

A New Deal for Horticulture



The case for a UK horticulture programme

To meet the UK demand for fruit and vegetables a massive scaling up of production is required. Since the 1980's the area growing vegetables has declined by 26% and the area growing fruit by 35%¹. Such a decline is not surprising, since only 1% of Pillar 1 direct payments are offered to the horticultural sector². Currently UK production represents 58% of vegetables consumed and only 11% of fruit. As a result fresh produce is by far the greatest source of imports into our food system. This situation is untenable for several reasons. A lack of support for horticulture contradicts overwhelming health advice to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and reduce consumption of meat and dairy products³.

Brexit brings specific challenges for UK horticulture. 77% of our vegetables and at least 18% of our fruit come from the EU. Reliance on imports of fresh produce risks price increases, should the pound weaken, resulting in further reductions in fruit and vegetable consumption with negative health repercussions. Already labour shortages in the UK horticulture industry are causing 70% of UK horticultural businesses to consider relocating production to the continent⁴. We need to produce more fruit and vegetables in the UK, and Defra must take a strong policy position to lead a horticultural renaissance. The Landworkers' Alliance proposes the policies listed in this document to encourage the development of a thriving UK horticultural sector.



An Agroecological Approach to Horticulture

Rather than increasing the scale of production on a few large farms, the Landworkers' Alliance believes that a dramatic increase in the number of small scale, agroecological producers growing fruit and vegetables close to the point of sale would facilitate the following advantages:

- Fresher produce, often bought within hours of harvest, brings greater nutritional benefit and better flavour encouraging increased consumption
- Less energy for refrigeration and transport, and less packaging required
- Spreads production risks over a much larger number of businesses in different geographic areas, insuring against problems of poor business management, spread of pests and diseases, and climatic extremes, compared with dependency on a handful of large businesses.
- Small scale growers produce higher yields of high labour intensive crops, such as peas, green beans and salad leaves, compared with industrial systems⁵.
- Diverse market gardens provide fulfilling, varied and attractive career/employment opportunities for UK workers.
- Short supply chains mean viable livelihoods for growers while produce remains affordable, as the purchase price is divided between fewer "players".
- Community ties are strengthened around farms that sell direct, counteracting growing rural and urban loneliness and isolation, while revitalising local trade.

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a grassroots union of small-scale, ecological and family farmers across the UK. We campaign for the rights of producers and lobby the UK government for policies that support the infrastructure and economic climate central to our livelihoods.

Proposals for horticultural regeneration

1 Fruit and vegetable producers should be eligible for support payments to grow the sector

Horticulture is the most labour intensive sector in UK agriculture, accounting for 0.23 jobs/ha^{5,6}, yet the prices received are often insufficient to cover the true labour costs of environmentally friendly production. Under WTO regulations a certain percentage of coupled support payments for agriculture are allowed, and can be reviewed periodically. The horticulture sector should be eligible for coupled support payments to support the public goods provided in terms of increased access to affordable healthy food, environmental protection, and community vitality. These payments would incentivise domestic production until the sector has strengthened sufficiently to substitute imports of fruit and veg that can be grown in the UK. Coupled support payments (in the region of a £5,000 top up for each FTE employee up to 4 employees) would be distributed annually to farms which can illustrate a minimum level of productivity in producing fruit and veg for the domestic market. The payments would help to compensate for the low wages expected in the industry and the loss of cheap labour from the EU by helping provide a living wage for UK employees.

2 An infrastructure support scheme should be introduced for new horticultural enterprises

Highly productive horticultural holdings can be established on relatively small areas of land, but require significant capital investment in infrastructure and equipment, such as glasshouses or polytunnels, fencing, irrigation, and machinery. Horticulturalists often lack the resources or sufficiently secure tenure to invest in the infrastructure needed to run an efficient and successful enterprise. The availability of capital grants, such as those available through the Scottish RPA Capital Grants Schemes, would enable more market gardeners to develop. The schemes would also provide extra support for existing businesses, wanting to increase capacity, and community-based social enterprises.

3 Introduce a “Mixed Farms Scheme” supporting creation of horticultural units on larger farms

Landowners, especially near towns and cities, should be encouraged to consider renting areas of land, with or without infrastructure to become market gardens. While diversifying into fruit and vegetables themselves is one option, horticulture requires a different skill set to agriculture and the introduction of another enterprise to a mixed farm can bring benefits such as “fresh farm produce” for a farm shop, a vibrant working community, enterprise diversity and income from rent. While many new entrants would prefer to buy their own holding, renting a market garden on an existing mixed farm can kick-start enterprises by providing a foothold in a rural community as well as access to shared facilities such as farm buildings, machinery and manure for fertility.

Trill Farm Organic Garden: A successful salad business on one hectare rented from a mixed farm

A fully equipped horticultural unit to rent, complete with on-site accommodation, enabled a young couple to swiftly establish a thriving business selling organic salad and other vegetables to restaurants in a busy tourist area. The garden provides jobs for three seasonal workers, as well as a livelihood for the growers' family.



1. Schoen, V. & Lang, T. (2010) Horticulture in the UK: Potential for Meeting Dietary Guideline Demands, Food Research Collaboration.
2. Defra 2017 Pers. Corr., Percentage estimated from Farm Business Survey sample of horticultural farms generating an output of over 25,000 euros
3. World Health Organisation (2015). Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption to reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases.
4. Defra (2016) Agriculture in the UK 2015, p955. Laughton, R. (2017) A Matter of Scale: A study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (20 ha or less). Landworkers' Alliance and Centre for Agroecology, Coventry University
6. Devlin, S. (2016) 'Agricultural Labour in the UK.' New Economics Foundation and Food Research Collaboration, p11

4 Introduce a support scheme for peri-urban horticulture, to develop market gardens as a community resource

Vegetables and fruit should be produced as close as possible to the people who will eat them, so they are fresh, and packaging, transport and refrigeration are minimised. Urban and peri-urban horticulture not only facilitate short supply chains, but offer people in cities the opportunity to help grow produce. These are often a welcome antidote to the stress of office work, or provide therapeutic benefits or access to affordable produce for low income households.

OrganicLea

OrganicLea offer City and Guilds Level 1 and 2 courses to 100 people per year at their twelve acre market garden near London. The combination of theory and practical lessons, on a commercial organic market garden, provides students with the skills and inspiration to find employment in a range of commercial, communal and therapeutic horticultural contexts.

6 A “New Deal for Horticulture” programme should be introduced to rapidly increase the number of growers

Such a scheme would include a recruitment scheme for secondary school children, and encouragement of horticultural courses and apprenticeships from NVQ to degree level. Prospects for a successful career would be improved by measures to improve access to land and infrastructure, and investment in agroecological research and development.

Tamar Valley Food Hub

Tamar Valley Food Hub distributes produce from 60 local producers, including 20 fruit and vegetable growers, via its online shop. The system enables flexibility of choice compared to box schemes, cuts waste, and reduces transport and packaging compared to supermarkets. The local market means produce is fresher and healthier for the consumer.

5 Introduce an Orchard Planting and Maintenance Scheme to encourage long term investment in fruit production

60% of England’s orchards have disappeared since the 1950s, contributing to massive erosion in the diversity of apples and other fruit varieties available to UK residents. Production of top fruit and soft fruit requires particular support to encourage import substitution, long term investment and to develop a skilled work force able to manage fruit pests and diseases without the use of pesticides. Financial support to encourage orchard planting, together with training in orchard maintenance, agroforestry plantation design, biological control and processing skills to make use of “grade out” produce would all contribute to the development of a thriving domestic fruit sector.

7 Encourage short supply chains to support growers and increase access to fresh and affordable food

Most fruit and vegetables are currently purchased from supermarkets, which rely on centralised supply chains, meaning that produce on the shelves will have been harvested at least several days earlier. Direct marketing systems such as farmers’ markets, vegetable box schemes and food hubs enable customers access produce within a couple of days, if not hours, of being harvested, maximising its nutritional value and flavour. Moreover, shortening the supply chain means both producer and purchaser get a better deal as fewer middlemen are involved. These direct sales are usually more sustainable, negating the needs for refrigeration, transport, and packaging.

Policy Recommendations

- 1) Fruit and vegetable producers should be eligible for special payments to support on farm employment.**
- 2) Introduce an infrastructure support scheme for horticultural enterprises.**
- 3) Introduce a “Mixed Farms Scheme” supporting farms to create areas of fruit and vegetables as part of larger farm units.**
- 4) Introduce a targeted support scheme for peri-urban vegetable production in green belts, to develop market gardens as a community resource for both production and training.**
- 5) Introduce an Orchard Planting and Maintenance Scheme.**
- 6) A “New Deal for Horticulture” programme should be introduced to rapidly increase the number of market gardeners and fruit growers to meet local demand for fruit and vegetables.**
- 7) Short supply chains should be encouraged to improve grower livelihoods and increase access to fresh and affordable fruit and vegetables.**