

Up to 30,000 workers to help reap 2021 harvest

The Seasonal Workers Pilot, originally launched in 2019, has been extended and expanded for an additional year with 30,000 visas available for those wanting to come and work on UK farms for a period of up to six months. The workers will play a vital role in helping horticulture growers pick and package their produce in 2021, whilst reducing their reliance on migrant labour as we exit the EU.

The expansion of the scheme follows a long period of close working with the National Farmers Unions and the Association of Labour Providers, across all parts of the UK and in particular recognition of the need for additional seasonal labour in Scotland to support local rural economies and the renowned soft fruit growers.

In addition, the government alongside industry will build on this year's Pick for Britain campaign and actively promote the recruitment and retention of domestic seasonal workers in 2021. This year Pick for Britain helped to raise the profile of roles in the sector, encouraging UK based workers take on seasonal jobs during the busy harvest months to help keep the nation fed.

Alongside the Seasonal Workers Pilot, Defra will also lead a review into automation in horticulture, to begin in early 2021. The review will report on ways to increase automation in the sector and meet the government's aim of reducing the need for migrant seasonal labour.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We will always back our farmers and growers, who work hard all year round to provide us with a secure supply of fruit and vegetables.

The measures announced today will provide vital labour, both domestic and from abroad, to our farmers and growers to help gather the 2021 harvest to feed the nation. Our review into automation will pave the way for a pioneering and efficient future for our fruit and vegetable growers.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

The expansion of the Seasonal Workers Pilot is great news for Scottish farmers and our world-class produce. The UK Government has listened to Scottish farmers and our rural communities.

From next year, up to 30,000 visas will be granted for workers to come to the UK for a period of up to six months to pick and package fruit and vegetables on our farms. This will give certainty to the

country's fruit and vegetable growers, and help ensure our critical food security.

NFU Scotland President, Andrew McCornick said:

NFU Scotland welcomes today's announcement that there will be a Seasonal Worker Scheme allowing 30,000 workers from outside the UK to undertake vital seasonal agricultural work.

The significant upscale of the Seasonal Worker Scheme from 10,000 to 30,000 permits has been hard won. Following close and supportive dialogue with government and MPs, NFU Scotland welcomes this increase on the understanding that the EU Settlement Scheme will allow workers who have undertaken work on Scottish horticulture farms prior to 2021 to return. And following the major, industry-led effort to recruit domestic workers during the 2020 pandemic, growers will continue to utilise all tools to encourage as much recruitment from within the UK as possible in 2021.

We look forward to working with government to establish the terms and operation of the scheme in terms of cost for employers and which operators will be licensed to operate.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay MP said:

Farmers and growers play a crucial role throughout the year in providing fresh British quality produce for the public. We are determined to support our farming sector as we leave the EU, and to reduce the food miles of food in our shops as part of our wider commitment to the environment.

Extending this pilot for another year and expanding its size show that we are continuing to listen and respond constructively to our farming sector as they prepare for next year's crop.

The Seasonal Workers Pilot opened in 2019 and was designed to test the effectiveness of our immigration system at supporting UK growers during peak production periods, whilst maintaining robust immigration control, and ensuring the welfare of participating migrant workers. It also provides a valuable source of labour for the UK's fruit and vegetable growers helping to make sure that all that we grow in this country gets onto our supermarket shelves.

The UK Government has a long history of helping farmers and growers get the seasonal workers they need. Since the end of WW2, similar schemes for Seasonal Agricultural Workers have welcomed migrant workers into the UK – this latest iteration shows the government's continued commitment to supporting the sector.