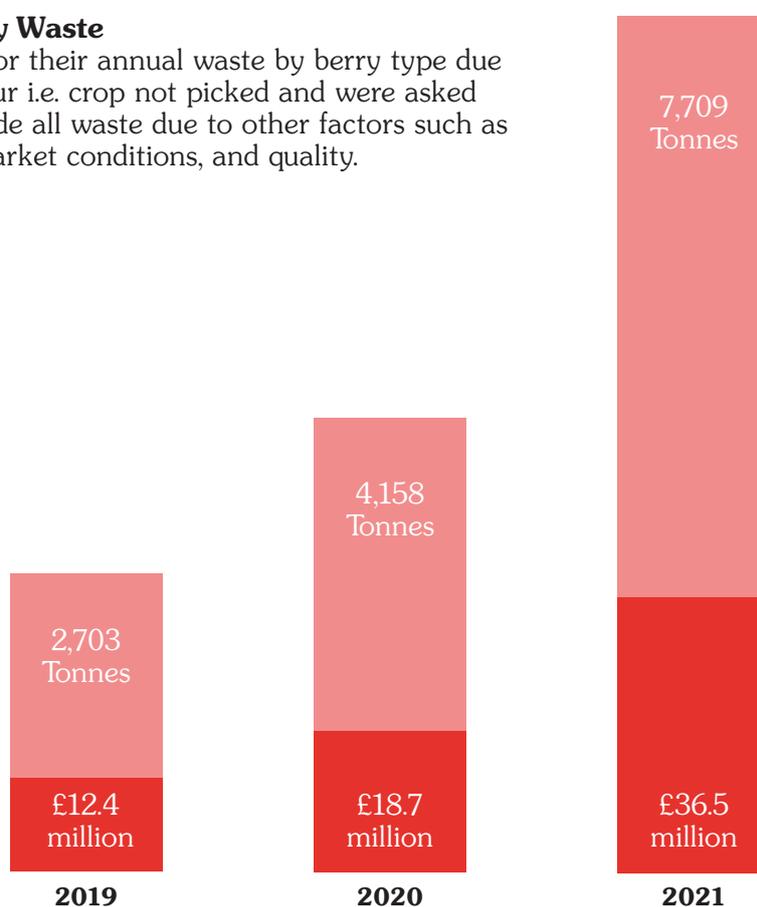
In summary, the UK berry industry will need a minimum 20,000 SWS workers in 2022 to deliver a total seasonal workforce 7% smaller than the workforce in 2020.

The berry industry utilises 40% of the total seasonal workforce employed by UK edible Horticulture, which would confirm a minimum need for 50,000 SWS visas for UK edible horticulture excluding ornamentals. This need is calculated from the position of the UK soft fruit sector which, due to the early start to the berry season and the length of the term of employment, is in a far better position to attract the reducing group of PSS European workers than many other sectors of UK horticulture.

Given this assessment, and the need for the government to act equitably in terms of addressing all growers needs, not just berry growers, we believe the minimum requirement for visas for seasonal labour in 2022 will be at least 55,000. Any lower number will result in further and much higher crop waste and ongoing contraction of the sector.

UK Berry Industry Waste

Farms were asked for their annual waste by berry type due only to lack of labour i.e. crop not picked and were asked to specifically exclude all waste due to other factors such as pest and disease, market conditions, and quality.



Annual waste doubled from 2020 to 2021 and is now a staggering £36.5 million across the sector.