

Digging into Horticulture:

Encouraging the Next Generation of Producers



**Soil Association
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Executive Summary

In the face of Brexit, it is essential that work begins now to inspire British young people to work in horticulture and alter the sector's reliance on migrant labour. There is an increasing risk that the UK's exit from the European Union will diminish access to labour for large-scale horticulture businesses, particularly if the UK government restricts immigration. Businesses therefore need to step up and motivate millennials to help produce UK fruit and vegetables, by providing the autonomy, social responsibility and community engagement that their generation expects to find in a job. By improving conditions and perceptions of horticultural careers, the sector will stand a better chance of appealing to young people and inspiring the next generation of workers into the sector. The government therefore needs to support the industry by removing barriers to entry and encouraging people to take up a career in horticulture. However, this behaviour shift will not happen overnight, so the government should simultaneously commit to maintaining access to migrant labour post-Brexit.



In order to increase recruitment into horticulture, we make the following recommendations:

For Government

- The UK Government should guarantee and publicly commit to a fully functioning immigration system post-Brexit, which ensures farmers and growers have adequate access to labour.
- Government should create an industry-wide action plan to address the needs of the sector through the establishment of a permanent sector-wide standing committee hosted by Defra.
- Government should guarantee to continue current commitments to the EU Fruit and Vegetable Aid scheme after Brexit with the aim of supporting the domestic production of fresh produce.
- Government should commission an in-depth impact assessment into how technological automation in horticulture will influence the demand for labour and rural employment.
- The Government-run Apprenticeship Levy should aim to encourage new entrants into horticulture from a more diverse educational background.
- To reduce barriers to entry, Government should implement measures to address the shortage of affordable housing in rural communities and support access to land.

For horticulture businesses

- The horticulture sector should come together with one voice, under one body, to better market the sector to the next generation. This will require an integrated strategy.
- The sector should collaborate to develop an academic centre of excellence for horticulture studies that would professionally train new entrants to the highest standard.
- To reach millennials, horticulture businesses should more clearly identify job entry points at different levels across the career ladder and better explain the variety of horticultural roles.
- Growers should consider measures that increase employee empowerment and increase control in the businesses, including transitions in equitable ownership structures.
- Horticulture businesses should develop contracts that offer greater flexibility, partnering with universities to attract students into both higher and lower-skilled roles.
- Businesses should consider partnering with housebuilders on developments that incorporate affordable housing for workers that are co-located with horticulture.
- Growers should bolster ethical practices and challenge sub-standard employment terms with the goal of eliminating modern-day slavery within the sector.
- Large-scale growers should continue to strengthen ties with the local community to ease integration through social programmes (like football tournaments) and act to improve career progression opportunities.

1. Introduction

The large-scale horticultural sector in the UK is finding it increasingly difficult to hire labour. Over the last two decades, there has been a negative shift in perception of horticultural labour by young people in the UK.¹ While previously, many UK students would work in fields during the university holidays, now students prefer hospitality and retail jobs.² Horticulture jobs are perceived as physically hard and poorly paid with little opportunity for career advancement. That said, these jobs are not unskilled and require a high level of dexterity, efficiency and speed. While there are ongoing issues of exploitation within the sector, low-skilled workers are paid according to the current national minimum wage standards.³ There is also a sense that they are jobs for immigrants.⁴ This perception fuels a vicious circle where UK workers are not interested in horticultural jobs and therefore producers hire migrant labourers, creating a dynamic that makes UK workers even less likely to consider applying.⁵

The UK's decision to leave the European Union makes this issue more critical. There is a risk that, following Brexit, freedom of movement will be restricted and migrant labourers will therefore not be able to come easily to the UK to work in horticulture. Since the 2016 referendum, there has already been a decline in workers in the sector. The National Farmers Union (NFU) 2016 Labour Provider Survey found that 60% of labour suppliers to the horticultural sector were unable to meet the demand.⁶ This lack of available migrant labour has created stress for horticulture businesses that

struggle to hire and retain UK workers. In their report into the impact of Brexit on UK agriculture and food, the EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee in the House of Lords highlighted the need to guarantee the supply of labour and observed that the "entire food supply chain will be adversely affected by any loss of access to that labour pool".⁷ Given the public health impacts of maintaining a healthy diet, guaranteeing the supply of fresh, affordable, domestically-grown fruit and vegetables for UK consumers should be a priority.

With this backdrop, the Soil Association's Digging into Horticulture project aimed to better understand the attitude held by UK millennials (people born between 1980-1995) towards horticulture and horticultural careers, to see how these attitudes might be altered and improved with the hope of increasing new entrants into the sector. What do they want from work? Can horticulture businesses offer it?

State of horticultural labour today

The number of regular employees in UK agriculture (excluding seasonal, casual and gang labour) is 115,000.⁸ The total rises to 182,000 when seasonal/casual labour is included.⁹ Currently, less than 1% of the UK's working population are employed in agriculture and this has continued to decline gradually over the past decade.¹⁰ Horticulture is the most labour-intensive sector in UK agriculture, accounting for 0.23 jobs/ha.¹¹ Within horticulture, the majority of workers are either casual or regular part time workers with the percentage of casual/seasonal labour anticipated to rise. That said, as noted in a recent Food Research Collaboration report into agricultural labour in the UK, "official data may fail to reflect the significant levels of unpaid, undocumented or illegal labour in food production in the UK".¹²

While this Soil Association report focuses on large-scale production, small-scale growers hold an equally important role in the production of UK fruit and vegetables, and are essential to achieving a healthier food system. Soil Association recognises the value of both large and small-scale production and advocates publicly for both. In conjunction with the Landworkers' Alliance, the Food Foundation and other organisations, we have signed onto the Fruit and Vegetable Alliance. The Fruit and Vegetable Alliance is a group of producers, trade associations, and food charities that are advocating for increased Government support for the production and consumption of fruit and vegetables in the UK

to improve public health. The Alliance will be officially launched later in 2018 and will work in close coordination with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to promote and support UK horticulture.



Seasonal migrant labour

The growing season has lengthened dramatically in the last few decades with the addition of glasshouses and polytunnels. While seasonal jobs in horticulture were done in the past by UK students during university holidays, this extended growing season requires a more consistent source of labour with workers who can commit to eight or nine month contracts. Consequently, the sector has moved from

employing students for two months of summer to hiring migrant workers from Eastern Europe who are reliably available for most of the months of the year.

The Labour Force Survey estimated in 2016 that 27,000 people from EU member states worked in UK agriculture.¹³ During peak harvest season, the number swells to around 75,000, with an estimated 98% recruited from the EU. The majority of these seasonal workers are employed to work in horticulture.¹⁴ Most migrant labourers in the horticulture sector come from Poland, Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria.¹⁵ They are paid according to the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage scale, depending on age.¹⁶ Many also receive a piece rate as a performance bonus in addition to their hourly wage, which can raise their pay packet.¹⁷



Exploitation and slavery still remain an issue in the sector (which the Migration Advisory Committee has previously reported) but much has been done to improve the situation in recent years through governmental reforms.¹⁸¹⁹

A heavy reliance on migrant labour meant that UK horticulture was already facing a labour shortage before the 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. Demand for seasonal workers is anticipated to rise in the next decade, with 95,000 seasonal workers predicted to be employed in the horticulture sector by 2020.²⁰ The industry is already struggling to find candidates. The NFU's monthly labour survey showed a 29% shortfall in seasonal workers for horticulture businesses in September 2017, from 17% in May.²¹ One of the reasons why the sector is struggling to find labour is that Eastern European economies have strengthened while the UK economy has declined.²² The weakening of Sterling against the Euro has made other markets more attractive to migrant labourers.²³ The perception that migrants are not welcome and rising xenophobia also factor.²⁴

In recent years, as Eastern European economies have strengthened and the labour pool from these countries has diminished, recruiters have begun to look outside of the EU.²⁵ The Co-operative Group stated in their written evidence to the Migrant Advisory Committee inquiry into Migrant Seasonal Workers that they agreed with such an approach saying, "We believe that non-EEA countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova represent good potential sources of the candidates we need".²⁶

Impact of Brexit?

The specifics of post-Brexit immigration from the EU have yet to be established. The issue has been batted backwards and forwards between the Home Office and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Government responded to the House of Commons Select Committee on Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs report on agricultural labour by arguing that the sector faces a “challenging situation” rather than a crisis, and is considering potential solutions.²⁷



Can local workers pick up the slack?

Some have suggested that tight immigration controls after Brexit will allow more UK people to work in UK jobs.²⁸ With 1.6 million unemployed people, and 1.16 million part-time employees, there would seem to be capacity.²⁹ But is there interest from people in UK to take up these roles? Many advocate for positions to be offered to those in the local community before immigrant labourers are eligible.³⁰ However, unemployment is not necessarily in the same location as the horticultural jobs. The region with one of the country’s lowest rates of unemployment is the South East (3.4%), which is also a major centre for horticulture.³¹ There is not a locally-accessible pool of domestic labour to recruit from, meaning that workers would be required to relocate from other areas of the UK to fill the vacancies, which presents a barrier to recruitment.

To address the loss of migrant labourers following the UK’s exit from the EU, Justice Secretary David Gauke recently proposed day-release work programs in low-skilled horticulture (amongst other sectors) for prisoners.³² While vocational training for prisoners should be encouraged, such a program cannot realistically meet the labour needs of the horticultural sector. Offender work programs cannot deliver a consistent and skill-trained workforce required, nor can it substitute the reliable and professionalised migrant workers that are employed today.

2. A generational challenge

Most seasonal migrant workers in horticulture are under the age of 35.³³ This is due to the physically demanding work and the long hours required.³⁴ Understanding what motivates UK workers in this age range, as well as how they perceive their employers and their colleagues, is essential if careers in horticulture are to be made appealing to them.

The generation - born between 1980 and 1995 – that are today's 20-somethings are known as millennials, or 'Generation Y'. By 2025, millennials will make up the majority of the workforce and are already an important part of the working population.³⁵ Millennials are the first generation of 'digital natives'. They have more formal education than any generation in history and have mastered multitasking through early exposure to a wide range of media.³⁶ They tend to be politically liberal and globally minded.³⁷

The generation following millennials do not have the same dynamics and drivers. Known as 'Generation Z', people born between 1995-2005 have been raised differently, changing their views, outlook and perspectives, and have had a different experience with technology.³⁸ Researchers predict that Gen Z will go straight into the workforce, opting out of the traditional route of higher education.³⁹ Consequently, recruiting them into the horticulture sector will require a unique strategy that differs from the recruitment strategy for millennials.



What motivates millennials?

To get a better sense of millennial attitudes towards horticulture, the Soil Association hosted a series of two-day study-visits to a series of large-scale horticulture businesses (both organic and conventional). In total, we hosted 15 study-visit participants. These participants were recruited through the Soil Association social media channels. To apply, the participants needed to submit a letter of interest to explain their previous experience, if any, in growing and why they were interested in participating in the project on large-scale horticulture. A focus group was conducted following the trips,

to better understand their impressions of the horticultural sector and their employment goals.

“Organic production aligns more with my moral set and scientific understanding with regards to health and the environment” – Adam, age 28

The study-visit participants tended to already have some experience of growing, whether through volunteering on community farms or as landscape gardeners. Consequently, students already recognised that a career in horticulture could be a fulfilling career option. While they are more interested in working in small-scale and organic systems than for larger enterprises, they expressed an interest in learning more about



large-scale growing. Adam, aged 28, said, “Organic production aligns more with my moral set and scientific understanding with regards to health and the environment” and Jon, aged 24, said “I am considering a career in horticulture as I feel it is important to contribute to making food grow more sustainable and localised. I’d definitely be more likely to go into organic”.

The general perception amongst the study-visit participants was that work in large-scale horticulture is low-skilled and unappealing. Jon, aged 24, said that his friends only considered horticulture as a hobby. Sam, aged 27, said “people think agriculture is low-waged and physically hard; it’s considered low-status”, with Adam, aged 28, adding that the sense of rural isolation and the monotonous nature might put people off.

Being able to see the reality of large-scale horticulture through the study-visits considerably altered the perceptions of the participants of the sector. Jon, aged 24, wrote afterwards that he “found the trip helpful to gain a broader picture of the industry and what larger producers are doing to improve their operations, towards automation and sustainable systems” and that he felt “inspired to pursue a future in horticulture”.

Principally, however, the visits highlighted professional motivations that the horticultural sector would need to address more directly in order for careers in the sector to attract UK millennials.

Career progression

Millennials consider the opportunity for rapid career progression one of the most important things about their job.⁴⁰ Millennials want more than just a job – they want a career. 69% cite a clear path for progression as the most important factor in keeping them engaged in a role.⁴¹ Millennials have grown up with a strong experience of positive reinforcement and this confidence means that they crave responsibility early in their careers.



Community

Creating an inclusive, social workplace culture is important to millennials. 33% of millennials felt that meeting their

colleagues in a social setting was the most important part of their work – a marked difference to older generations - and over half of millennials reported that poor company culture was a source of disappointment.⁴² Since horticulture production has a strong sense of community and teamwork, this is an aspect of the sector that might appeal to new entrants.

Social values

It was striking that the study-visit participants were searching for work that would provide meaning to their life. This hunger for social purpose creates a tension for large-scale producers who want to recruit millennials. Rachel, aged 26, said, “I want my job to make me feel fulfilled, and have a meaningful job that is in line with my principles. I want to make a difference to other people and feel like I’m working towards change”.

This sentiment is in keeping with broader trends within the generation, regardless of education. For many millennials, work isn’t simply a way of earning money; they want to know that what they are doing on a daily basis is contributing to some greater goal. 63% of millennials expect their employers to contribute to a social cause.⁴³ Millennials could therefore respond well to highlighting horticulture’s role in feeding the country in a way that is healthy, environmentally sensitive and socially just.

Work-life balance

For the majority of the study-visit participants, the relatively long hours and difficult work/life balance made them less inclined to work in large-scale horticulture. This attitude reflects the trend in the millennial workforce to find balance in their work and have freedom and time for family and social life.⁴⁴ 90% of millennials think policies that encourage a good work-life balance are one of the best things about their job.⁴⁵ Charlotte, aged 26, specifically identified a desire for a “good work/life balance”. That said, for millennials, work-life balance is a lower priority than salary, a fulfilling job and good opportunities for career development when considering a new role.⁴⁶

3. How can businesses recruit UK millennials?

Young UK workers might be willing to consider jobs in horticulture if those roles were more specifically connected to their generational priorities. Shifting the structure, framework and marketing of horticultural careers, while encouraging multiple entry points into the sector for new entrants, would likely attract millennials into the sector.

Catch career changers

Millennials came of age during the Great Recession and many struggled to find jobs that met their expectations. 31% reported that they had taken work in a sector that they did not wish to work in.⁴⁷ Now, as the economic outlook improves,

many are ready to change jobs to find a new role that better suits their ambitions. Additionally, many are looking to move out of London due to the rising rents and the falling quality of life. The exodus from London has reached a five-year high, up 80% from 2012, with the highest departure being people in their early 30s.⁴⁸ People are sick of the rat race and high rents, and are looking to make a change.

Case Study: Tregothnan

Home to the Boscawen family, Tregothnan is a living and working private Cornish estate, with a history dating back to 1334. Tregothnan offers formal apprenticeships in joinery, horticulture, and forestry across its range of smallholders and tenant farms, including placements at a leading strawberry grower and a specialist, highly skilled propagation farm. These apprenticeships were undertaken in conjunction with Truro and Penwith College and apprentices get assigned a highly experienced mentor to build their career experience. Tregothnan horticulture involves apprentices in engaging and varied tasks such as cultivating, pruning, weeding, composting, and tending to a woodland area. Tregothnan was recognised as one of the UK's Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers.

Since many millennials are frustrated with their current career prospects, emphasising the potential of horticulture

could be effective. The study-visit participants expressed a strong dissatisfaction of their current employment. Aaron, aged 40, said, "I am tired of cities and [meaningless] jobs. I want engaging and challenging work" and Ben, aged 28, said that he specifically "wanted to escape London 9-5" and feel as if he has "actually done something worthwhile". Ruth, aged 28, explained that "many of [her] friends pursued office-based jobs after university and most were now looking to return to the countryside and get back to nature".

"I am tired of cities and [meaningless] jobs. I want engaging and challenging work" – Aaron, age 40

Aim older

The project made clear that targeting new entrants who are slightly older (aged 25+) is more beneficial since there is a tendency for students to discover an interest in agriculture during/post university. As a general trend, the student's initial interest in an agricultural career had been sparked in their mid-twenties, particularly due to increased philosophical and environmental awareness around the issue of food systems and food security.

It would also appear to be ineffective to target teenagers. Rob, aged 26, said "I would never have cared about agriculture as a teenager". All participants spoke of the lack of attention that the secondary school career services paid to agriculture/horticulture. Rachel highlighted the issue saying that "I don't think it is presented as a viable career option and

it's not really well supported. I didn't get any direction to do farm work from careers advice at school or university".



Play to strengths

Horticultural careers potentially offer qualities that millennials want – autonomy, progression, rural living and community. The horticulture sector should play to these strengths in recruitment and highlight the more senior and technical jobs that exist within the sector.

Current thinking in behavioural economics suggests that traditional careers marketing (brochures and pamphlets) may not be the best approach.⁴⁹ Young people are more likely to listen to third party influencers who they already admire and respect, than to conventional authority figures like their

parents or teachers.⁵⁰ The most significant influencers are peers; thus, personal stories and connections with younger people in horticulture could be a method to reach new entrants. Developing a lasting relationship with management and workers could begin with secondary school visits and getting students into the fields.



Of course, such personal stories and relationships need to be true. Horticulture is a sector where employees can progress from entry level to management, with low-skilled workers gaining responsibility and moving into management roles. Nurturing and investing in personnel and making individual workers feel valued will encourage people to stay and understand the potential within the sector. While some in the sector have not been as successful at investing in employees as they could have been, many businesses have supported

staff to progress into more senior roles through on-site training and skills programs. Following a series of repeated seasons for one employer in low-skilled roles, a significant number of migrant labourers have been moved into permanent contracts and more technical roles. Such a decision by the business owner could have been influenced by the perception that UK workers weren't interested in the work when migrant labourers have demonstrated a commitment to the business.

Open up

The reality of work in large-scale horticulture was relatively invisible to students. The businesses seemed isolated from the communities around them, and offered little opportunity for students to gain access and understand the day-to-day reality of the enterprises or the jobs on offer. While this challenge is common to other agricultural businesses, horticulture as a sector has made progress in addressing the issue through initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday and hosting school visits on farms.

Increasing opportunities for on-farm volunteering could provide a new entry point for millennials to get experience of horticulture. Lantra estimates half a million volunteers already support land-based and environmental industries.⁵¹ While these informal opportunities offer hands-on learning without a long-term commitment, they rarely offer formalised learning, tend to be unpaid and do not provide a transferable qualification.

4. Five future trends

While the steps described above have the potential to help horticulture businesses attract UK millennials, particularly into technical and management roles, they are unlikely to address the structural shortage of lower-skilled labour facing the sector unless they go hand-in-hand with more substantial changes in practice. Five trends present particular challenges and opportunities for horticulture businesses on this front.

Are the robots coming?

One key and much-remarked trend is for businesses to reduce labour dependency by investing in technological solutions. The uncertainty in labour supply is causing producers to turn to robotics, which have made considerable advancements in recent years.⁵² The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, has voiced support for innovation and technology across the food and farming system and his department has recently announced an Industrial Strategy to provide the necessary funding.⁵³ However, fully automated systems are still many years away in most areas of horticulture, and many producers doubt whether they will ever be able to achieve the level of human judgement on quality or speed for picking.

Better gigs

There is a growing trend away from regular employment towards more temporary contractual work. This is occurring across all sectors of the economy with the rise of mobile technology and the gig economy, where individuals are paid per task rather than per hour. The gig economy currently employs approximately 1.3 million people and is predicted to expand rapidly in the next decade.⁵⁴ This shift towards less formalised employment structures offers the benefit of flexibility to a younger generation seeking more autonomy over their time, but at the risk of increased insecurity.⁵⁵ To compete for staff in this context, the horticultural sector should aim to offer flexibility and security, for example offering annualised hours so that workers have a set wage but work for more during the peak of the season.

Intergenerational equity and citizenship

Recent announcements about millennials' indebtedness and pension shortfalls, and proposals from the Resolution Foundation to provide them each with £10,000, reflect a growing public and policy concern with intergenerational equity.^{56,57} Meanwhile, the National Citizen Service – initiated by the Coalition Government in 2010 to offer work experience for 15-17 year-olds through community service projects – demonstrates the potential for work experience that offers outdoor activity and social impact; in 2016, 93,000 young people took part.⁵⁸ Examples from other countries, such as MA'O in Hawai'i, show how horticulture businesses could

benefit by working with universities. This could be through individual partnerships or collaborating to pitch a sector deal to Government.

MA'O Organic Farms

This community scheme asks university students from the poorest part of Hawai'i to commit for two and a half years to twenty-hour weeks on the farm in exchange for covering their tuition and a monthly stipend. Like in university, they are awarded grades for their work on the farm, which correlates with their pay. As a result, the students learn agriculture techniques whilst gaining formal accreditation and continuing with indigenous community traditions. The program aims to develop transferable skills in agriculture by providing the students with a recognised accreditation while simultaneously reconnecting the students to their ancestral land and heritage with the goal of reinforcing their sense of pride and community.

From stakeholders to shareholders

New entrants into horticulture are turning towards equitable ownership structures. Cooperatives and other similar social enterprises take an innovative and democratic approach to land ownership and commerce. These innovative structures ease the pressure on one individual to source the necessary financial capital and access to land since the cost, and consequently the risk, can be shared out across multiple

individuals. Such an approach was taken at Community Farm, a community-owned social enterprise that sells wholesale fruit and vegetables and run a local box scheme.⁵⁹ More than 500 community shareholders invested in a Community Benefit Society with the goal of impacting local economies, communities and food systems.⁶⁰

In other instances of equitable ownership, multiple growers work together across a shared piece of land, allowing each individual grower to specialise. One grower can focus on soft-fruit while another can grow brassicas. Livestock or dairy could also be added onto the property, further diversifying the business. This form of shared ownership not only achieves increased economies of scale, but also provides a route for new entrants to start and develop their own business.

Where established, larger businesses follow a similar course, as Riverford Organic are doing by transferring into employee ownership, they potentially address one of the key barriers to recruiting UK millennials. We found that the study-visit participants were caught between wanting the autonomy of owning their own business, yet being daunted by the prospect of raising start-up capital. High land prices put purchase well out of reach for new entrants and finding land to rent at a reasonable price with security of tenure is not easy.⁶¹ This made them less likely to consider the first step of seeking a job in the sector to gain experience. Ben, aged 28, felt that he “**had underestimated what levels of financial investment are involved**” before he participated in the study-trip. Ruth, aged 28, said that she was “**slightly more hesitant [about a career in**

horticulture] because of the money involved to purchase enough land/machinery etc. to make the effort worth it”.

Case Study: Riverford Organic

In 2017, Guy Singh-Watson decided to transfer Riverford Organic into employee ownership. As of June 8th 2018, the Riverford Employee Trust will own 74% of the company. Guy Singh-Watson established Riverford Organic in 1987 and has grown an internationally recognised business over the last three decades. However, without a clear successor to the family business, Guy decided that an employee-ownership structure would best reflect Riverford’s values now and into the future. Guy hopes that by adopting an employee ownership model, the company will be able to provide a fair deal for his staff, customers and the planet and continue the dedicated commitment to organic principles.

While distinct from employee ownership, the sector has a strong tradition of large-scale co-operation to build on. The EU Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme provides support to Producer Organisations (PO’s) such as G’s Growers, Berry Garden Growers, Wye Fruit, Speciality Produce and many more. For example, Berry Garden is a growers’ cooperative that has an annual turnover of £346million with 30% of the UK berry market.⁶² By creating a cooperative, they were able to increase market share, have greater agency, and more bargaining power with their customers. Furthermore, grower

ownership ensures that there is greater transparency across the supply chain and ensures a shorter route to market to the benefit of the consumer.

Rethinking rural housing

Accommodation is a key barrier for small-scale growers and farm workers alike. Average house prices in rural areas are 26% higher than in urban areas, while local earnings are 27% lower, and there is much less housing association and council housing.⁶³ This makes it difficult for workers to find accommodation close to their work. In seasonal low-skilled migrant labourers, many enterprises provide on-site housing. Although bad practices remain, the overall standard of on-site accommodation has improved in recent years and the associated facilities (WiFi, television, gym facilities, etc.) are often used as non-financial incentives to entice workers to one business over another.⁶⁴

Integrated housing developments, which include productive farming or horticulture, are an emerging trend that offers opportunities to help address this challenge. There is a growing number of such developments in the USA, known as ‘agrihoods’, in which horticulture replaces golf course or country clubs as a selling point for rural housing estates.⁶⁵ While the agrihood boom is yet to reach the UK, some developers and organisations are exploring similar approaches, such as ‘agrivillages’, and Government has backed the creation of purely residential ‘garden villages’.^{66,67} Such concepts offer potential for joint ventures between

horticulture businesses and house-builders, providing attractive employee housing with new revenue streams from the development and on-site produce sales. While large-scale horticulture is a far cry from the raised beds and veg boxes of agrihoods, managing the latter alongside a commercial horticulture business provides opportunities to diversify roles, provide community engagement opportunities and offer progression around the core workforce skills. Although the US schemes to date have been high-end, the growing pressure on house-builders to meet affordable and social housing targets could make such partnerships increasingly attractive to them.⁶⁸

5. Conclusion

None of the opportunities outlined above offers a quick fix to the current and growing shortage of workers in horticulture. In the short term, to avoid significant declines in UK fruit and vegetable production – and potentially in their consumption, depending on the outcome of trade negotiations – these jobs continue to depend on migrant labour. Government therefore needs to guarantee access to a sufficient labour pool post-Brexit.

In the longer term, the perception and reality of horticulture needs to change in order to become relevant for today's workers and more enticing. Large-scale horticulture producers need to emphasise the way that horticulture jobs can be varied, well-paid, innovative, community-based, socially-relevant and connected to the career objectives of

many millennials. Recruitment into the horticulture sector should focus on the aspects that best appeal to millennials and Gen Z, as opposed to continuing with the conventional sales pitch. Such a shift would require concerted effort and resources to be successful.



The Soil Association's Future Growers programme has worked to train young growers and prepare them for careers in organic horticulture. Since its formation in 2007, the scheme has trained over 100 organic entrepreneurs, and has brought new energy into the field of sustainable fruit and vegetable production. While Future Growers focuses on small and medium-scale production, a similar programme could encourage millennials into large-scale production by emphasizing the benefits of the sector and training young people. Farm Start, Kindling Trust and the Biodynamic Agricultural College offer similar training.

6. Recommendations and next steps

In order to achieve the desired outcome of increasing recruitment into horticulture, the following should be adopted:

For Government

- Government should maintain access to seasonal migrant labour for the horticulture sector. The UK Government should guarantee and publicly commit to a fully functioning immigration system post-Brexit, which ensures farmers have adequate access to labour.
- Government can support the future of horticulture sector and the increasing pressure over labour through the establishment of a permanent sector-wide standing committee hosted by Defra.
- Government should continue to support domestic fruit and vegetable production with the goal of improving diets in the UK. This is particularly important to tackle childhood obesity. As a result, Government should guarantee to continue current commitments to the EU Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme after Brexit.⁶⁹ The scheme aims to provide support to horticultural producer organisations.
- Government should commission an in-depth impact assessment into how technological innovation and

automation in the UK horticulture sector will influence the demand for labour and the impact that it will have on rural employment.

- The Government-run Apprenticeship Levy should aim to encourage new entrants into horticulture from a more diverse educational background than just conventional agricultural colleges. Allowing university students to work in the sector during their degree or during the summer would create an entry point without embarking on professional training such as an NVQ.
- The appeal of horticultural careers is linked with barriers to entry for start-up growers. To reduce barriers to entry, Government should identify and implement measures to address the shortage of affordable housing in rural communities, so that new entrants can live close to their place of employment, and support access to land and capital for new entrants. In Scotland, for example, grants of around £13,500 are available for new entrants and £60,000 to help young farmers with initial set up costs.⁷⁰ Calls have been made for a similar scheme in England with a particular emphasis on horticulture.⁷¹

For horticulture businesses

- The horticulture sector should come together with one voice, under one body, to better market the sector to the next generation. This will require collaboration and an integrated strategy. It will also include identifying key opinion leaders that are most likely to connect with the targeted demographic of millennials or Gen Z. Grow Careers, a program through the Chartered Institute of Horticulture, has had considerable success in redefining horticulture careers.⁷² However, the program is limited to ornamental horticulture, as opposed to fruit and veg production.
- The sector should also collaborate to develop an academic centre of excellence for horticulture studies that would professionally train new entrants to the highest standard possible. This could be modelled on the successful centre of excellence for wine at Plumpton College. Grassroots training programmes, such as the Soil Association's Future Growers, should also be expanded to provide multiple routes for new entrants.
- To reach millennials, horticulture businesses should more clearly identify job entry points at different levels across the career ladder. It is key to explain the variety of horticultural roles across the entire supply chain and appeal to a wider range of applicants.
- Growers should consider measures that increase employee empowerment and control in the businesses, including transitions in ownership. Nurturing and investing in personnel, and making individual workers feel valued, will encourage people to stay and understand the potential.
- Working as a sector or individually, horticulture businesses should experiment and innovate by:
 - o Developing employee contracts that offer greater flexibility and security while still meeting business requirements.
 - o Partnering with universities to trial benefit packages with the potential to attract students into part-time work or placements in both higher and lower-skilled roles.
 - o Partnering with housebuilders on housing developments that incorporate affordable housing for workers, while also making an asset out of being co-located with horticulture.
- While significant improvements have been made across the sector, there is still a significant issue of exploitation and abuse within horticulture. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority have helped to drive forward improvements but there is more work to do to eliminate modern slavery within the sector.⁷³ Growers can help by bolstering ethical practices and

acknowledging the negative social impact that sub-standard employment terms can and has had.

- Large-scale growers should continue to strengthen ties with the local community to ease integration through social programs. Similarly, within their enterprises, they should act to improve career progression opportunities so that workers are able to advance through the company.

About us:

The Soil Association was formed in 1946 by a group of farmers, scientists, doctors and nutritionists who were determined to pioneer a world where we can live in health and in harmony with nature. Today we're farming and growing, buying, cooking, campaigning and researching. We collaborate with organic and non-organic producers to innovate and implement practical solutions that create a better future. Through our trading subsidiary, Soil Association Certification, we work with over 6,000 businesses including organic farmers and growers, caterers, food processors and manufacturers across more than 50 countries, and certify approximately 14 million hectares of forest globally.

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