

News story: UK farmers given support for seasonal labour with new pilot scheme

A two-year pilot to support UK farmers by allowing non-EU migrant workers to work on farms, then return after six months, has been announced by the Home Secretary and Environment Secretary.

Welcoming the announcement, Scottish Secretary David Mundell said:

We have listened to the views of farmers in Scotland and across the UK. Many of Scotland's farms, in particular our soft fruit growers, rely on seasonal workers. This pilot is a welcome first step in ensuring that Scottish farmers can continue to access the workers they need to grow and harvest their produce.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

British farmers are vital to the UK's economy – and the Government will look to support them in any way we can.

This pilot will ensure farmers have access to the seasonal labour they need to remain productive and profitable during busy times of the year.

I am committed to having an immigration system that reduces migration to sustainable levels, supports all industry and ensures we welcome those who benefit Britain.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We have listened to the powerful arguments from farmers about the need for seasonal labour to keep the horticulture industry productive and profitable.

From lettuce in East Anglia to strawberries in Scotland, we want to make sure that farmers can continue to grow, sell and export more great British food.

This two year pilot will ease the workforce pressures faced by farmers during busy times of the year. We will review the pilot's results as we look at how best to support the longer-term needs of industry outside the EU.

Soft fruit production in the UK has grown dramatically, by 130% in the last 20 years. Fruit is grown particularly in the South East (Kent), Midlands (Hereford, Worcestershire and Shropshire) and in Scotland (Perthshire), while field vegetables are grown widely across the UK.

In 2016 Scottish fruit and vegetables had an output value of £265.9m. In June 2016 Scotland had 22,000 hectares of land used for horticulture – 18,200 for vegetables, 1900 for fruit and 950 for flower and nursery stock.

The Seasonal Workers pilot will be run by two scheme operators, who will oversee the placement of the workers. The arrangements for selecting the scheme operators will be announced in due course.

To be eligible for the pilot workers must be aged at least 18 years old on the date of application and be from outside of the European Union.

The pilot will commence in the spring of 2019, will run until the end of December 2020 and will be monitored closely by the Home Office and Defra.