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Angus MP Kirstene Hair has welcomed an announcement of a pilot scheme to allow fruit and vegetable farmers to hire workers from outwith the EU.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said the scheme will provide 2,500 Seasonal Migrant Worker Visas to non-EEA workers.

There are an estimated 75,000 temporary migrant workers in agriculture every summer. The 75,000 figure falls short of the 80,000 workers the industry claims are currently needed and far short of its expected ‘need’ of 95,000 by 2021.

Ms Hair has been campaigning to reintroduce the SAWS the issue since her election and has been calling on UK ministers to reintroduce the scheme now rather than awaiting MAC report due to the strong evidence which had been brought forward.

The Home Secretary had previously stated he would wait for the recommendations from the Migration Advisory Commission (MAC).

Scottish Conservative MP for Angus, Kirstene Hair, said:

“I am delighted with this boost to our soft fruit industry across the UK.

“Following months of campaigning, I am pleased to see the government have listened to concerns raised following the steady decline in seasonal workers in recent years.

“It is certainly a very positive step in the right direction and one I have been long calling for.

“The pilot will go some way to addressing some of the current shortfall in labour and will be welcomed by the agricultural industry, especially in my constituency of Angus. However, it will need to be adopted fully if labour demand is to be met.

“This is a time-critical issue as farmers have already lost income through

crops being left unpicked. I will continue to monitor the situation in the coming months as it is important that pressure on the government is maintained to ensure a Seasonal Migrant Scheme is introduced fully and with the capacity required to support this iconic British industry.”

Home Secretary Sajid Javid MP said:

“I would like to personally thank Kirstene for all her tireless work supporting farmers in her constituency and championing the benefits of a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme.

“I hope this pilot will ensure farmers across the UK have access to the seasonal labour they need to remain productive and profitable during busy times of the year.”