

Government publishes review into automation in horticulture

Defra has today (Wednesday 27 July) published the results of a review exploring how the horticulture sector can make use of innovative technologies such as packhouse automation, AI enabled robotics and autonomous guided vehicles to help with tasks like the picking, packing and transporting of fruit, vegetables and flowers.

With labour shortages continuing to affect the farming sector globally, the Environment Secretary George Eustice and Professor Simon Pearson from the University of Lincoln co-chaired the [Review of Automation in Horticulture](#) in support of the wider aim of reducing the sector's reliance on migrant workers.

The Review brought together experts across horticulture, technology and supporting industries to understand what would be required to accelerate the development and uptake of automation technologies, in both the edible and ornamental horticulture sectors. The recommendations include:

- establishing a consortium that brings together government and industry to drive adoption of proven technologies
- adopting a mission-led approach to fast-track new technologies;
- the horticulture sector setting up working groups to share novel harvest practices and consider how best to make the industry more attractive for workers.
- developing the sector's skills pipelines and consider ways to attract and retain staff
- considering a long-term Seasonal Workers Scheme for edible and ornamental horticulture to help stabilise workforce pressures;

The Government will consider the report's recommendations and publish a response in due course.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice said:

"I would like to thank Simon Pearson for chairing this review and for the technical knowledge he brought to it. There are opportunities for new robotic technologies to reduce costs and labour requirements in horticulture in the years ahead and this review highlights the potential for this."

Professor Simon Pearson, co-chair of the Automation Review said:

"Our successful horticulture industry is facing unprecedented pressure to step change labour productivity. Productivity gain reduces the reliance of the sector on seasonal migrant workers, secures vibrant rural businesses and the flow of high health foods at fair values to consumers. This review was undertaken to understand how we can accelerate the development and adoption of automation and robotic technologies across the fruit, vegetable and

ornamental production sectors.

“My role at the Lincoln Institute of Agri-Food Technology at the University of Lincoln is to support and enhance the future of food and agriculture productivity, efficiency, and sustainability through research, education, and technology. Therefore, I was delighted to Co-Chair the Automation Review and hope to see the recommendations taken forward to best support colleagues in the industry.”