**UK Grower Webinar – Finding Solutions to People Challenges in 2022**

On 25th January 2022, Food Network for Ethical Trade members Co-op, Berryworld, Fresca Group, Morrisons, Tesco, Total Produce supported an interactive online event aimed to support horticulture growers across the UK to tackle the unprecedented 'people' challenges that have already impacted and continue to face the sector. Through interviews, a panel discussion, short videos and a live Q&A session, we explored the challenges of recruiting and managing workers responsibly with over 160 audience members. Our aim was to:

* Hear about the solutions businesses put in place last season to address labour exploitation, recruitment, working hours, accommodation and other challenges
* Understand what solutions government and relevant authorities are implementing and see how they view the challenges evolving
* Consider how the industry can work together to manage labour well and make the industry attractive to new recruits.

The key messages raised by contributors and audience members from the event are outlined below and a recording can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSehcnjMWrw

**Recruitment and retention**

* Significant challenges recruiting enough people to undertake all the necessary jobs on farms (particularly harvest) for all panellists for the 2021 season. This was attributed primarily to Brexit, with Covid-19 also playing a part, with everyone citing crops being left in fields due to lack of pickers
* Some panellists had success in recruiting workers from the UK, but this was very much in the minority. Difficulties identified included; lack of interest in farm work, low unemployment rate and short periods of seasonal employment (often not near home) not being attractive. In 2020 it was reported to have been easier than in 2021 because of the with the government’s ‘Pick for Britain’ messaging and people on the furlough scheme.
* Examples of what businesses are doing to address these challenges include; developing short videos for potential recruits to show them what work will be like, providing ‘wraparound’ support so workers do not need to worry about admin such as setting up bank accounts and offering non-working family members accommodation on farm to support with childcare.

**Seasonal Workers’ Scheme (SWS)**

* All speakers, including the Member of Parliament and Gangmasters Licensing and Abuse Authority, highlighted the importance – but also the difficulties – of the SWS. The low permitted numbers, inflexibility in movement between farms, not allowing returnees automatically and length of visa were all cited as areas of potential change which would enable the scheme to better serve the sector
* The GLAA explained that even with the scheme in place, there is still significant opportunity for worker exploitation and they have seen issues around fraudulent documents and extortion in home countries. They have a programme of education and communication to businesses, law enforcement and workers.

**Working Hours**

* One contributor shared how they have changed the way they manage their labour on-site with a detailed labour plan on Excel and Power BI which includes; horizon scanning events which might affect attendance, plotting working hours across the different sections so people can be moved to ensure sufficient/ not excessive hours, mapping productivity and wages.
* Some panellists reported the lack of available workers in 2021 resulting in longer working hours. Businesses found that this in fact was seen as a positively by workers, who they said wanted the additional hours.

**Wages and costs**

* Audience members commented on whether the continued focus on cheap food was having a negative impact on people already working in the supply chain and recruitment of new people. Panellists recognised the challenge of cheap food but also highlighted potential earnings for workers, which could be well above the UK Minimum Wage.
* Panellists said that with rising production costs and expectations from customers (for example, 7-day ordering, inflexibility in quality specs, short-term contracts), there were opportunities particularly for supermarkets to work with them to make business more sustainable.

**Opportunities for collaboration**

Feedback from panellists and audience members during and after the event was that collaboration would be welcomed in a number of areas:

* Cross-industry collaboration to share workers where possible under the SWS rules
* Government creating an accessible map of where workers are required across the UK in 2020 was seen positively and could provide an opportunity to collaborate with government in the future
* Work together to understand from workers what they are looking for from an employer
* More guidance and resources on good recruitment strategies
* Further sharing of best practice opportunities

**Webinar contributors:** Jen Baines (GLAA), Sir Roger Gale (MP North Thanet), Shayne Tyler (Fresca Group), James Simpson (Adrian Scripps Ltd.), Steve Taylor (Winterwood Farms Ltd.) Pleun Van Malkenhorst (Rainbow UK Ltd.), Nick Ottewell (LJ Betts Ltd.), Ed Palmer and Peter Holder (S&A Produce).