



Dear Minister Spencer,

We, the members of the Fruit and Vegetable Alliance, are writing to express our disappointment at the decision not to develop a horticulture strategy for England. Now, more than ever, a joint approach between industry and government is necessary to create a resilient, sustainable and prosperous fresh produce sector that attracts skilled and motivated workers and supplies healthy food.

To support the development of a strategy, over the last six months, the FVA has prepared the linked document, "[Cultivating Success: Priorities for increasing sustainable production to meet growing demand](#)." The diverse range of issues it highlights demonstrates why a strategy is necessary; to address the wide range of challenges faced by the sector, from recruitment and training to supply chain fairness.

While we welcome the expansion of the seasonal worker visa route and the Farming Investment Fund, to support investment, we cannot rely on individual actions alone. We need a long term plan that aims to harness the market opportunities of meeting public health requirements while increasing production in a country well suited to horticulture, in the face of growing climate instability elsewhere.

The horticulture strategy for England was one of the most positive aspects of the Government Food Strategy, addressing as it did the recommendation in Henry Dimbleby's Independent Review that "to meet health, climate and nature commitments and bring us up to 5 a day there should be a 30% increase in fruit and veg consumption in the national diet by 2032 (compared to 2019)." A year on from the publication of the Government Food Strategy, the need for a horticulture strategy is greater than ever, as cost price increases and unfair trading practices in the retail sector are leading to growers reduce their acreage of vegetables and fruit. To rely on imports from countries like Spain, Kenya and Morocco is far too risky in the face of climate-change and political instability, as illustrated by the shortages of imported salad vegetables this February and March. Only by turning UK horticulture into a prosperous and environmentally sustainable sector, are we likely to attract the investment and the skilled workforce we need to ensure long term security of fresh produce supply.

Regrettably, without the ambition to create a horticulture strategy for England, we have been led to question the Fruit and Vegetable Alliance's ongoing participation in the Edible Horticulture Roundtable. On this eve of the Food Security Summit, we are, therefore, withdrawing from the EHRG until such point that Defra is prepared to recommit to developing a horticulture strategy, which is an essential element of achieving UK food security. We would like to thank the civil servants who work in the Defra Horticulture Team for their efforts to communicate with the sector through the EHRG. If Defra decides once again to develop a horticulture strategy, we would be more than happy to work with you and the Horticulture Team on its development. Until then, we need to focus our efforts on other ways to protect and revitalise our sector.

Yours sincerely,  
[The Fruit and Veg Alliance](#)