

Public urged to join collective action to protect plant health

Leading nature charities, trade bodies and the Government have committed to improving public engagement with plant health and biosecurity in a major new agreement announced today (Monday 23 May) at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The Public Engagement in Plant Health kickstarts a national conversation around biosecurity and promotes the actions that the public can take to protect tree and plant health.

Twenty-nine organisations are set to sign the Accord, including Defra, the Royal Horticultural Society, National Farmers Union, National Trust, Tree Council and Horticultural Trades Association – amounting to a total membership of over seven million people across the country.

The signatories will work together to raise public awareness of plant health.

The joint campaign will encourage plant lovers not to bring home plants, trees, fruit and seeds from overseas, as doing so could inadvertently bring pests, diseases and invasive species into the UK, alongside an awareness campaign which will educate the public to buy plants, trees and seeds from responsible suppliers, and ensure everyone knows how to report sightings of pests and diseases.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, said:

This Accord will change the face of plant biosecurity in this country, with leading organisations from across society setting out a long-term shared vision for public engagement, awareness raising and behavioural change.

Safeguarding the health of our plants and trees will require people, the government and partners to work together as we strive to deliver on our ambitious tree planting targets and leave the environment in a better state than we found it, as outlined in our 25 Year Environment Plan.

Professor Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science and Collections at the Royal Horticultural Society, said:

The RHS believe that the collective actions of each and every one of our nation's 30 million gardeners can play a pivotal role in protecting our tree and plant health, and natural environment.

We will continue to work with government, industry, and the wider public to safeguard and preserve our natural environment for

generations to come.

Sarah Lom, CEO, The Tree Council, said:

We need everyone in Britain to become a tree health hero and take action to protect our trees and other plants. By making the right choices, we can ensure a healthy future for trees, from growing and nurturing, to protecting them from pests and diseases. The Tree Council is delighted to be a partner in this important Accord. The health of trees and plants affects everyone and so it is essential we work together if we are to safeguard the future.

Pippa Greenwood, Horticultural Manager, Horticultural Trades Association (HTA), said:

As the trade association which represents all parts of the garden industry supply chain, the HTA aims to continue to play a significant part in raising awareness and understanding of plant health and biosecurity along the length of that chain – from seed producer, through plant producer and retailer, to landscapers and the end user – the great gardening public! So, we are very pleased to support the Plant Health Accord.

The increasingly globalised plant trade along with climate change continue to present immediate and emerging threats to our biosecurity from pests and diseases. If introduced to the UK, pests and pathogens can cause serious and lasting harm to our biodiversity, farmlands, ecosystems and native species. Promoting positive behavioural change through public engagement is therefore necessary to safeguard the benefits trees and plants provide for society, the environment and the economy.

The 29 organisations which have signed the Accord will work closely to share best practice and research findings to ensure future plant health interventions are evidence-led and encourage behavioural change. They will also collaborate to develop new and innovative partnerships which will maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of our plants and trees.

The Public Engagement in Plant Health Accord has been announced today on the Animal and Plant Health Agency's stand at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2022. The theme of the stand this year is the long-running 'Don't Risk It!' campaign, which aims to raise awareness of the risks of moving plants and associated pests through international travel.

Today's announcement also comes ahead of the publication in summer this year of the new GB Plant Biosecurity Strategy, which will set out a biosecurity vision for the UK for the next five years. Building upon work achieved under the existing strategy published in 2014, the Strategy aims to deliver a step change in our plant health protections, actions and behaviours. The Public

Engagement in Plant Health Accord will be published in full as part of this Strategy.