

NFU Horticulture and Potatoes activity update

24th March 2017



The NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board and the NFU Potato Forum work tirelessly to make a difference for growers of fresh produce, plants and flowers. This document is a snapshot of recent successes and an overview of the current work activities in key policy areas.

Top stories

[Life after Article 50: stepping into the unknown](#)

Horticulture and Potatoes Board Chairman, Ali Capper, contemplates the industry's needs now that Article 50 has been triggered. [Read more...](#)

[EU pesticides regulation is failing farmers](#)

With the European Commission now in listening mode, the NFU's senior regulatory affairs adviser, Chris Hartfield, argues that an urgent and major re-think is required on pesticides regulation. [Read more...](#)

[NFU secures business rates change for nursery growers](#)

A sustained NFU lobbying effort has led to changes which will make nursery growers exempt from business rates as Parliament intended. [Read more...](#)

[Picking the best opportunities for fruit growers](#)

NFU Horticultural and Potatoes Board Chairman Ali Capper has addressed labour, regulation, Brexit and supply chain issues with an audience of fruit growers and City professionals in London. [Read more...](#)

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Successes

[NFU secures business rates change for nursery growers](#)

The NFU has secured confirmation from DCLG Minister, Marcus Jones MP, that the agricultural exemption from business rates will continue to apply to nursery growers and that the law will be amended as appropriate to ensure no further ambiguity. This follows the NFU's long-running battle to address a wording issue that would have resulted in damaging and widespread implications for the nursery growers and the wider horticultural industry which depends on them. Read more [here](#).

Labour access and National Living Wage (NLW)

The NFU continues to attract widespread media coverage of the challenges facing horticulture and potatoes from NLW and access to labour. The NFU secured a Westminster debate in November where a large number of MPs debated – and showed support for – a new seasonal workers scheme for horticulture and potatoes. Read what the NFU is doing [here](#).

[Fit for the Future](#)

With retailers and food service companies already engaging with the NFU's Fit for the Future initiative, the NFU has been working closely with the Food Foundation to launch a fresh challenge in 2017 which will ramp up the public profile for the campaign and harness celebrity endorsements. Find out more [here](#).

Plant Health Fees: The NFU challenged Defra's plans to increase plant health fees as they move to full cost recovery, resulting in a delay which saves the industry £205,000, or the equivalent of over £270 per plant health 'client'. Defra has been working with the NFU and other stakeholders to ensure plant passporting fees are calculated accurately and to identify further efficiencies. As a result, there will be savings made under the new system.

[NFU challenges lack of transparency on payment deductions](#)

The NFU has received widespread support after it wrote to 30 potato packers and processors in February, calling for total transparency on payment deductions and delivery rejections. A series of follow up meetings with packers and processors will take place in March and April. Read more [here](#).

[Backing British Blooms](#)

The NFU launched a new report in June setting out the key areas that need to be tackled to remove the barriers to growth for this budding sector and secure the revival of the British cut flower industry. The report received widespread media coverage as well as reaching tens of thousands of consumers through social media. [Read the report here](#).

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Policy updates – in brief

Access to labour

What are we doing? The NFU continues to have regular dialogue with Defra and the Home Office to develop a new seasonal workers scheme which will support the sector's labour requirements. The NFU is calling on government to introduce measures that will ensure UK farmers and growers have sufficient access to labour post-Brexit. The Home Office minister has said a seasonal scheme for 2017 will not be implemented. To support our case, the NFU monitors the availability of seasonal labour with an End of Season Labour Survey and an in-season survey of labour provider's. The frequency of the in-season survey has been increased so that the NFU can gather real-time information and provide evidence to government which demonstrates the urgency of the need.

National Living Wage

What are we doing? The NLW for over 25's came into force in April 2016. The NFU continues to call for measures to minimise the impacts. These include the introduction of a new seasonal workers scheme for students, reduction in employers national insurance contributions, and removing the need for pensions auto-enrolment for seasonal workers.

Brexit

Alongside Labour, Trade, and Plant Health, the NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board has prioritised 'crop protection' as a critical issue to address during the Brexit negotiations. The NFU is in regular dialogue with Defra and the Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) to work up a new UK plant protection policy which takes into consideration the UK climate, the types of crops we grow, and the needs of consumers, so that UK growers have the right products available to produce the crops consumers want. To support his work, the NFU has increased its staff resource in this area.

Fruit and Veg Pledge

What is it and how will it benefit members? The Fruit and Veg Pledge is a charter for best business practice in the fresh produce supply chain. It was created in 2012 as part of the NFU's Catalyst for Change initiative and three retailers have signed up (Aldi, Lidl and Co-op). Further discussions are progressing with a view to obtaining more signatories in the coming weeks. Though the Pledge is not legally binding, by making a public commitment, signatories will be keen to ensure they are meeting its terms. Members should, therefore, contact the NFU if their customers are not dealing with suppliers in the spirit of the Pledge and we will raise issues anonymously on their behalf.

Fit for the Future

What is it and how will it benefit members? In 2015 the NFU commissioned a study to gather evidence on what works in delivering increased consumption of fruit, veg and potatoes. The findings were summarised in the NFU's Fit for the Future report, released in April 2016, along with 34 'options for action' for industry and government to implement. The NFU is making encouraging progress and industry engagement has been greater than anticipated. In Autumn, Waitrose launched new 'meal kits,' providing a full meal solution for consumers with plenty of fruit and veg, and in the summer, Co-op took direct action on the back of the report by introducing discount vouchers for fruit and veg in stores. This year, Tesco will be introducing new measures in store to encourage sales and Sainsbury's is trialling new store layouts to encourage greater sales of plant based foods.

Red Tractor Fresh Produce Standards

The NFU has been a key contributor to the consultation for the next edition of the Red Tractor fresh produce standards. With a high volume of changes originally proposed, the NFU has worked to ensure that changes are kept to a minimum and focus on the key objectives to ensure the food we produce is safe and traceable. An updated NFU Audit Pack will be produced in time for when the new standards to come into force in October.

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Recent board and team activities

The NFU Horticulture and Potatoes board, met on 23rd March and discussed Labour, Red Tractor, retailer price promotions, a BEIS consultation and more.

Horticulture and Potatoes board chairman, Ali Capper, has had a number of meetings on labour (Defra and Home Office), Red Tractor and education (FACE). Ali also attended NFU Policy Board, presented NFU issues at the Worshipful Co of Fruiterers Conference and met with AHDB to discuss its strategy implementation.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, and Potato Forum chairman, Alex Godfrey, attended a series of potato grower meetings in the West Midlands and North East, to listen to the concerns of growers in those regions and explain the work being done by the Potato Forum nationally. The main topics of conversation included payment deductions and AHDB.

Alex has also begun a series of planned meetings with potato packers and processors about making improvements to the level of information shared on potato deductions and rejections.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, Andrew Burgess, was on the Panel at the Fruitiers Fresh Produce Conference with Ali Capper and NFU Deputy President Minette Batters.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, Tim Edwards, met with DEFRA and other members of the Plant Health Management project system steering committee and was making sure the NFU is involved and aware of future activities.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, Robert Lockhart, had a meeting with HS2 as the line will run through his farm, including areas currently used for growing OSR and potatoes. Robert also attended the NFU Environmental Forum which the RSPB Farm in Cambridge.

Horticulture and Potatoes board members, Tim Papworth, has been active in the local area including meetings with:

- Clan Trust - an agricultural charity set up to help the young and old in Norfolk and forward the development of science in agriculture
- Mardlers – a Norfolk farming club/discussion group that holds meeting through the winter months and has a study trip during the summer. This meeting welcomed James Thompson from Beeswax Farming (Dyson) who was a real inspiration!
- Stalham Farmers Annual Dinner – Stalham Farmer Club is the second oldest farming club in Britain (1841) and this year celebrated 175 years. The guest speaker at the dinner was Sir Nicholas Bacon, premier baronet of England and President of the RHS.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, Sarah Dawson, has been working with Lee Abbey on the Red Tractor standard proposals and attended the Red Tractor fresh produce Board. Sarah also attended a Ladies in Agriculture event on International Women's day; a Food and Biocide Industry Group conf call and updates on activities; Met with MEP Roger Helmer to discuss and gain support for UK position on Glyphosate, EU Draft Fertiliser Reg's; and an EU R&D & Funding for food producers workshop meeting, promoting need for targeted application to SME's.

Horticulture and Potatoes board member, Stephen Watkins, had a meeting with his local M.P. to discuss flooding and the need for glyphosate.

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Chief Horticulture and Potatoes Adviser, Hayley Campbell-Gibbons, also joined Ali Capper for meetings with Defra and Home Office to challenge them to put in place measures which secure labour supply for horticulture. Hayley also had a series of grower meetings in the North West to discuss their key concerns for the sector.

Horticulture and Potatoes Adviser, Lee Abbey, attended a series of potato grower meetings in the West Midlands and North East, to listen to the concerns of growers in those regions and explain the work being done by the Potato Forum nationally. The main topics of conversation included payment deductions and AHDB.

Lee also joined Alex Godfrey in a series of planned meetings with potato packers and processors about making improvements to the level of information shared on potato deductions and rejections.

Horticulture Adviser, Amy Gray, attended a BPOA meeting to discuss the development of its new action plan. Followed by the BPOA committee meeting. Last week Amy attended the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers conference 'Navigating turbulence in the produce supply chain and beyond.' This week, Amy joined Hayley for a series of grower meetings in the North West to discuss their key concerns for the sector.