

Circulation: NFU Members, Media Contacts, MP's.

Date: 1st November 2011

Contact: Hayley.Campbell-
Gibbons@nfu.org.uk

Tel: 02476 858628

Summary: NFU Proposal for a new Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)

The need for a new scheme

It's an absolute priority that British growers have access to labour to carry out all their operations. Many of the crops produced in the UK are seasonal. This creates a structural problem to annually recruit sufficient seasonal workers.

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) is a robust and effective scheme, controlled by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and managed by contracted operators, which has provided a pool of labour for the horticulture industry for the past 60 years. SAWS helps growers to overcome employment difficulties by providing an ideal contribution to the industry's seasonal labour requirements.

The current SAWS is due to end this year, although it could be extended until the end of 2013 under EU laws concerning migration controls on new member states. With shortages of A8 nationals already beginning to reappear and demand for seasonal labour on UK horticulture units increasing, there could be a labour shortage on the horizon. Therefore in the short term the horticulture industry believes an extension of the current SAWS arrangements to 2013 is vital.

In the longer term, the horticulture industry believes that an approach must be taken to maintain business confidence in the industry and allow growers to plan for the future. The industry considers that a new SAWS is needed that ties in all of the positives of the current arrangements with a new scheme with new criteria. The NFU, with the support of labour providers, has developed this proposal, which describes such a strategy and sets out a new architecture for a SAWS for the next decade.

Proposed SAWS criteria

We consider that the following criteria are critical to the architecture of a new SAWS scheme:

- **Overseen by the Home Office and managed by licenced operators with an annual quota decided by HO and MAC** - A new scheme should be overseen by the Home Office in much the same way as the current SAWS scheme and managed by licenced operators.
- **Checks on arrival and departure for SAWS workers** - A new scheme should include a robust system for checking arrivals, departures and return to home country.
- **A scheme open to students of agriculture** - A replacement SAWS scheme should return to the origins of the original scheme as a youth work experience programme.
- **Preference given to students from within the EU** - A replacement to the SAWS scheme should require that operators continue to recruit from the EU in preference to non EU applicants. However, a new scheme should be available to university level students of agriculture or agriculture related subjects from any countries with 'returns' arrangements with the UK.

- **Positioned under the Temporary Workers and Youth Mobility Tier of the Points Based System** - To be consistent with government policy the new scheme should be contained within Tier 5 of the Points Based System – Temporary Workers and Youth Mobility. As such it could meet the UK's cultural and international objectives.
- **A set of independently accredited scheme standards** - A new SAWS scheme should have a specific set of standards, which are the subject of an accreditation scheme, managed by SAWS operators.
- **Restricted to a maximum six month placement** - Permission to work and remain in the UK should be via a work card or specific visa category and restricted to the dates on the work card and a maximum period of 6 months.
- **An educational element should be incorporated** - Under the previous SAWS programme agriculture students were often set assignments to complete during their placement. This should be encouraged under a new scheme. A more robust educational element could include the provision of English lessons and on the job training.
- **Growers should be encouraged to provide cultural activities** (for example, excursions to local areas of historic interest, visits to sites of artistic or architectural significance).

We believe that the architecture described above, coupled with a properly enforced accreditation scheme of a specific set of standards for SAWS workers will provide Government, NGO's, trade unions and opposition parties with the assurances that they need to support a new SAWS for the next decade.

Channelling inactive British citizens into horticultural vacancies

While the response from the local population to local, seasonal employment opportunities in the horticulture sector is often poor we recognise that during a period of high UK unemployment, the horticulture industry must do everything it can to maximise the potential of the resident workforce. There are things that both industry and Government can do to encourage UK citizens and, in particular, students to take on seasonal work. We have identified several groups of British citizens that could be viewed as targets for recruitment as follows:

- **New entrants:** Changing perceptions and improving the career development and progression opportunities available in the horticulture sector is an important part of achieving success.
- **Unemployed people claiming jobseekers allowance:** We consider that adapting the UK benefit system to allow those on benefits not to lose their entitlement while undertaking work on a daily call basis would encourage inactive citizens to take on seasonal work.
- **Prisoners and ex-prisoners:** The employment of prisoners and ex-prisoners is something that employers approach with a certain amount of caution. However, an offer of financial support for employers to train and mentor ex-prisoners may encourage more widespread take up.
- **Students:** We consider that a summer programme carrying vocational or academic credits in addition to cash pay would be the key to attracting agricultural and horticultural students to work in the industry.

Summary: With a potential labour shortage on the horizon, the horticulture industry believes an extension of the current SAWS arrangement to 2013 is vital. In the longer term we want Government to ensure that, where there are opportunities for providing channels to seasonal labour through sector based schemes like SAWS, these are facilitated. In developing this proposal for a new SAWS scheme the horticulture industry is offering to work together with Government to implement the solutions that are needed to allow the horticultural industry to respond to the demands of consumers and continue to compete with imports.