
Final Ministerial Reply



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Department
for Environment
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From George Eustice MP
Minister of State for Farming, Food and Marine Environment

Dear Katie

Thank you for your letter of 16 March on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Gardening and Horticulture Group about my recent meeting with them. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

You asked to be updated on a number of Cross Government issues and I am pleased to be able to provide you with answers from Defra; the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Communities and Local Government. You can find these in the enclosed annex.

GEORGE EUSTICE MP

All Party Parliamentary Gardening & Horticulture Group answers

- 1. We ask for reassurance that Defra Ministers are committed to supporting and fulfilling the Ornamental Horticulture Action Plan and collaborating with the industry to deliver its key asks over the next five years.**

Defra ministers are committed to the goal of increased growth and competitiveness for the sector which is why Defra convened the Ornamental Round Table in summer 2014. The Round Table published its Action Plan in spring 2015; this is an industry led document and Defra continues to work with this industry led group.

- 2. The APPGHG and industry encourages Government to recognise the need for and facilitate the creation of statistics on skills in the horticulture sector.**

You raised a number of issues related to education, recruitment and training. To set the context for responding, I should explain that the Government's general approach is to give employers more say in ensuring that skills and training are tailored to the needs of industry. This includes the development of employer-led apprenticeship standards. The introduction of the apprenticeships levy and the new digital apprenticeships service will take this further.

The current area-based reviews of post16 vocational education also aim to ensure that there is better responsiveness to local employer needs and economic priorities as well as high quality professional and technical routes to employment.

The government continues to collect broad statistics on skills gaps and shortages through the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. I recognise that this may not be at the level of detail that you need or that has been collected by Lantra in the past. I would encourage you as a sector to work together to identify gaps and to look at options for meeting those gaps.

- 3. The industry and APPGHG ask Defra to support its joint initiative with Bright Crop by offering financial support and/or by giving written support. We would also ask Defra to help the industry in approaching the National Careers Service and other relevant funding agencies to encourage them to support it.**

There are a number of valuable initiatives that seek to promote careers in the food and farming sector. We recognised, in our work on a long-term food and farming plan, that there are opportunities to join up these initiatives to create greater impact. We have been discussing with Bright Crop and the National Skills Academy for Food and Drink to develop these options.

The most important factor for all industries is that information about the opportunities they can provide are available to young people and those who advise people about their career choices. Through the Careers and Enterprise Company, the Government is working to facilitate contacts between schools and local businesses to improve the information available to young people about the opportunities open to them. A Careers and Enterprise Co-ordinator will be appointed in every Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area to facilitate this work. Further details about how to get involved are available here: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/enterprise-adviser-network>.

Bright Crop and the National Skills Academy have been working together to develop options for supporting this work by the LEPs.

- 4. We ask that the Government publicly recognises the expertise and professionalism required by those working at all levels of the horticulture industry, particularly in relation to landscaping and grounds maintenance. We would also ask that Government assists the industry in promoting itself as a credible and sustainable career choice for young people from Key Stage 3 onwards.**

Please see response to number 3.

- 5. The industry would also urge the Government to focus on and expedite efforts to improve the numeracy and literacy of school leavers entering FE and HE colleges to ensure that they have the skills they need to succeed in careers in the horticulture industry.**

Numeracy and literacy of employees are of course vital in all industries and to the success of the employees themselves. Initiatives to promote these skills in school leavers are for the Department for Education.

- 6. We ask that Defra continues to support, fund and facilitate the HIP, to ensure that the industry keeps moving forward and is able to grow through innovation. We also ask that Government supports the delivery of the HIP strategy where possible.**

Defra is making a small financial contribution of £25k to the HIP. Plus we are supporting innovation in agriculture and horticulture via:

- 1) The Agri-tech centres and catalyst fund
- 2) The Genetic Improvement Networks
- 3) The ICT-Agri ERAnet, which supports research on precision farming technologies. We have two projects with UK involvement that are coming to an end this spring/summer
- 4) We are supporting a EU co-funded call under the coordinated Integrated Pest Management (C-IPM ERAnet) which will launch later this year

In addition, Giulia Cuccato will continue to engage with the levy board, and will work in partnership with the UK research councils to align their work programmes with the HIP. For example, the NERC have just announced their ASSIST (Achieving Sustainable Agricultural Systems) programme, which will

examine the environmental effects of sustainable intensification of agriculture, and develop farming systems that contribute towards environmental sustainability.

- 7. In the spirit of greater collaboration between the industry and Government, we would ask that the industry is consulted and given the opportunity to input into Defra's emerging 25 year plans to ensure that the value and wider benefits of horticulture, and relevant industry initiatives are recognised.**

In developing the 25 Year Environment plan we will be collaborating closely with a wide range of stakeholders including industry representatives. We are also keen to recognise the range of initiatives being taken forward by stakeholders (including those from industry), which will support the Plan's long term development and delivery.

- 8. We should also ask that Government recognises industry efforts by supporting initiatives such as the Growing Media Responsible Sourcing Calculator.**

Defra has actively supported the Growing Media Responsible Sourcing Calculator. We provided the HTA with £30k towards its development in 2013/14. Judith Stuart from Defra was co-chair of the group designing the scoring system from 2013 to 2015. In 2015, she became chair of the Technical Committee. In addition, she drafted the guidance document being used in the scheme and was involved in the development of the other tools that are available to score materials. We are continuing to support the scheme as it launches its pilot phase.

- 9. The horticulture industry seeks to understand Defra's position on dealing with the next tranche of species likely to be added to list of invasive species of Union concern. We also ask for reassurance that the horticulture industry will be involved in this and that the listing of species will be derived from scientific research and truly evidence based.**

The UK, supported by several other MS, has called for a process whereby last year's approach is reviewed and lessons learnt before proceeding to consider or decide upon any further lists. Nonetheless, the UK will continue to seek to be satisfied that the criteria for listing set out in Article 4 is met. A regional approach is, however, available under the national and regional plan options at article 1 and 12, and we will consider those for species which do not necessarily meet all of the criteria for listing as a species of Union concern.

The UK, supported by several MS, has called for a more transparent and inclusive approach to considering the merits of any proposed listings. That is why we circulated details of lists that are at an early stage of proposal on the 11 Feb, to enable interested parties to contact us with any views or information relevant to their consideration. We have also called for a review of

the way in which the EU Regulation's scientific forum considers and opines on proposed risk assessments to ensure greater clarity about the process.

10. The industry asks for reassurance from Defra that urban trees does fall within the Minister's remit and that this precious resource will be given due consideration in Defra's policies and plans as a result.

The Minister is very supportive of promoting urban trees and considers this to fall under his remit. Urban trees are considered in our plans and policies and will feature in the 25 Year Environment Plan. We will continue to work across, and outside of government, to open doors and endorse the wealth of existing and emerging research, evidence and good practice which is helping us appreciate and quantify the benefits and value of these trees.

11. We urge Defra to recognise the value of urban trees, and to promote the benefits of 'iTree' studies as citizen-engaging scientific studies which are low cost but provide a much needed picture of tree cover to inform our understanding of the existing green infrastructure in towns and cities.

Defra recognises how valuable trees are to our towns and cities, and the significant contribution they make to people, the environment, and the economy. Initiatives and studies such as London's i-Tree Project are helping us appreciate and quantify the wide ranging benefits of these trees and we continue to work both across, and outside of government to endorse and promote their findings which will help secure our existing urban forest and encourage future investment in new planting.

12. With horticulture underpinning the condition and quality of public parks, there needs to be a coordinated effort between Defra and DCLG to ensure that local authority grounds maintenance contracts remain viable and parks do not go into decline.

This year's Local Government Financial Settlement provides a fair and balanced offer to local government, with an essentially flat cash settlement, from £44.5 billion in 2015-16 to £44.3 billion in 2019-20. Over the course of this Parliament, council Core Spending Power will see a decrease of just 0.4% in cash terms.

We would like to see more councils following in the footsteps of those authorities that have made significant savings by making changes such as merging back-office functions. Public service transformation will and must continue, so councils are making funding decisions that reflect the services local people want to see.

Therefore, we are giving councils new financial freedoms, by giving them the flexibility to use the receipts from the sale of capital assets to help pay for the upfront investment in the transformation of local services, to ensure further savings in the future.

Please see the general lines in terms of Local Government Finance Settlement 2016-17 below.

- The range of services provided by local authorities was considered during the Spending Review, as part of the overall assessment of spending pressures on local authorities. The Local Government Financial Settlement gives local authorities the ability to protect important local services.
- We have offered a four year settlement to councils to help them to plan ahead when setting their own budgets.

13. The APPGHG and industry would also like to know what the figures for tree extraction have been for each year over the last ten years for the individual countries of England, Wales and Scotland, including felling for pest and disease, renewables and timber use. The APPGHG also wishes to know how these figures compare with the amount of tree planting carried out in each country for each of the last ten years and in total.

There is a variety of information published on forestry statistics on extraction and planting, but not all the information that is required is available in public domain as of yet.

However, the National Forest Inventory (NFI) which is a rolling programme designed to provide accurate information about the size, distribution, composition and condition of our forests and woodland is in the final stages of preparing a report which includes the data being requested and covers the comparison analysis.

The report is due for publication at the end of May – we will make members of the APPG aware once these statistics are available.

14. The APPGHG and industry asks for reassurance from Defra that it is on track to achieve the Government target of planting 11 million trees during its current four-year term, and would like to know why the level of tree planting has decreased so dramatically in this particular year.

Yes, we are confident that this target remains realistic, and will be achievable through Countryside Stewardship (with its higher stocking density of the number of trees per hectare than earlier schemes) and other initiatives related to woodland creation. The level of tree planting has been affected last year for a number of reasons:

- There has also been unavoidable late notification of the details of the scheme in its first year;
- Country Landowners and Business Association (CLA) advising its clients to avoid the first year of CS to let the grant scheme 'settle in';
- Lower than normal levels of applications (due to inevitable caution and uncertainty on behalf of applicants in the first year of a scheme);

- Subsequent delays in processing applications particularly where they were dependent on amendments to any existing Environmental Stewardship agreements;
- Delays with digitisation for the Rural Land Register; and
- New requirements for agreement holders to supply additional evidence with their claims have meant some claims have been delayed where evidence has been inadequate resulting in the associated planting being 'counted' in 16/17 rather than 15/16.

15. We would also ask for assurances that the industry will be better engaged, at an earlier stage, with woodland grant schemes and large-scale procurement projects to provide more certainty and a more stable investment environment for commercial growers.

The FC has provided webinars to support the sector, specifically in relation to CS Capital Grants, Woodland Creation and Countryside Higher Tier Woodland Improvement. The FC has run a series of external face to face events for customers based in each of the FC areas. The slides from the webinars and recordings are available on the FC's website.

16. We urge Defra to help promote the industry by agreeing to have a UK garden at other international horticultural expos and supporting and facilitating UK representation. Ultimately, the industry wishes to host an international horticultural expo in the UK, and would welcome any support in this venture.

The UK is participating in the Antalya International Garden EXPO 2016. We appreciate the support that the Horticulture Trades Association (HTA) has given to make this a success. Holding an international horticultural expo in the UK is a major undertaking which requires a long timeframe to plan it. We look forward to seeing a business case for such an endeavour.