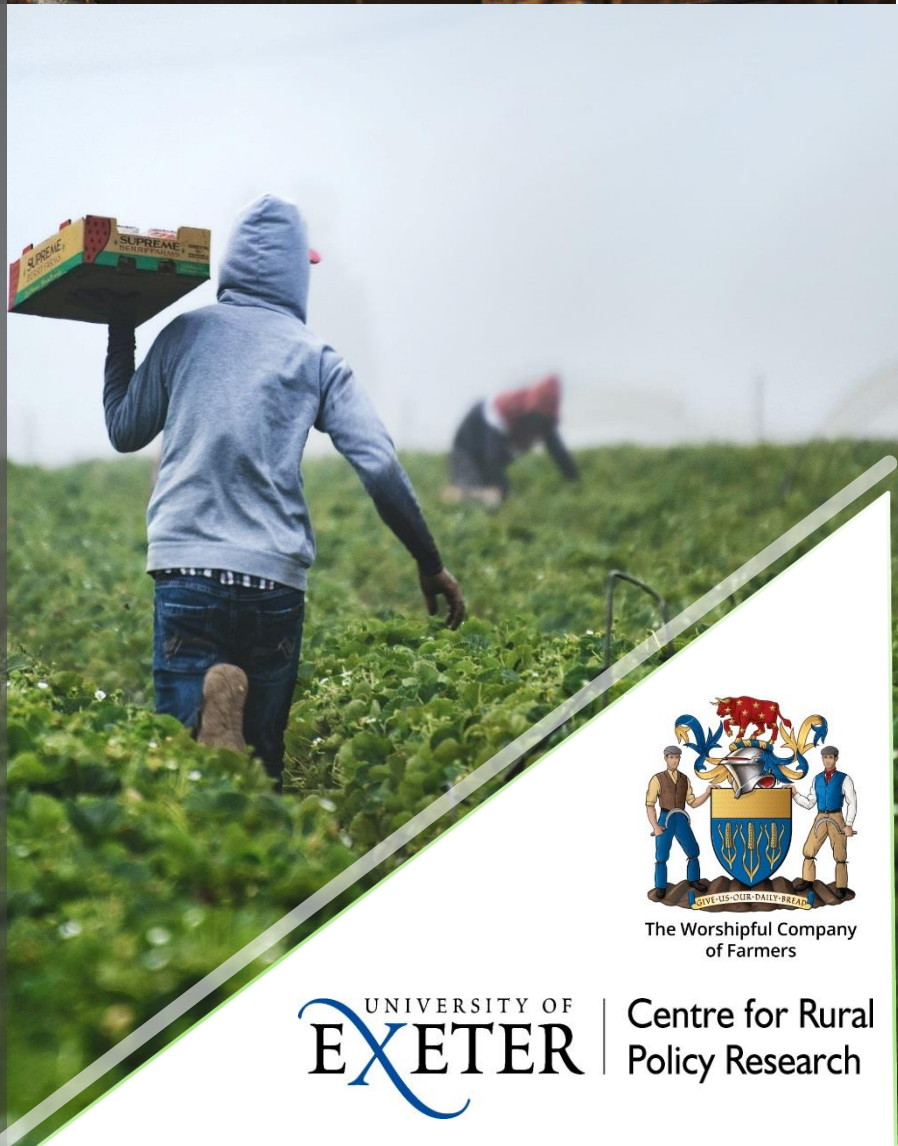


Farm labour in the U.K. Accessing the workforce the industry needs

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and

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May 2021



The Worshipful Company of Farmers

UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The issue of worker and skills shortages in farming requires addressing urgently. This needs to be across all sectors and should include both regular and seasonal positions.
2. Numbers of farm workers have levelled out over the last ten years, and while mechanisation can assist with labour requirements, large numbers of workers will still be required across all sectors at least in the short term.
3. Changes in immigration policy are likely to impact many sectors in terms of their accessibility to farm labour. Horticulture, dairy, pigs, eggs, and poultry will be particularly affected.
4. Multiple drivers exist which affect the scarcity of permanent workers, such as perceptions of the industry, poor farm culture, traditional forms of succession, poor promotion of the industry, and the location of the work.
5. Multiple drivers also exist which affect the scarcity of seasonal workers, including poor on-farm conditions and treatment, the location of work, the pay structure, lack of relevant skills, and competition from other industries and countries.
6. The impact of labour shortages might include: a drop in production, businesses being forced to cease production, businesses relocating to countries outside of the UK, an increase in slavery and exploitation, the exacerbation of unemployment in the industry, an increase in mental health issues within the industry, and the need to employ more people from the domestic workforce.
7. It is extremely unlikely that the domestic workforce will be able to fulfil the entire workforce requirements of the agricultural industry, and so should only be regarded as part of the wider solution to the farm labour crisis.
8. Solutions to the farm labour crisis include: ensuring that the new seasonal worker pilot scheme is fit for purpose, making farms more attractive as places of work for all workers, mechanising more aspects of the work, and widening the pool of domestic labour by promoting the industry as an attractive place to work.
9. Potential new entrants to the industry from the domestic workforce might include young people

(from all backgrounds), career changers, service leavers, ex-offenders and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

10. Various opportunities, strategies and barriers exist to facilitate, support or discourage i) these various sections of society from working in agriculture and ii) farmers from facilitating their entry into an agricultural career. Experts in the various fields, however, recognise that both the industry and the groups themselves offer great potential for matching suitable workers to employers.

11. The Pick for Britain campaign, while not entirely successful in 2020, was an interesting exercise from which much can be learned regarding increasing employment of the domestic workforce within the industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For research and policy

- The seasonal worker scheme must accommodate the needs of all sectors currently reliant upon migrant workers, including those requiring year round staff, so as not to discriminate between sectors.
- Definitions of, and value placed upon, the skills of farm workers need to be revisited by the Migration Advisory Committee to ensure that the farming industry is not disadvantaged by the new immigration policy.
- Research should be undertaken to establish the attitudinal baseline of prisoners, service leavers, young people, and potential career changers to identify current attitudes towards careers in agriculture. This should be mirrored with farmers (i.e. their attitudes to employing people from these groups).
- Use of online portals should be encouraged to facilitate the exchange of workers between businesses, such as the Association of Labour Provider's (ALP) *Extra Workers Needed Portal*.
- Introduce new data collection strategies to identify, with more certainty, where labour

shortfalls exist across all sectors. This could be led by AHDB.

- Defra should commission a thorough evaluation of the seasonal worker pilot scheme prior to introducing any new worker scheme.
- Payments under ELMs and other schemes should include 'social conditionality' such that any farm payments are conditional upon the social and human rights of farm workers being respected and enforced, and penalties introduced for businesses not adhering to the policy.
- Establish a cross sector working group to identify ways to encourage gender and ethnic diversity in recruitment to the industry.
- Liaise with the MoD to include explicit inclusion of agricultural opportunities within the Career Transition Partnership.

For industry

- Supermarkets should participate in consumer awareness campaigns directly associated with corporate responsibility and fair worker treatment. All supermarkets should introduce corporate human rights policies into their overall policies, making living wages for all food workers a key priority (See Oxfam's Supermarkets Scorecard 2021). Consumers need assurance that not only are farm workers protected but also that farmers receive a fair price for their products.
- Assist in the facilitation of 'halfway' training schemes similar to the Access to Agriculture scheme run by Harper Adams, aimed at people from non-farming backgrounds.

For scheme operators

- Create lasting networks. Some of the most effective schemes in place, whether training

courses, or other initiatives, or on-farm placements said that lasting networks have proved extremely important to participants.

For employers

- Measures need to be enforced to mitigate the risk of contagion under farm living and working conditions in terms of health and safety in the future.
- Create a reputation for being a good employer and undertake management and leadership skills training where possible.
- Ensure compliance with all employment laws and policies to ensure worker rights are fulfilled at your place of employment.

FOREWORD



The theme for my year as Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers is “A Helping Hand”. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, our Livery has attempted to reach out to support those less fortunate. This research report aims to fulfil part of that ambition by identifying where labour is required in the agricultural workforce and new potential sources of farm labour in a post-Brexit, economically ambitious Britain. It also seeks to provide guidance on career opportunities in farming, for those who may not have seen agriculture as a first choice or those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are seeking new and fulfilling job opportunities.

In 2020, Exeter University were appointed by the Livery to research and write a study identifying the challenges of farmers finding labour, and potential workers finding jobs or careers in farming. I would like to personally thank Professor Matt Lobley and Dr Caroline Nye for their hard work and insight in providing this report. Despite the progress of automation and robotics farming still needs good people. I hope this report becomes a “go to” reference guide for farmer employers and prospective employees alike and the industry benefits from new recruits from non-traditional backgrounds.

***Richard Whitlock, Master,
Worshipful Company of Farmers***



1. INTRODUCTION

"It is important not to airbrush the present-day workforce, particularly the tens of thousands of casual workers, out of contemporary debates over the future of farming" (Verdon 2017)

British farming is at a crossroads. As land managers in Britain face multiple challenges related to Brexit, climate change, policy transitions, and increasing pressure to become more environmentally sustainable, it is more important than ever to safeguard the industry. A key challenge currently facing British farming is the availability of farm labour. While agriculture as a sector only contributes to 1.4% of the country's workforce (ONS 2020; Defra 2020c), the impact of an ever diminishing availability of labour could have significant consequences for both the structure of the industry and the country's food production as a whole. Although not a new phenomenon, the issue of labour shortages in farming has been exacerbated by events such as the U.K leaving the European Union, which has led to drastic reductions in the number of non-UK workers available to farm businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the issue of farm labour shortages. The crisis dragged the spotlight back to the problem of labour with a new sense of urgency, as fears around a potentially compromised food-secure system were stoked by national media outlets and echoed by employers across the country. Despite widespread recognition of the potential crises associated with farm labour shortages by the state, the media, and the general public, there remains a scarcity of empirical research investigating the issue and how it might be resolved. As a country which currently imports just under 45% of its food from elsewhere (Defra 2020a), leaving fruits, vegetables, and flowers to rot in fields, as has occurred in previous years, should no longer be an option if U.K farming and its varying sectors are to remain resilient. It is time that the U.K agricultural industry and its related

stakeholders determine a new, defined course for the future of, what is currently, a precarious agricultural workforce.

This report examines the current situation regarding farm labour shortages in the U.K. It collates some of the available quantitative data in order to illustrate which sectors are most affected. It examines the drivers behind the shortages in agricultural labour. And finally, through primary research with key stakeholders and relevant initiatives, as well as drawing on secondary resources, the report explores some potential solutions to the current labour crisis in agriculture. Both the regular and seasonal workforce will be considered.

In any examination of farm labour shortages, it is important to consider the issue of skills shortages at the same time. There is a common misconception that a large proportion of farm work is unskilled. Without the right people with the necessary skills in place, the productivity of any business is likely to be negatively affected, even if all available positions are filled. The importance of skills will, therefore, also be considered in this analysis.

This report focusses on the paid agricultural workforce¹, which includes permanent full-time or part-time staff, or casual workers. Seasonal labour falls under the casual category but casual also applies to other types of worker such as milking, lambing or other types of relief work. It is important to point out that unpaid family members contribute significantly to many agricultural businesses and in supporting the sector as a whole. While there is not scope within this study to include them, they are no less important and

¹ Not including the farmer/land owner or their spouse

further research considering this section of the workforce is necessary.

The aims of this project were as follows:

- To determine the current situation regarding farm labour shortages in the U.K.
- To outline some possible solutions to labour shortfalls in agriculture.
- To explore some of the current initiatives involved in engaging alternative sources of agricultural labour.

1.1 METHOD

This study used the following methods:

- Desk-based research of existing literature on farm labour shortages and alternative labour sources in agriculture.
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 21 stakeholders, including:
 - Individuals working for farming or labour organisations. (Quoted as Farming rep 1, 2, 3, 4, Labour expert 1,2 and 3, and Horticulture expert).
 - Agricultural businesses (dairy and horticulture) employing anywhere between 16 and 8,000 workers (and using a range of permanent and seasonal labour). (Quoted as Farmer 1,2 and 3).
 - Operators of initiatives assisting individuals such as ex-offenders, service leavers, young people and career changers into work (agricultural and non-agricultural industries). (Quoted according to type of initiative. E.g. Service leavers 1).

This study was subject to ethical review by the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences and International Studies of the University of Exeter.

1.2 A HISTORY OF FARM LABOUR SHORTAGES

"It's an area that we haven't paid sufficient attention to for twenty-five years"
(Horticulture expert)

The history of labour on U.K farms is both long and diverse. Over the last two hundred years and beyond, labour requirements on farms have changed dramatically, with numbers of farm workers dropping from 1.7 million in 1851 (Bolton et al 2015) to approximately 171,000 in 2020 (Defra 2020c). Numbers peaked momentarily during the second World War, as the Women's Land Army, prisoners of war, and casual workers were united to bring in the crops (Figure 1). The war effort exemplifies a national response to a global crisis, something that was attempted to be mirrored more recently in response to the COVID-19 pandemic through the Pick for Britain campaign.

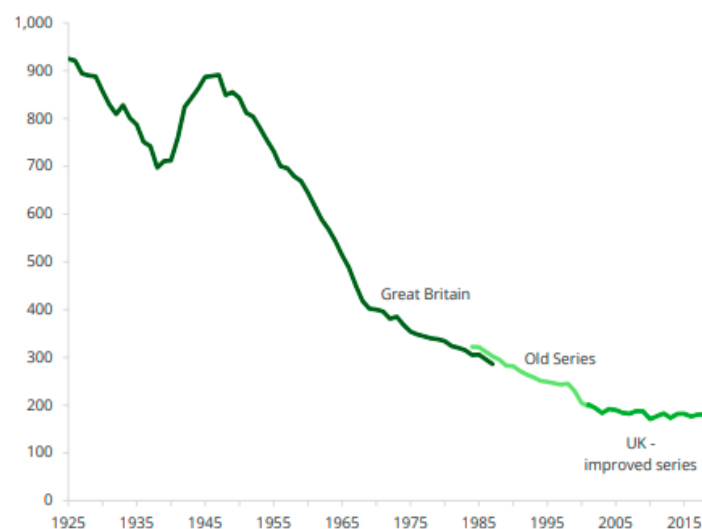


Figure 1. Workforce on British/UK farms (thousands), June each year (Source: Zayed and Loft 2019: 11)

Labour shortages in farming are reported to date back as early as the 14th century (Tipple and Morriss 2002), although it was not until the 19th century that low unemployment rates in Ireland drove many Irish workers to fill the ever increasing demand for agricultural labour in Great Britain (Kerr 1943). Those Irish workers were, effectively, the first migrant workers.

Farms continued to struggle to source local labour throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. A continuing reliance on a mixture of itinerant workers, women, and at one stage, children, ensured that the industry was able to continue harvesting crops to feed the nation. For a period during the early 20th century, working-class families would travel to pick crops such as hops during the holidays. At other times, farmers relied on travellers, students and local workers where they were available. It was reported by one respondent of this study that, in some coastal areas, fishermen would help bring in the crops when seas were too rough to go out.

Following the Second World War, a Seasonal Agricultural Workers scheme (SAWs) was introduced in the UK, allowing non-UK workers to work for a specified time on farms, most commonly horticultural units. By the time it was abolished, an annual quota of 21,250 workers was in place, enabling mostly Bulgarian and Romanian workers to fill seasonal agricultural positions across the country (Migration Advisory Committee 2013). The scheme was scrapped in 2013 because, according to the Home Office, 'at a time of unemployment in the UK and the European Union there should be sufficient workers from within those labour markets to meet the needs of the horticultural industry' (Home Office 2013:1).

While this was true, due to the increase in occupational mobility afforded to workers arriving from the EU, some farmers report their labour

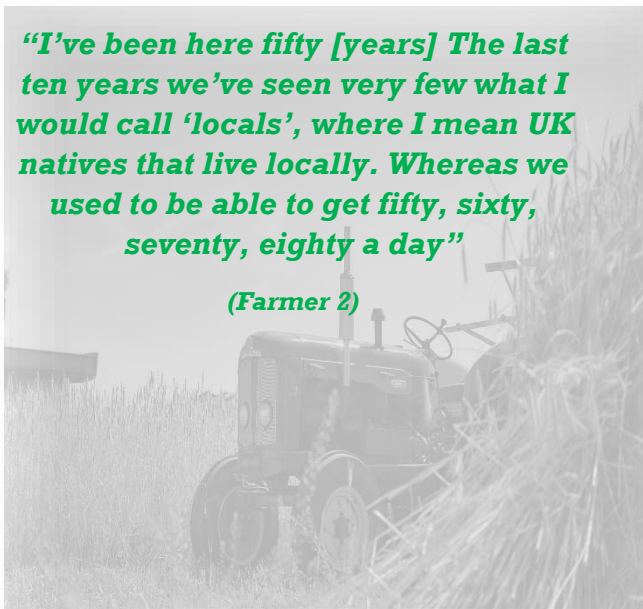
struggles as having begun with the abolition of the original SAWs scheme.

It has not only been seasonal positions which have lacked local workers in recent history. Newby (1977) talked about labour shortages having occurred in agriculture in England in the 1960s, when, 'for almost the first occasion in peacetime, there appeared to be long term shortages in some categories of labour, particularly those possessing a high degree of skill in certain sectors like stock-breeding' (1977:147). There was an exodus of workers from farming and rural communities known as a 'drift from the land', with some people pushed out of the industry due to the introduction of agricultural machinery, and others pulled away by the lure of new industries and job opportunities opening up in local towns. As a result, not only did most seasonal positions gradually become filled by migrant workers, due to the accessibility of the work to individuals from the EU, but a proportion of employing farmers also began to rely on non-domestic workers to fill some of the more permanent roles in agriculture.

The increasing reliance on migrant workers should be regarded alongside wider structural changes occurring in farming, particularly in terms of the increasing power of supermarkets, and the pressures that result from this in the overall supply chain (Heasman and Morley 2017). In simple terms, if farmers do not receive a sufficient price for their product, the effect of this will be passed down to their workers in terms of both work culture and pay.

"I've been here fifty [years] The last ten years we've seen very few what I would call 'locals', where I mean UK natives that live locally. Whereas we used to be able to get fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty a day"

(Farmer 2)



2. RESULTS. THEME 1

2.1 LABOUR SHORTAGES IN AGRICULTURE TODAY

Numbers of agricultural workers in the UK currently stand at approximately 171,000², the same figure as ten years ago (Defra 2020c). However, this sum does not include casual workers. Defra recorded a total of 42,984 casual workers in England in 2019, although industry figures suggest that the actual number is much higher. Recent studies, as well as a growing consensus among industry bodies and businesses, recognise that a lack of workers to fill positions in farming across the UK is fast becoming a crisis within the industry (Nye 2021).

“There are not as many skilled farm labourers out there. Some of the farmers will advertise and literally not have any applications” (Labour expert 3)

From the yearly flurry of media articles on fruit pickers in recent years, it would be easy to assume that labour shortages in agriculture only occur on holdings reliant upon seasonal labour, especially horticulture. However, this is not the case. A call for evidence issued by the government in 2017 (House of Commons 2017a) revealed that many sectors were experiencing difficulties in finding the labour required on their holdings. This included seasonal workers for the horticulture, poultry, and egg industries, as well as permanent workers for the poultry, pig, dairy and egg industries. In addition to this, a study of 1251 agricultural holdings in south west England showed a high incidence of difficulty in finding skilled labour among horticulture, dairy and mixed farming systems, particularly on holdings between 100 and 250 hectares in size (Nye 2018), while prior to the referendum, data showed that labour requirements on some farms were likely to increase (Nye 2017b).

“Finding good herd managers is an issue. And good stock people, I’ve lost count of the number of conversations I’ve had with [farmers] over the past couple of years who say it’s difficult to source really good staff. I think also, generally speaking, there’s a whole generation of farm managers not there” (Farming rep 3)

Work on farms has developed to rely increasingly upon either the adept skill of the picker, or the highly skilled requirements associated with technological advances and precision farming, such as GPS systems, soil sensor systems, and satellite imaging. However, general perceptions of work in agriculture have not kept up with such technological advances, meaning that fewer UK natives are taking up careers in farming. Other barriers exist, which vary across the sectors and types of labour required, and are explored in more detail in section 2.3. These constraints, combined with the UK’s recent departure from the EU, mean that many farm businesses will struggle to access the workers they need. In December 2020, Defra announced an expanded quota of 30,000 seasonal worker permits known as the Extended Pilot (Defra 2021). This is based on an estimate that 50,000 workers are required to fulfil seasonal roles, and the hope that domestic workers and automation will make up the shortfall. While many employers will have sought settled or pre-settled status³ for their EU employees prior to leaving the EU, those who fall short will no longer be licenced to source their own labour from overseas. Instead they will have to use one of the four pilot operators selected by the government. The decision to limit migrant workers has received a mixed reception from businesses and

² Includes regular full time, regular part time, and casual workers, does not include farmers, partners, directors, spouses or salaried managers.

³ Settled status is granted following five years’ continuous residence in the UK, while pre-settled status required

anyone residing for less than this length of time to have already been living in the UK before the 31st December 2020.

industry stakeholders alike, with many believing that it could be highly detrimental to the industry.

“If you restrict immigration along the lines that the government has done with the points based system, yes, you are pandering to a populist public but economically it is a disaster. You are creating a problem which shouldn’t be there and doesn’t need to be there. This is not an economic problem - this is not an economic solution. It is a political solution and that is where we are going to come unstuck” (Farming rep 1)

The COVID-19 pandemic served to further highlight the precarious nature of the UK’s reliance on migrant workers, as the sudden lack of access to labour affected several sectors of agriculture at varying levels. The government endeavoured to rally domestic workers to help with harvesting via the Pick for Britain campaign. However, although many thousands of domestic workers showed initial interest in the work, only a small proportion ended up being interviewed for the roles and even fewer actually working on farms. This is believed to be partly due to the fact that new ways were carved out to access labour. For example, migrants were given special compensation to be flown in to deal with the emergency, and there were relaxations on movement between countries at the points in the season when the workers were needed most. However, a lack of clarity and security around the issue remains. The future of migrant labour in the UK is unclear but the

“With the overall figure that we have from [a recent] survey being that it’s around 11% that were UK resident labour market this year, we are hopeful that there will be a confirmed scheme based on the pilot, but there is clearly going to be a shortfall and it’s very clear in terms of government direction that they are expecting industry to look first to resident labour” (Labour expert 2)

government is keen to decrease the country’s reliance on migrant workers (Gov.UK 2020a). It is, therefore, necessary to consider what other solutions might exist in the more immediate future for filling positions in farming, as well as what might be done to encourage a new generation of entrants wanting to work on or with the land in the future. While steps towards catering to the labour requirements of farms in the UK are being made, many feel that they are too small and not rapid enough. There were suggestions among interviewees that such a lack of urgency might cause permanent structural damage to the industry, as many businesses might not recover from prolonged labour and skills shortages.

“Even if you act right now and you start to attract more people, there’s ultimately a pipeline which will take time to filter through and so there could be a period of time where there is still a very restricted supply of labour, particularly in terms of skilled labour” (Labour expert 2)



2.2 THE CURRENT AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

"This year we employed 3,600 people and we have actually only got 2,600 jobs. The 2,600 are for six months. So, if somebody only stays for three months that is two people needed to do that job" (Farmer)

This section explores the current situation regarding the agricultural workforce in the UK. The quality of quantitative data regarding hired farm workers in the U.K varies. While the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) conducts an annual sample survey of agricultural holdings in the UK, which includes numbers of farm workers, accurate data capture is thwarted by the timing of the survey and the limited scope of the data collected. Equally, attempts to pinpoint the contributions of individual seasonal workers to agricultural work over a given

year are difficult due to the transitory nature of workers, some of whom will move from farm to farm with the harvest seasons, as well as the seasonal nature of the work. While Defra has collected information regarding seasonal labour in horticulture for England on a quarterly basis since 2018, other sectors reliant upon seasonal workers lack an equivalent dataset. Here, data gaps have been filled as far as possible using smaller surveys, industry sector data, technical reports and academic research. Obtaining accurate information regarding numbers of farm workers is important in order to be able to identify, implement and effectively monitor government policies supporting the future of agriculture in this country. It is important to remember that official data sets fail to capture numbers of unpaid, undocumented or illegal workers used in farming (Devlin 2016), a cohort urgently requiring further examination.

2.2.1 LABOUR EMPLOYED BY SECTOR

The majority of casual workers are found on horticultural and general cropping holdings. Similarly, the majority of regular full-time workers can also be found on horticulture and general cropping holdings as well as cereals and dairy. Regular part-time workers tend to predominate on grazing livestock, cereals, and dairy farms (Figure 2). Numbers are distributed differently across holding types, as many horticultural units employ large numbers of workers compared to other sectors (Figure 3).

Numbers of people employed in agriculture have levelled-off over the last ten years (Figure 4) as compared to the dramatic decrease shown in Figure 1 (see page 2). Figure 5 demonstrates how numbers of workers under the control of farm managers have changed between 1969 and 2020.



Number of people working on commercial farms in England, by farm type and employment type in 2019

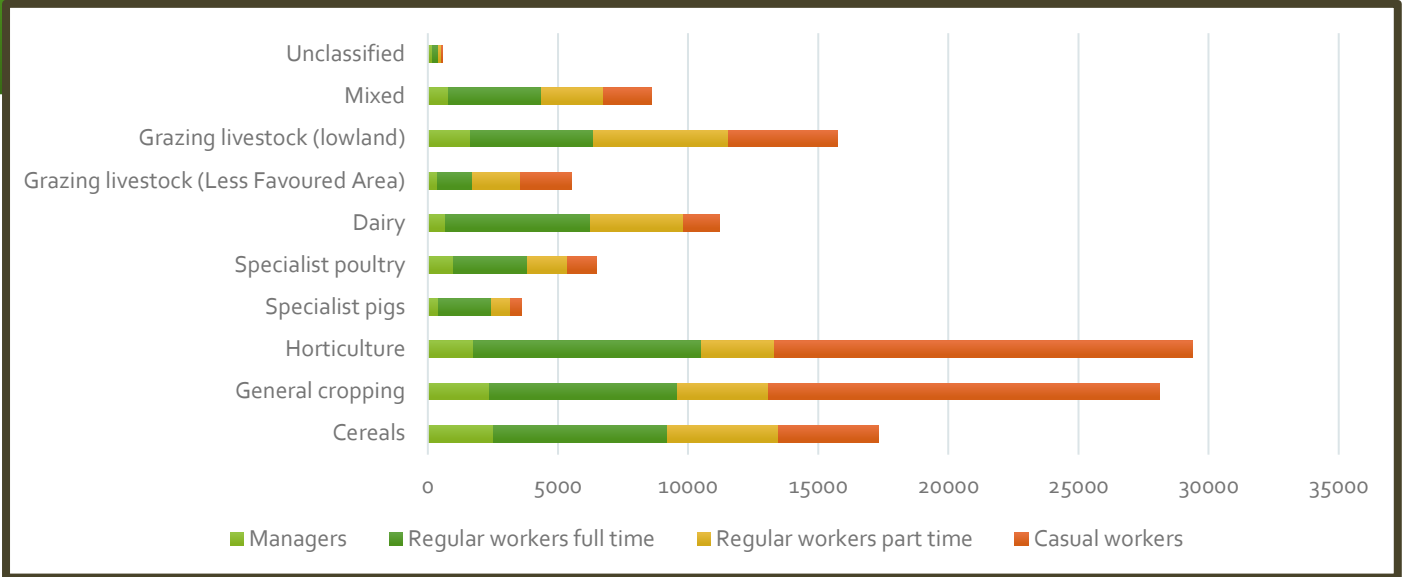


Figure 2. (Source: Defra (2020c))

Number of holdings in England employing labour, by farm type and employment type in 2019



Figure 3. (Source: Defra (2020c))

Number of people working on agricultural commercial holdings between 2000 and 2020 in England

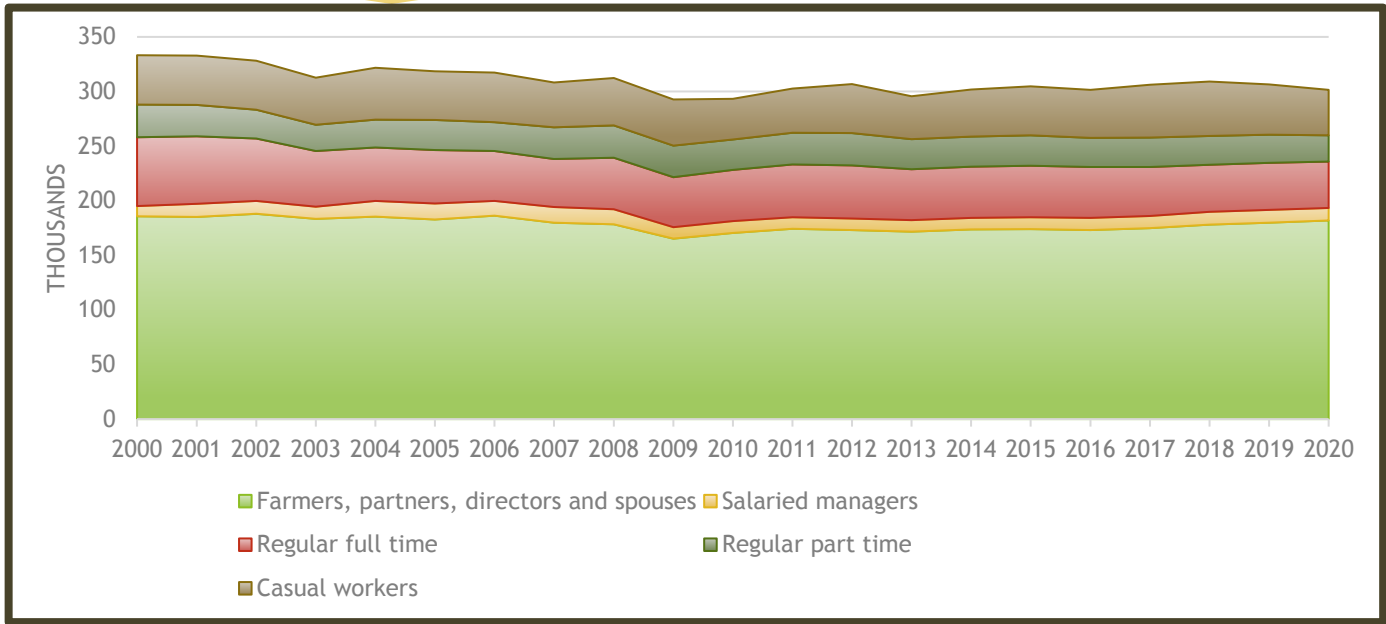


Figure 4. (Source: Defra 2020c)

Number of full-time employees under the control of managers in 1969 and 2020

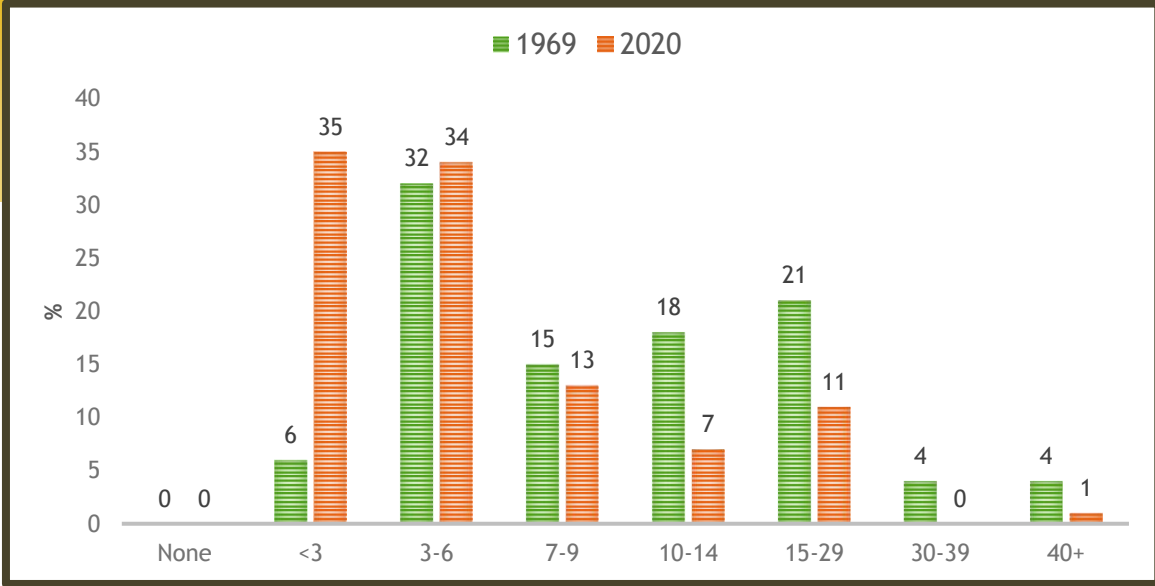


Figure 5. (Source: Crane et al 2020).

Table 1. Estimated labour requirements of the British horticultural industry between 2017 and 2021, as predicted in 2016.

	Yearly labour increase (compounded)				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Soft fruit					
Top fruit	29,109.35	31,147.00	33,327.29	35,660.21	38,156.42
Stone fruit	9,292.00	9,384.92	9,478.77	9,573.56	9,669.29
Salads	3,368.20	3,705.02	4,075.52	4,483.07	4,931.38
Brassicas	13,596.00	14,003.88	14,424.00	14,856.72	15,302.42
Root crops	7,634.70	7,787.39	7,943.14	8,102.00	8,264.04
Asparagus	2,539.20	2,920.08	3,358.09	3,861.81	4,441.08
Protected edibles	5,514.60	5,790.33	6,079.85	6,383.84	6,703.03
Mushrooms	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00
Total	75,254	78,939	82,887	87,121	91,668

Insufficient data on herbs, daffodils, protected ornamentals, outdoor ornamentals and other

Source: British Growers (2016)



2.2.2 WAGES IN AGRICULTURE

According to a 2020 survey, the average salary of a farm manager in the UK was £49,543 per year, with a small minority earning in excess of £90,000 a year (Crane et al 2020). Farm manager salaries are shown to increase with age, and approximately 60% receive a fixed salary, with the remaining managers receiving a bonus and/or share of the profits. While non-cash benefits are still received by workers, these appear to be decreasing compared with earlier years⁴. Non-managerial, permanent roles in farming can earn anywhere between £14k to £27K or more, some of which will also receive non-cash benefits such as the provision of housing. One employer interviewed stated that their salaried staff earned, on average, approximately £45,000 a year, while a good herdsman in dairy can earn up to £60,000 or more.

Seasonal work tends to be paid hourly or by piece rate (with a guarantee of minimum wage), with pickers able to earn between £8.72 and £15 an hour (Adkins 2020). However, some workers will have wages taken out for accommodation. Legally, employers are allowed to remove up to £4.82 from a worker's pay each day if they are being housed in a caravan. Some employers have also been known to charge for 'extras' such as Wi-Fi, transport or social activities.

2.2.3 LABOUR SHORTAGES BY SECTOR

"We're recruiting for a couple of full-time, permanent, reasonably skilled farm staff and we are struggling. Normally it's 'bang' within a couple of days you can find somebody. We've had an ad out for three weeks now and we've not had a lot of response" (Farmer 2)

A Future Workforce and Skills Survey revealed that almost two thirds of agriculture and horticulture businesses reported that vacancies are taking more time to fill (FDSC 2020). This demonstrates a substantial increase when compared to a large survey

carried out of farms in the south west of England in 2015, which saw just over a third of all survey respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, 'I can always find skilled labour when required (Nye 2017b)'. A similar response rate was received from farmers when questioned about seasonal labour. This section uses the available data to determine what the current shortages are by sector.

HORTICULTURE

Horticulture is the sector most commonly associated with farm labour shortages in the UK. The horticulture industry is estimated to be worth approximately £3.7 billion to the UK economy (Defra 2020b). It has seen an increase of 34% in labour costs over the last five years with COVID-19 increasing this by a further 15% in 2020 (Pelham 2020). The last four years have seen significant fluctuations in the availability of labour. 2020 was a particularly unpredictable year for the horticulture industry due to the impact of COVID-19 on the arrival of migrant workers. The estimated labour requirements for 2020 were 87,121 roles (Table 1). According to the AHDB labour barometer, between 71 and 86% of horticultural businesses managed to find the labour they required over the peak season (Swales 2021). However, this came at a cost because i) turnover of domestic workers was high and businesses had to continually recruit and train new staff ii) productivity was lower and iii) extra costs were incurred due to the direct effects of COVID-19, such as paying for the housing of quarantining staff or for extra cleaning and hygiene maintenance (Pelham 2020). Horticulture is one of the most difficult sectors to mechanise, especially soft fruits.

DAIRY

There are currently around 13,000 dairy producers in the UK upon whom 80,000 jobs in the food and drink sector are reliant (RABDF 2017). Many of these holdings require additional labour but employers have reported challenges. A survey of 121 dairy farming businesses carried out by RABDF in 2020

⁴ E.g. Provision of house rent, rates, lighting and heating, and private use of car.

found that 80% of respondents were concerned about staff recruitment. 63% of farmers had experienced difficulty finding staff in the last five years and 42% had employed staff from outside the UK in the last five years, an increase of 10% from 2014. The main reasons given were insufficient numbers available within the domestic workforce and the willingness to work of EU workers (RABDF 2020).

Almost all employers responding to a similar survey in 2016 survey agreed that using EU labour had been a successful option for their business, with the majority of workers coming from Poland and Romania. EU staff were, at the time, rarely regarded as transient or temporary, with the expectation being that many would remain for three or more years. 33% of dairy farmers stated that they would now consider leaving the industry due to lack of labour (RABDF 2020).

PIGS

The UK is home to almost 11,000 holdings with pigs, ranging from small to industrial-scale farm sizes (AHDB 2020), and with multiple associated jobs in production and processing stemming from the sector. In 2017 the National Pig Association released a press statement reporting labour-related challenges (NPA 2017). Based on responses from 138 respondents with employee numbers ranging from fewer than ten to more than 50, the findings show that producers anticipate sourcing all of their labour requirements from within the UK as being 'very difficult', 'impossible' or 'possible but not straightforward'.

Just over half of those who responded said that they employ at least one non-UK worker with many recruiting more than a quarter of their labour from outside the UK. Almost all of these workers came from the EU and were employed on a permanent basis. While many are likely to have gained settled status prior to the UK leaving the EU, if any workers decide to leave, the sector might struggle to fill some of these roles, being unable to benefit from the temporary nature of the new permit scheme, and having to rely instead on meeting the prerequisites of the new points system (Gov.UK 2020d).

ARABLE

Arable farms tend to require less labour than horticultural units, at approximately 18 hours per hectare per year compared to 425 hours per hectare for soft fruits (Migration Advisory Committee 2013). This is because many crops can be managed using machines. However, a large proportion of work carried out on many holdings, particularly those operating arable or mixed farming systems, is performed by agricultural contractors. Due to the fast pace of technological change, agricultural machinery has become prohibitively expensive for many land managers and investing in large equipment has no cost-benefit when it is usually only required for a few days or weeks a year. Contractors are able to invest in the vehicles necessary to complete the work in an effective, timely and efficient manner and, therefore, play a significant role with regards to farm labour. However, contractors have reported struggling to find skilled staff to fill positions within their firms (Nye 2018) which means that in the long term, even arable farms not normally reliant on large numbers of employees might be affected.

EGGS

Another sector likely to be impacted is the egg industry, which currently enables the UK to be 85% self-sufficient in eggs. Employing over 10,000 people directly, with another 13,000 employed indirectly, the egg industry has become particularly reliant upon EU workers for entry level roles, reporting 35-40% of staff working on egg farms as coming from the EU (House of Commons 2017b).

POULTRY

Poultry meat makes up half of the meat eaten in the UK, and directly employs 38,500 people in production and processing (BPC 2020). Many of the jobs involved are skilled or highly skilled and require at least 3 months of training. The poultry industry alone normally fills approximately 7,200 positions annually with non-UK workers, many of whom are licenced and trained in butchery and processing skills. According to the British Poultry Council, an inability

to fill vacancies in the future will significantly impact levels of production.

BEEF AND SHEEP

Limited data exists regarding labour shortages within the beef and sheep sector but the South West Farm Survey revealed that in 2015 almost 30% of beef and sheep farms surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 'I can always find skilled labour when required' (Nye 2017b). The meat processing industry has also expressed concerns regarding labour availability (BMPA 2020).

2.3 DRIVERS OF LABOUR SHORTAGES IN THE 21st CENTURY

"I think the barriers are barriers of omission rather than barriers of commission [It is] about there not being sufficient conduits for individuals from outside of farming to really see farming as a career" (Farming rep 3)

It is important to identify the reasons behind the scarcity of agricultural labour in the UK. These reasons will differ, according to the sector in question, as experiences of permanent work in dairy will vary drastically from the experiences of individuals who are employed to pick fruit or vegetables across a season. A recent study discovered three principal reasons behind the scarcity of permanent farm workers in the U.K: **farm-level**, **local-level** and **national-level** (Nye 2021). Using this same framework, the next section will identify the factors affecting labour availability in U.K farming today. The section is split between permanent labour and seasonal labour. While some drivers can affect the permanent *and* seasonal workforce, the detail for both types of worker is likely to be different.

Many representative organisations and bodies of these sectors have introduced or advocated for measures to promote careers in the industry, through training programmes, apprenticeships and education initiatives. However, much more needs to be done in all of these areas in order to make agriculture as an industry more attractive to domestic workers and help prevent labour shortfalls in the future.

2.3.1 WHAT IS DRIVING THE SCARCITY OF PERMANENT FARM WORKERS?

MIGRANT WORKERS

With regards to migrant labour, due to the changes in immigration policy since leaving the EU, any workers who have not claimed settled or pre-settled status will now be unable to do so. This means that, unless non-UK workers meet the specifications of the new points-based immigration system and are eligible to enter the UK as a 'skilled worker', attracting new workers from outside of the UK to permanent positions in farming will be extremely difficult. Seasonal worker permits are only valid for periods of up to six months and as long as farming occupations fail to make the shortage occupations list, where it is deemed 'sensible' to recruit migrants for positions domestic workers are unlikely to fill, many employers will no longer be able to rely upon migrant workers to fill permanent vacancies.

Farm-level

The farm-level drivers contributing to permanent labour shortages include:

- **Low pay** or the perception that agricultural work is poorly paid. In reality, many permanent jobs in agriculture are well paid (see section 2.2.2 on salaries).



- **Poor farm culture.** This includes a lack of people-management skills, a lack of time or willingness to train workers, the lack of off-farm training opportunities provided by employers, poor delegation of work tasks, and a lack of 'forward thinking' on the part of the employer.

“I think we don’t get as many of those people with ambition because of our image. But a lot of people will do their best to knock that ambition out of people, because they’ll give them the mundane jobs” (Farmer org 5)

- Lack of career progression within the employing business.
- The perception within farming communities that workers need to come from a farming background.

“I think there is sometimes a perception that unless you are from a farming background you can’t become a farmer and I think that’s something which needs addressing” (Labour expert 2)

There is a need for employers to open up opportunities to people who are enthusiastic but might need extra training/time to develop the skills.

“We had a young lady working for us who came from a non-agricultural background. One or two of my lot were looking at her going ‘why can’t you just jump on a tractor and go because we all know how to do that?’ But once we’d trained her she was fine. So you’ve just got to have a slightly different level of expectation” (Farmer 2)

- Children from farming families are discouraged from a career in farming due to witnessing events such as Foot and Mouth or the general challenges associated with farming in the current climate.

- **Poor recruitment processes.** Advertising in the main farming periodicals is reported to be prohibitively expensive, so many employers still rely on word of mouth or advertise inefficiently.

“A lot of people in the land-based sector are not great at writing job specs” (Service leavers 2)

- Traditional forms of succession are not necessarily putting the right person forward for the job.

“You need to decide who would be the best person to lead your business and then look for that person. Not look at your son and say ‘they’ll do’” (Farmer org 5)

The persistence of primogeniture⁵ or 'keeping it in the family' can prove limiting to business success. A recent survey of 688 farms in the U.K revealed that, of those with a potential successor, only 17.7% of these were identified as being female (daughters) (Wheeler et al 2020).

“One individual a while ago was looking at succession opportunities for their business and we spent the whole time talking about one of this individual’s sons who was neither eligible nor suitable to farm the holding. It wasn’t until we got to the end of the conversation that he mentioned he had a daughter. The daughter lives on the farm, worked on the farm, was involved on a daily basis and was certainly passionate about it and I said why haven’t you considered her for the succession and he just said ‘because she’s my daughter’ (Farming rep 3)

⁵ The practice of passing ownership of a holding to, typically, the firstborn son.

Local-level

- **Lack of affordable accommodation** in rural locations. Some permanent workers were reported to own their own properties but according to one employer, 'it is still the exception rather than the rule'. Rural housing is reportedly expensive and rarely accessible to local workers. One respondent said that housing difficulties prevented them from employing people with families, which further limits the pool of labour from which they can recruit.
- **The rural location of farm work** might be off-putting to new entrants used to urban lifestyles or because it is far from an individual's home. Rural locations also tend to have poor transport infrastructure which might deter potential workers who do not have their own personal transport.

"If we have got a sixteen or seventeen-year old who is really keen to work on a farm but they don't drive and there is no public transport, that can be as much of a challenge as housing. Because you could get somebody quite local that doesn't necessarily want to stay on the farm but can't get there or can't get home again" (Labour expert 3)

Even for those who are interested in a career in farming, parts of the country are believed to be seen as less attractive locations to move to than others.

Previous studies identified further local-level drivers of domestic labour shortages (Matthews 2000; Nye 2021).

- **Poor community relations**, between land owners and 'other' rural locals, especially young people.
- **Fewer small farms** around to act as a 'training ground' as compared to twenty or so years ago.
- Many agricultural **students return to the family farm** where possible.
- **Bright and capable students are headhunted** before leaving college/university by large companies.

- Many students move directly into contracting jobs.
- Those who are applying are not sufficiently skilled for the work.

"It is a dangerous place working on a farm anyway and they were saying that, even for the likes of modern apprenticeships and those coming out of university and college, they have got no practical skills. They know the theory or the land theory but they can't even drive a tractor, they can't drive a fork lift, they can't feed cattle and they can't do the basics" (Labour expert 3)

National-level

- **Lack of general education/awareness** about food production at primary and secondary school levels, as well as more generally across the population.
- **A poor, antiquated public image** of farming as a career. It is associated with low pay, long hours, poor work-life balance, bad conditions, lack of progression, heavy physical labour, and unskilled work.
- **Few apprenticeships** occurring within the industry (see section 3.5.1).
- **'Poaching' by other farms** (driven by better pay, more attractive 'shiny' machinery, more novelty of work) .
- **Lack of promotion** by the agricultural industry itself.
- **Lack of promotion** from key influencers such as careers advisers, teachers, or parental guardians, often leading to bright students being discouraged from working in the industry.
- Associations with a **poor health and safety record**, including death. One interviewee compared the lack of health and safety enforcement on farms as 'criminal' in comparison to other industries.
- Associations with **poor mental health and suicide**.
- The focus on 'new entrants' into agriculture tends to **concentrate on individuals becoming principal**

business owners in their own right rather than employees.

- **Competition from other industries.** Labour shortages are not limited to farming. Construction, civil engineering, telecommunications etc. are also competing for an ever-decreasing British labour force.

“What that means is that simply there aren’t enough people to go around. The jobs are there but the people aren’t” (Farming rep 1)

2.3.2 WHAT IS DRIVING THE SCARCITY OF SEASONAL FARM WORKERS?

Farm-level

- **Conditions.** Working and living conditions for seasonal workers are generally associated with being cramped and basic, with large numbers of workers housed in bunk houses or caravans. Although some farms are reported to have improved conditions for their workers, many have not. The drawbacks of close living quarters became even more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic as cramped housing on some holdings threatened to, or in some cases did, perpetuate disease outbreaks among workers.

A constraint for some employers is a lack of planning permission to build dwellings for their workers. With regards to being able to provide housing, one farm business stated that ‘accommodation is not a problem’ while another said that ‘housing is a nightmare’.

The work also requires long hours and is physically demanding, requiring a certain level of fitness and commitment from its workers.

- **Pay.** Seasonal work is associated with low pay or unfair treatment related to picking speeds/limited hours offered.
- **Humiliating, disrespectful treatment, including heavy surveillance.** Some domestic workers in 2020 reported feeling shamed if their work was not quick enough, while some migrant workers report being ‘yelled at’ or treated like second-class citizens (Adkins 2020).

- **Lack of communal space and social activities** on some farms can be off-putting to workers used to better conditions.

Local-level

- ‘Poaching’ from other farms.

“Investing in people is not something that has happened and usually the only way to get decent staff is to nick them off another farm” (Horticulture expert)

- **Location and lack of transport.** The rural or remote location of farms automatically make crop picking jobs out-of-bounds for many domestic workers. The commute is too far and few are willing to move for the duration of the picking season. The areas in the UK with the highest unemployment rates tend to be far from farm locations.

“I think it’s worth flagging that higher unemployment rates generally don’t always map out into higher unemployment rates in the geographic locality that’ll run to farming areas, which tend to be more rural” (Labour expert 2)

National-level

- **Tight margins** caused by the supply chain prevent employers from being able to increase pay to a level that would be considered acceptable to many domestic workers.
- The last few years have seen the recruitment process becoming increasingly more challenging.

“It’s not as easy as it was, believe me, we have to advertise. If you went back two or three years, you didn’t have to advertise at all” (Farmer 1)

- **The cost of R&D into automation and new technologies** is expensive.
- **There exists a lack of available operational labour** in the domestic labour force.

- Largely attributable to the media, seasonal work has been portrayed as back-breaking 'dirty' work, commonly associated with cases of modern-day slavery. While such cases exist, this perception is unfair to many of the more ethical employers who treat their staff well.

- The situation of many migrant workers is simply not comparable to domestic workers in the UK

“If you’re going somewhere outside your home country with the intention of working for a sustained period of time to accrue a pot of money to then bring back, that is different to somebody who is settled and used to living a family life in the UK who is looking for work that will give them a steady financial income that they can rely on year round” (Labour expert 2)

Pertaining to migrant workers in particular:

- Crises such as COVID-19 prevent workers from being able to arrive in the UK (e.g. local/national lockdowns in multiple countries, flights cancelled, an increase in early leavers rate returning home).

“We struggled to get our usual people back. All the planes were being cancelled. They just couldn't get here. It was awful. It also increased our early leavers rate as well, for the same reason” (Farmer 3)

- Fluctuations in the value of the pound sterling can make the UK less attractive as a workplace destination.

- Visa and other fees will be off-putting to potential workers.

- Abolition of the SAWs scheme, Brexit, and limitations of the new immigration laws all contribute to the likelihood of labour shortfalls in the coming years.

- An improvement in the home economy of workers from places like Poland, Romania and

Bulgaria tempts some workers to remain at, or return home for work.

- Competition from other countries e.g. Germany

“Our biggest competitor is Germany. And the problem is in Germany there are lots more tax breaks. They can work more hours than we let them work because of our ethical working laws. So, they can earn a lot of money in Germany” (Farmer 3)

- A change in attitude towards coming to the U.K occurred for some migrant workers post-referendum, due to feeling less welcome or in danger.

- Competition from other industries. Many other U.K industry sectors are also experiencing labour shortages and might be attracting workers away from seasonal farming positions (driven by better pay, working indoors, and being less physically challenging).

“With the immigration system there will be no entry route into lower skilled work for EU nationals from next year. So everyone, whether in care, construction, distribution, agriculture, manufacturing, warehousing, who requires workers in lower skilled roles will be sourcing from the UK resident population and those who have EU settled or pre-settled status” (Labour expert 1)

- Several stakeholders expressed frustration at the fact that farm work was not on the **shortage occupation list**, suggesting that the evidence is repeatedly ignored and that this will be to the detriment of the industry.



2.4 THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF FARM LABOUR SHORTAGES

Interviews revealed that farm labour shortages are likely to have a significant impact on farm businesses in the UK, including the following:

1. Lack of skills will lead to a drop in production.

One employer, following the Feed the Nation campaign in 2020, said:

“Although we might have had access to a domestic labour force because of COVID, they weren’t very good. Whereas migrant labour, let’s take fruit pickers for example, seem to be very good and they tend to be paid very well because they are experts in what they do” (Farming rep 1)

Another stakeholder working for a farming organisation agreed that production would likely be impacted if farms could not find the labour they need.

“There is a risk that, even with maximised efforts, there will be a shortfall. The potential danger there is that impacts on production” (Labour expert 2)

2. Agricultural businesses will be forced to cease production. Secondary data reveals that 65% of members of a Scottish representative organisation for the farming industry stated that they were considering down-scaling operations should issues with labour shortages continue, with 31% believing it might cause them to leave farming altogether (Migration Advisory Committee 2020).

One interviewee stated that the costs associated with labour shortages will contribute to farms going out of business. This employer believed that larger businesses were more vulnerable in some ways than smaller farms, due to lower overheads, claiming, ‘the bigger you play, the further you fall.’

“For very intensive farming it’s absolutely disastrous. You can argue that you’ll replace with robotics but we’re probably 10 years away from teaching a robot to pick a strawberry. So what could happen? What will happen is there will be a shortage of labour so then you’ll have to pay more money, then you get inflation and eventually people will go bankrupt. We’ll import more food and hopefully one day somebody will wake up and say why are we importing all these strawberries? Because you’ve got no workers. Oh, so let’s allow more workers to come in then. And then it will go back round a full circle. However, you’ve got to ask the question, will that strawberry farm be still in business over that period? Will it survive that kind of upheaval?” (Farmer 1)

Other respondents believe that labour shortages will lead to smaller enterprises going out of business. If labour becomes prohibitively scarce, some small farms simply will not be able to afford the automation necessary to keep up.

“Some will go into automation because they recognise the importance of investing in the future but that is capital heavy and at this moment in time that may not be viable or possible to do. We know that smaller farmers who can’t guarantee labour supply will leave” (Farming rep 1)

A representative of a farming organisation described the issue further:

“From an economic point of view if you don’t have enough labour you can’t maintain output and if you can’t maintain output the business will tend to stagnate and in the end that business, rather than continuing to stagnate, it will actually become insolvent” (Farming rep 1)

Such narratives were not limited to large horticultural units, although they were referred to many times. But other sectors of the farming industry are considered to be vulnerable to the same outcome.

“This is going to be fatal to a lot of people in the dairy industry” (Farmer 4)

3. **Businesses will choose to relocate to countries where access to labour is not a problem.** Where businesses have the capacity, many are already considering moving part or all of their enterprise outside of the U.K.

“Businesses that don’t have sufficient labour are going to cease operations, reduce operations [or] look to move overseas” (Labour expert 2)

This kind of decision will be made largely based on the type of crop and proportion of labour required. According to one employer, the labour costs of producing lettuce is half that of that required to produce spring onions.

“Spring onions are difficult to mechanise because they are too soft. So the managing director of that business has already made plans to grow a summer production in [a country in Africa] where he has got the labour” (Farmer 3)

The same employer said that they were also considering moving part of their production process.

“We will have to go to where the people are” (Farmer 3)

One negative implication of such drastic transitions includes the overall impact upon the food security of the country if there is an increased reliance upon imports. Another repercussion of moving food production to other countries is that worker rights in those countries might be less stringent than those currently in place in the UK, putting a greater number of workers at risk of exploitation and affecting the UK consumers’ information regarding food sovereignty and transparency of production (Nye 2017a).

4. **There might be an increase in slavery and worker exploitation within the UK.** A number of organisations, councils, and authorities exist whose

purpose is to ensure that vulnerable and exploited workers are protected. These include the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the Association of Labour Providers (ALP) and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JWCI).

Among other things, these bodies work hard to prevent worker exploitation. This is achieved through a variety of methods, such as identifying victims, licensing businesses, promoting responsible practices, introducing certification programmes, challenging laws and practices affecting worker rights, and providing support to employers and/or workers. Prior to the Morecombe Bay tragedy in 2004, where 23 people died picking cockles illegally, it is estimated that at least 50,000 undocumented workers were employed on farms and in packhouses (Verdon 2017). Gangmasters, people who organise and oversee the supply of workers for casual roles, are now legally obliged to be licenced and the Gangmaster Licensing Authority (GLA) has the authority to inspect the operations of those holding licenses. However, licensing breaches and exploitation of workers is still common, particularly in the food processing sector (GLAA 2020).

Several interview respondents stated that there is a risk that some businesses might be driven to source workers illegally due to the new immigration policy, and if labour needs are not met. By working on a farm without legal status to do so, workers have no rights or support and therefore become vulnerable to exploitation.

“From next year EU workers can come into the UK to visit but they won’t be able to work so we’ll see a massive increase in illegal working, black market working, and exploitative situations because whereas this year those individuals could go and work in agriculture, next year they won’t be able to so that option is removed” (Labour expert 1)

Professor Piotrowicz, in his response to a call for evidence, pointed out that the UK's points-based immigration policy statement refers only once to protecting individuals from exploitation (Defra 2020e). An assessment of the UK seasonal worker pilot (Robinson 2021) states that even those entering under the current permit system are more vulnerable than they would have been under Freedom of Movement in the EU. This is due to permit time-limits restricting their ability to challenge exploitative conditions, visas being tied to one employer, and people illegally exceeding their allotted 6 months becoming prey to traffickers. The report highlights a number of forced labour indicators, such as degrading living conditions, debt at recruitment, absence of contracts, and limited hours and piece rates, and provides a vital insight into where the scheme requires further monitoring and development.

5. Permanent year-round roles underpinned by the seasonal workforce might face the threat of unemployment, exacerbating rural unemployment issues. In the case of one business, almost 2,000 permanent staff would be affected. Outside of all the direct primary production roles, it is likely that many thousands of jobs dependent upon domestic food production such as food processing, manufacturing, and distribution, would be impacted.

6. Labour shortages are already having a negative impact on the mental health of farm owner/operators. Some farm business owners report feeling more exposed to fluctuations and changes in the economy of the industry, increasing the vulnerability of their business.

“Managing directors of big businesses are seriously worried/stressed. I don't want to say they have all got major problems, but I would call it stress. On the back of not knowing whether they are going to have sufficient numbers of people to harvest the crops” (Farmer 3)

Many business owners reliant upon labour cannot be assured that the pool of labour with the necessary

skills will be available to them at the times of year when they need them most. This is likely to create or exacerbate mental health issues in the form of stress, anxiety or depression for some employers. This applies to any sector where farm labour is crucial, not just the larger horticultural units.

“I've lost count of the number of occasions where we've had meetings where someone has said I'm sorry I can't make it because my worker has just left or I've got an issue with a worker or, you know, I haven't got people in today or whatever. So, yeah, labour is always a big issue that plays on people's minds” (Farming rep 3)

7. There will be a need to train more workers, which comes at a cost. Many employers have relied upon a certain percentage of 'returners' each year, with one farmer stating that ten years ago up to 70% of staff were returners. This had declined to approximately 40% post-Brexit, according to that individual, but even lower for others (Pelham 2020). The result is that more time needs to be put into training new workers and productivity is likely to be lower until sufficient skill is developed. Training new workers requires numerous resources, such as money and time, which many farmers, especially those on smaller holdings, cannot afford to give. Fortunately, some initiatives are available to help with such an issue. For example, the new youth employment scheme introduced in 2020, known as Kickstart, will encourage the uptake of apprenticeships in farming, as well as the new Trailblazer Apprentice scheme (see section 3.5.1).

8. In the case of fewer migrant workers, there will be a need to employ more people from the domestic labour force. While this is currently part of the government and industry strategy to make up the

shortfall in labour, it comes at a cost. This is discussed further in section 3.6.

“Recruitment in future years is going to require the industry to do what it can effectively to use resident labour as much as is possible. The stats from this year, would suggest that that is going to be a challenge” (Labour expert 2)

It is extremely unlikely that the domestic workforce will ever be able to fulfil the entire workforce requirements of the agricultural industry (CLA 2019). Hard-to-fill vacancies are common across several sectors, many of which have been populated by migrants in recent years. The number of vacancies in the UK at the end of 2020 for all major employment sectors was estimated to be around 578,000. This figure does not include agriculture, forestry or fishing due to the size of the sectors (ONS 2021). The

seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for November-September 2020, following six months of pandemic-related job losses, stood at 5%, equating to approximately 1,724,000 over-16 year olds classed as unemployed (ONS 2020b). At surface level, it appears that sufficient numbers of workers are available to fill any shortages in farm labour. However, some of the drivers outlined earlier will either deter domestic workers from the roles (geographical location, pay, hours, conditions) or will deter employers from employing British workers (lack of experience and expertise). This is more likely to be the case for seasonal workers than permanent, as only a proportion of unemployed workers will have the capacity to withstand the physical demands required by seasonal work. Opportunities to attract domestic workers to farming jobs do exist, but the execution of such a programme of recruitment will demand effort and will not be without its challenges.

3.RESULTS: THEME 2.

3.1. SOLUTIONS TO THE FARM LABOUR CRISIS.

“The next couple of years are going to be quite tough. We’ve built up a legacy of issues that we need to resolve. I think if we get around the issues properly and we get some proper focus on looking at how we can put agriculture centre stage in terms of opportunities for future employment, then the future does look bright” (Farming rep 3)

Interview findings and analysis of secondary data reveal several important steps which can be taken at farm-level, local-level and national-level to improve the outcome of the current crisis.



3.2. ENSURE THAT THE NEW UK SEASONAL WORKER PILOT SCHEME IS FIT FOR PURPOSE.

It is imperative that the seasonal worker scheme facilitating the movement and recruitment of migrant workers is fit for purpose for all parties. It should be frequently reviewed according to the needs of farm businesses so that numbers available guarantee an avoidance of labour shortfalls. As it stands, the seasonal worker pilot is principally aimed towards meeting labour demands during peak production periods. But businesses relying on seasonal labour *and* permanent labour need to be considered in both the short and long term. Equally as important, however, are the safeguards put in place for the migrant workers participating in the scheme. The pilot scheme requires thorough evaluation and consultation prior to the agreement of a final scheme, with the rights and safety of the employee holding paramount importance, and with worker and migrant organisations integrated into scheme evaluations to ensure a voice for the worker (FLEX 2019).

3.3. MAKE UK FARMS MORE ATTRACTIVE AS PLACES OF WORK FOR ALL WORKERS.

This is relevant to the seasonal and permanent labour force and workers from the domestic and international labour markets, as employers will be competing with each other, other industries and other countries for workers.

Improve pay and conditions on farm

Interviewees recognised that in order for a job to be attractive to a potential worker, whether domestic or migrant, the conditions attached to the job itself require improvement. Pay levels need to be satisfactory, at the very least, but employers recognise that paying an extra 50 pence an hour is enough to attract workers from other farms. For permanent roles, pay must be competitive with other industries.

Accommodation was another area discussed frequently by all stakeholders. For seasonal workers, housing is usually provided by employers and can take the form of either purpose-built brick buildings with shared facilities (kitchen and bathroom) or caravans with shared facilities. One employer stated that caravans, although smaller, tend to be more popular due to the fact that workers share facilities with fewer people.

“If we can build really nice mobile homes then maybe we could actually provide the accommodation that these people are going to be able to afford to live in. There is nowhere to live in our village, absolutely nowhere” (Farmer 4)

Accommodation needs to not only be fit for purpose but also safe, comfortable and wherever possible, offer privacy and space. Current seasonal worker housing is unlikely to appeal to the larger proportion of the domestic workforce.

“If we are going to attract these people then the housing has got to be half decent” (Horticulture expert)

According to one individual working for a farming organisation, ‘there has been an increase in

investment into accommodation’, although there is still ‘room for improvement’. Housing also needs to be considered for permanent workers as many rural areas have priced local workers out of the market.

Hours

Due to the high labour and productivity requirements dictated by the supply chain, it is unlikely that picking jobs will be able to drop the hours needed per person, although one respondent expressed a desire to achieve such a scenario.

“I’d love to see four days on and four days off with no overtime and a full workforce seven days a week. It would be more efficient. I’d be utilising the machinery every day. I’d be equally efficient at 7 o’clock on a Sunday night as I would at 7 o’clock on Monday night at no more costs, but getting that, it’s just not as easy as it sounds” (Farmer 1)

More permanent roles are also associated with long and unsociable hours, related to looking after livestock, seasonal requirements or generally high levels of work to be carried out. However, even some dairy farms have created roles which offer two days off a week, a condition likely to be a prerequisite for many new entrants.

“You’re a livestock farmer, you need somebody 24/7 but do you need the same person? Or could you look at working it so that people can come in and come out and be more flexible” (Farming rep 4)

Benefits

For seasonal workers, apart from the provision of satisfactory pay, workers need access to other benefits through the workplace. Basic provisions such as working WIFI are considered to be of vital importance in attracting workers, but cultural benefits are also cited as essential to enable workers to enjoy a life outside of work. This might take the form of assisting with learning English, providing a

meeting place for social gatherings, and facilitating such gatherings wherever possible. Arranging coach trips off-site (to theme parks, for example) and organising transport to social events if housing is far from the social centre.

“A few years ago, Wi-Fi was a luxury. Now they would not come if you didn't have Wi-Fi. So, every other farm must be providing Wi-Fi. Because they wouldn't get anybody. I think everybody is doing some of this stuff. It is just how much of it and whether it is in the ethos to try and do it, to understand that they are the most important people here” (Farmer 3)

Due to the fact that many domestic workers will still refuse to be accommodated on farm, employers will need to be flexible wherever possible. This might include the provision of parking at work-sites or arranging transport from urban areas.

Training and career progression

“A lot of farmers have got labour cut to such a bare minimum you can't really take on three or four completely unskilled people and train them. Some of the bigger businesses might be able to but a lot of the current typical farming businesses won't. So, if there was something in place to enable people to get the basic skills and then move into agriculture, that is probably the way forward” (Farmer 2)

Training is a key issue for both seasonal and permanent farm work. For seasonal work it is time-dependant and can be costly. And where labour is scarce, this limits the ability of more experienced staff (currently more likely to be migrant workers) to train non-experienced workers.

For permanent workers, Nye (2021) discovered that few farmers were offering additional training to their workers, especially formal courses, which proved off-putting to potential staff. Training employees can be costly, and there is a risk that trained employees might leave a business. Solutions need to be reached whereby employers are able to train workers, which

for some might require a level of subsidisation to remain competitive with larger holdings. This might entail some kind of 'halfway' training scheme similar to the Access to Agriculture scheme run by Harper Adams, a strategy which in principle would also work well for new entrants from the varying sections of society discussed later in report.

“I think that is the issue. There is not a step, there is not a small step, it is like one huge leap” (City farm 1)

It is recognised that formal training does not work for all individuals, regardless of their abilities, therefore practical training can help bridge the gap for capable workers who are discouraged by formal education.

“I think sometimes just the word college puts people off. Often we will have work experience students referred on weekdays. They will come one day a week to us and actually they are amazing. They are really intelligent young people. They just can't focus in that way in school. It is not the way they learn” (City farm 1)

Without the means to develop and progress within a role, individuals are less likely to be attracted to a career in farming. Businesses need to look to offer constant development opportunities for workers, especially permanent, salaried staff.

“So, trying to create a structure which actually encourages people to take a more focused look at either their own skills, but also in the context of our discussion, the skills of their employees and potential recruits, I think is going to be helpful in just generally raising standards. I think also in terms of getting that engagement from workers, that they feel valued, that they feel that their skills are being invested in” (Labour expert 2)

Employers also need to consider their own management and leadership skills. According to one respondent:

“There is a lot of unconscious bias in the industry. I think you’ve only got 35% of the industry trained in management skills. That’s not a lot is it?” (Farming rep 4)

Such skills are regarded as essential, not only for the day-to-day running of a business, but also to ensure staff retention.

“We’re a sector of people that have either fallen into farming or grown up into farming, so we haven’t necessarily got the formal education or the management experience and training. And I think that does play a big part in our retention of people in the industry. We don’t manage people properly. So, we don’t keep them. I think it’s beginning to dawn on people that actually they need to become an employer of choice” (Farming rep 4)

Developing new management and leadership skills is not only beneficial in terms of staff retention and returns but can also improve the work-life balance and mental health of the farmer.

“Those that say ‘well, we can’t afford to invest in staff training’, are also those that say ‘I can’t get any staff to work in my business’” (Farming rep 4)

All skills development should include health and safety.

- AHDB management and leadership courses <https://ahdb.org.uk/pmids>. Accredited programmes, subsidised courses in management and leadership.

Treatment of workers

Many employers in the industry treat their workers very well. However, unfair or poor treatment is still pervasive across certain sectors. This is reported to be particularly the case on some horticultural holdings.

“They can’t change the nature of the work but they can change how they welcome people, how they treat people with fairness and dignity, how their supervisors talk to people, the standard of accommodation, the social aspect of working there, the sense of valuing people” (Labour expert 1)

With regards to migrant workers in particular, one employer commented how:

“The new farm manager treats them with a fantastic amount of respect with absolutely no difference than if they were British workers, and that is what should be happening” (Farmer 4)

Dignity and respect should be implicit throughout the agricultural workforce, regardless of the type of work or sector. Ideas of workers being deferential and compliant are outdated and some employers with excellent reputations acquire this through involving their staff more directly in the business on a day-to-day level.

“You’ve got to embrace the workforce, make the workforce part of the business, give them ownership. When you can get them understanding the challenges, and understanding why I want to do this and why I want to do that or, you know, ‘what do you think?’, ‘do you think we should do it this way’? By embracing the workforce you get far more out of them than just going out in the morning and saying ‘go plough that field’” (Farmer 1)

Improve recruitment methods

Employers need to update recruitment methods to attract new workers. For some, this has meant

leaving behind expensive print advertising and concentrating on developing a social media presence, recognising that word of mouth alone is not a sufficient conduit.

“The one caveat I’ve got with social media is that it’s never going to work for you if you just put an advert when you need a person to work for you. You need a presence. You have to build that reputation and that brand of who you are and what you want to be” (Farming rep 4)

Ensure there is no risk of worker exploitation or illegal activity

Any business employing migrant workers needs to ensure that it is compliant with all current standards and regulations. There should also be widespread adoption of tools designed to prevent social injustice and poor treatment in the workplace, such as the Farm Work Welfare app

3.4. MECHANISATION

Respondents discussed the importance of mechanisation and new technologies in substituting labour, with some farm businesses having invested several million pounds into the process. However, business operators are nervous of the time it takes to research and develop new labour-saving technologies, as well as being tentative to invest further due to the general insecurity they feel around the future of the agricultural industry in the UK as a whole.

“If we’re going to invest I don’t know £3 or £4 million pounds into some automated packing machine, for example, then we need a guarantee that we’re going to have an industry in three or four years so that we can pay the loan off” (Farmer 1)

The subject of mechanisation brought up many issues around affordability and business and holding sizes, with the general consensus being that research and development is geared towards large businesses, potentially pushing smaller businesses out of the market.

“Something like daffodil flower picking where you can’t just go and harvest all the flowers in one go, you know there is an element of selection involved which is something that needs a human to do. So you know we’ve got to be ten years or more from anything robotic even if we’re optimistic” (Farmer 2)

While automation is often wielded as the panacea for all farm labour issues, industry experts and farm businesses alike believe that progress so far has been slow. This is partly due to the fact that the abundance of migrant labour has prevented any overt push to find solutions, but also because further technological advancement is required to develop tools able to pick soft fruits or identify ‘ready-to-be-picked’ produce as rapidly as humans. Currently, humans take 2-3 seconds per picked strawberry compared to a robot’s 8-10 seconds (Ghaffarzadeh 2020). However, it is estimated that the international market for agricultural robotics will surpass a revenue of \$20 billion before 2026 (Infoholic Research LLP 2019).

Eventually, it is expected that automation will replace the bulk of seasonal labour requirements. However, it was revealed in this study that even where some businesses have already invested heavily in technology, it has not automatically led to a decrease in labour requirements.

“Through mechanisation we have improved productivity by 20%. So, we are employing the same number of people that we did ten years ago but we are harvesting 20% more crop. So, in five years we have improved productivity by 20% through mechanisation but it still needs quite a few people” (Farmer 3)

It is therefore vital that considerations around agricultural labour remain at the forefront of policy-making decisions if the industry is to remain resilient, rather than assume that mechanisation will ultimately lead to a requirement for fewer workers. With new technologies arise requirements for new skills, and people will always be needed at some level.

Several respondents expressed the belief that mechanisation and technological advances might ultimately make the industry more attractive to new entrants and that such aspects of farm work should be embraced in promotional campaigns and educational events. However, the RSA report (2019) states the opposite, suggesting it might be more worthwhile to market other aspects of the work in addition to the technological aspects.

3.5. WIDEN THE POOL OF DOMESTIC LABOUR BY PROMOTING THE INDUSTRY AS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO WORK

“The industry as a whole probably needs to be much more open to people from different backgrounds coming into it” (Farmer 2)

The convenience of the SAWs scheme followed by increased access to labour facilitated by EU membership diverted the attention of employers, industry and policy-makers away from potential labour sources closer to home. 2021 will, however, see a substantial drive to recruit workers from within the UK. A number of initiatives already exist which seek to match workers from varying sections of the U.K with employment opportunities on farms. Some projects aim to teach skills associated with agricultural work. For others, the opportunity to rehabilitate and integrate people back into society from different walks of life is an additional driver.

“We very much see that a lot of these people are quite technically minded, and maybe people who have been working in the Forces like the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, if they are coming out, they will bring skills and knowledge. So, we see the industry openings are not just for young people but for career changers as well” (Labour expert 3)

Potential sections of society from which to source domestic labour include:

- New entrants – Youth
- New entrants – Career changers

- Service leavers
- Prisoners and ex-offenders
- Homeless people

Each of the suggestions below are proposed to contribute a small part to the wider solution, with the understanding that it is extremely unlikely that the domestic workforce will be able to fulfil all labour requirements of the agricultural industry.

3.5.1 ENCOURAGE YOUNG ENTRANTS

“There is a job for everybody in agriculture no matter at what level that you want to go in at” (Labour expert 3)

One of the main recruitment drives to solve the labour shortage will target young people. It is believed that a lack of appreciation or awareness exists as to the science, technology, engineering or maths that can be involved in an agricultural career which, along with antiquated perceptions of farming has led to limited promotion of the industry to young people. Farming has traditionally been seen as a ‘less academic’ career route by many of the key figures in children’s’ formative years, such as parents, teachers and careers advisors (Nye 2021), many of whom are yet to catch up with the technological advances and opportunities offered by today’s industry. Every respondent interviewed agreed that young people should be a key cohort for recruitment drives.

How might this be achieved?

“I do think there is a way through education with starting off with kids probably in their pre-teens to think about a career in agriculture and then, working them so they can see some way where they can get the education and the qualifications they need to then come on into agriculture” (Farmer 4)

Education

A study of attitudes and perceptions of careers in agriculture and the food sector discovered that young

people are not fully aware of all of the occupational opportunities available through the agricultural sector (Hughes et al 2015). A large proportion of those surveyed felt that the sector was not attractive to new graduates and 46% suggested that an improvement in advertising and marketing might assist young people’s awareness of the opportunities available in farming. One suggestion has been to introduce agriculture into the curriculum. Some respondents think this best done by an optional qualification. Others think it should be woven into the core subjects, like maths and science, familiarising children with the subject so that all children have the option to develop an interest in farming. A GCSE in agriculture and land use was introduced in 2014, which has gradually gained in popularity since its inception (CEA 2020). It is an optional qualification available to children at secondary education level. Several respondents believe that this poses the risk that only children who already have a connection to farming will opt for such a course, potentially alienating other children who have no farming knowledge. One expert thinks that all children should be introduced to farming much earlier.

“I think we have to start at an early age. We shouldn’t be waiting until they are in their fifth year. We should be starting at primary level and just drip-feeding them information. They are not thinking about leaving school or anything, but [saying] ‘this could be a potential career for you’” (Labour expert 3)

In 2023, a new agricultural qualification under the new T-level system will also be introduced. It offers the technical equivalent to A-levels by combining classroom theory, practical learning and a placement within industry. In Scotland, Rural Skills SCQF qualifications are already available as further education options.

A study of 314 14-15 year olds in Devon (RSA 2019) revealed that less than half had a sufficient understanding of the careers available within the farming sector, with few showing an interest in such careers. Over 50% stated that they would be unlikely to consider a career in food and farming and 60% of students equated roles in farming with low pay, and

long and inflexible hours. This is despite the fact that over half of them had some familiarity with the industry.

In terms of course enrolment, numbers of students enrolling in agriculture and related subjects has increased by 5.4% over ten years (2007/8 – 2016/17), while academic staff employed in agriculture, forestry and veterinary science have increased by 27.9 % over ten years, although as a proportion they only make up 1.3 % of all staff in total (Universities UK 2018).

However, one expert outlined how simply attracting younger people into the industry is not enough, as they are likely to face immediate barriers.

“What are you going to do, give them a power washer for three weeks and expect them to stay with you, when they’ve just had to bike 15 miles to get to you because they’re not old enough to drive a car, and their mum can’t afford to drop them off and pick them up every day. There are so many different things that we have to think about to make ourselves more attractive, and that’s empowering people to do what they want to do in the way they want to do it, as long as it’s delivering the results for the farm” (Farming rep 4)



Diversity

While farming has been a traditionally male career, it is now the case that females are more likely to undertake undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in agriculture and related subjects. However, agriculture is one of the subjects with the lowest proportions of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students at only 5.8 % (figure 7).

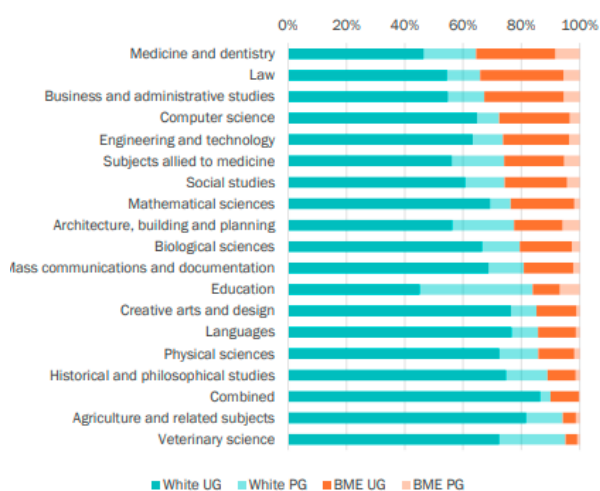


Figure 7. Students by subject of study and ethnicity, 2016-17 (Source: Universities UK 2018).

It is felt that many teachers and careers advisors could play a role in promoting careers in agriculture, especially as many students will seek advice from these groups (RSA 2019).

“Part of the problem is influencing the influencers, in terms of careers advice that somebody might gain at a secondary college level, not necessarily taking agriculture and horticulture into the spectrum of potential careers that people might want to have” (Labour expert 2)

Apprenticeships

“We’ve got to get labour from somewhere. It is not going to get any easier and the more doors we close, the harder it’s going to be” (Farmer 2)

Numbers of apprenticeships in agriculture, horticulture and animal care have remained consistent over the last ten years at approximately 7,000 per year (House of Commons 2020). This is one of the lowest numbers across all industries. However it is unclear whether this is due to a lack of hosts or lack of demand. 63% of apprentices in agriculture are male with only 1% having a BAME background (Department for Education 2020). 53% of agriculture apprentices applied via a personal connection or recommendation, a more likely scenario than in any other industry. Crucially, apprentices in agriculture were more likely to report improved career prospects, doing better at their job, increased job security, and increased job satisfaction than almost all other subjects⁶, and 93% of completers of agricultural apprenticeships were in work in the 2018/19 cohort.

“I think what the government needs to do is introduce an element of incentive to allow employers to employ more apprentices and one way of doing that is to increase the actual wage levels” (Farming rep 1)

Apprenticeships are viewed as an effective route for new entrants to the industry.

Other examples of work placements:

Kickstart Scheme:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-than-19000-jobs-created-by-kickstart-scheme-so-far>

Entrepreneurs in Dairying:

<https://www.rabdf.co.uk/entrepreneurs-in-dairying>

Trailblazer apprenticeships:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/trailblazer-apprenticeships>

Work experience

“Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland is our key dairy area and there was a shortage of dairy workers. There was a project done with school children where they did a day-a-

⁶ Apart from construction and engineering

week on a dairy farm and, they got a qualification at the end of it. And quite a lot of those young people actually went into the dairy industry. They were offered opportunities”(Anonymous)

Work experience is another means of providing training to young people, and can be formal or informal. A variety of schemes attempt to connect young people with farming, be it through industry career days, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and/or certified training courses. Another means of connecting with farming is through volunteering, training and education opportunities on urban city farms.

City farms case study

“There are a lot of young people who are really interested in the animal care side or the food growing side or more practical hands-on work. But there is no progression really because [while] there are quite a few city farms they are all very small” (City farm 1)

The first city farm was established in Kentish Town, London, in 1972. This eventually grew to a number of 65 city farms across the UK. With a variety of purposes, including social and environmental sustainability, city farms also offer opportunities to young people in terms of skills, training and education connected to farming and gardening. There is no standardised approach to youth programmes across the country’s city farms, but many strongly support individuals passing through to develop an awareness of farming and its potential for a career, with one respondent pointing out the gap in the provision of some kind of stepping stone for urban youths from working on city farms to an actual career in farming.

“We would all be well placed to support some sort of move to refer people” (City farm 1)

At one London farm, young people are retained for as long as they want to stay, with one youth having worked on the farm for nine years. They emphasised

the importance of quality of experience over quantity in a child’s development.

“Grant funders like to see big numbers but we are quite keen on that kind of long-term impact and actually, really developing and working with someone” (City farm 1)

One advantage of the placement of city farms is the ability to increase diversity, represent BAME communities, offer a step-up to children from lower income families, and encourage participation, particularly of girls. One respondent pointed out that recruitment tends to be targeted towards these groups.

“We have a waiting list, and we have a criteria, and we do say we will be positively discriminating because we want it to be those who would really benefit” (City farm 1)

One barrier to these urban youths seeing farming as a career seems to be lack of exposure to the potential for career opportunities in farming:

“Very few of them even see that as an opportunity for them to go into that career. The doors are closed before they’ve even considered it” (City farm 1)

A second barrier for those who do develop an interest, and for operators of city farms, is putting in place some method of connecting young people to employers and jobs in industry.

“We’ve got one young farmer who is determined to be a dairy farmer. She has got her heart set on it. She has done loads of research but again it is – ‘well how on earth do I make that start?’ and ‘I can’t afford to go and stay somewhere’ and ‘do I need to do free work experience?’ and ‘how am I going to afford that?’” (City farm 1)

City farms tend to experience high demand for their youth groups, with hundreds of young people having passed through over the years. One respondent

reported that demand was on the increase. They use a variety of recruitment methods via schools, young carer groups, and referrals from inclusion officers. Many families sign up children to toddler groups, which often involve waiting lists. Otherwise, family group visits can be organised, and visiting a farm is free, so those living in the area are often aware of the farm within their vicinity. City farms are a great starting point to spark initial interest and develop experience but due to their generalist approach and size they do not offer a true representation of commercial farming. There is recognition that farmers are not youth workers and would therefore need external support in transitioning young people from city farm/urban areas to rural areas. Currently much of the focus of city farms is on educating visitors about food origin but the potential is there to arrange work placements on farms for interested youths and educate about farming careers more extensively. Some farms do already offer apprenticeships in horticulture or livestock management, diplomas in animal care, City and Guilds accreditation and are AQA unit award scheme centres, but there exists more potential to harness the potential of city farms in the recruitment drive for more workers.

Other ventures helping to facilitate linkages between young people and farming include Lantra Scotland, Developing the Young Workforce (Scotland), Young Farmers Club, Farmer Time (LEAF), the Henry Plumb Foundation, Farms for City Children, and the Access to Agriculture programme run by Harper Adams. The latter organises 10 weeks experience on commercial farms, specifically targeted at students with little to no practical farming experience.

3.5.2. OTHER NEW ENTRANTS (CAREER CHANGERS)

“Quite often when we talk about issues around new entrants to agriculture, we think about new entrants on the basis of them being business owners in their own right, but actually I would say that we need to be thinking about new entrants more

widely and encouraging people down the employment route” (Farming rep 3)

Several programmes have been or are currently being run to assist career changers in transitioning to a career in farming. Organic farming in particular has tended to attract adult career changers in recent years. Examples of opportunities include:

- **Soil Association Future Growers Scheme** (Not currently running).
- **Lantra Scotland** - Actively works in promoting land-based careers, encouraging employers to upskill their employees, and working with industry bodies with initiatives such as pre-apprenticeships and The Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund.
- **The FarmEd Programme**. Specialises in regenerative agriculture. <https://www.farmed.co.uk/programme>

Such schemes can be run as paid or volunteer apprenticeships, training programmes, farm visits, seminars, or mixed formal and informal education. One particular operator reported a high success rate, with 85% of trainees continuing into a career in horticulture post-programme. For those who did not choose a career in horticulture, feedback suggested that this was partly due to low pay.

Incubator and share-farming opportunities

Another means by which to introduce new entrants into farming is using incubator schemes or via share-farming opportunities. The idea of ‘incubator’ schemes is to allow people who are interested in farming to experience a ‘trial period’ of farming, often using a share-farming model. They help people to bypass the usual barriers to farming, such as access to land, financial constraints, and risk, and can offer anything from land, training and mentoring, access to markets, and equipment and business support. Schemes can take the form of a purpose-designed site using land acquired (bought or rented) from a variety of sources, or operational farms willing to act as ‘incubators’ for interested parties (ideal for farmers

who do not have a successor but prefer not to sell the farm). While incubator projects and share-farming schemes are usually considered steps towards becoming a farmer in one's own right, they can also be used as a means by which individuals can straddle the farm-worker/farmer division, and train in all elements of farm work while at the same time gaining dividends from the business itself. Incubator opportunities range from agroecological farming to more commercial systems.

Examples of incubator projects and similar initiatives include:

Farm Start. Run by the Landworkers Alliance, this scheme allows new entrants protected access to training and mentoring, land, markets, business support and equipment:

<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/farm-start-network/>

Fresh Start Land Enterprise: An initiative bringing together entrepreneurs and businesses to use land for unlocking business innovation:

<http://freshstartlandenterprise.org.uk/land-partnership/>

Newbie. Works throughout Europe to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship by developing opportunities for new entrants: <https://www.newbie-academy.eu/>

The Scottish Land Matching Service. Matches new entrants with existing farmers to encourage joint ventures for the benefit of both parties:

<https://slms.scot/>

Several respondents believe that new entrants keen to become land managers should consider the risks and benefits of this, claiming that retaining the status of farm worker rather than being an owner has its benefits.

Small growers are also crucial to act as incubators for new farm workers but for many they simply do not have the capital to pay as much as some of the larger businesses. This presents a clear dichotomy for smaller growers.

It appears that organic initiatives tend to attract more female entrants, while more commercial farming

“I would often say to individuals in their late teens/early twenties, that if they looked at employment as an initial way into the industry, they would be farming much bigger areas with much bigger kit on guaranteed hours with holidays and pay without any risk to their own capital. Get some years under your belt as an employee, maybe do the farm manager route, and then thereafter if you’ve still got a passion to run your own business then go ahead. But if you try to find an opportunity as a young individual on a tenanted basis you’re going to be farming small areas of land with a short length of term at your own risk and working 24/7 to achieve your goal” (Farming rep 3)

‘new entrant’ farming programmes attract more male new entrants, a balance that might require further examination as to how to change the gender balance and widen the pool of potential workers further.

It was reported that an initiative set up as a training provider might be more likely to receive funding, but career changers might not be as interested in achieving new qualifications as younger entrants. Creating a network for initiative participants also proved important among respondents.

“The other thing that I think we did really well is bringing people together. Those groups of trainees and apprentices, a lot of them are still in touch today as friends you know. We built that network and community and supported them as a group through the training schemes” (Career changers 1)

CRITERIA

Candidate requirements vary according to different initiatives, with some demanding greater physical

capability while others asked for some previous experience in land work.

RECRUITMENT

Recruiting new entrants from the pool of career changers is being achieved in a variety of ways. These include the use of mailing list registration, word of mouth, newsletters, online campaigns, and social media. According to one respondent, the most important way to recruit new entrants is to simply make the work more attractive.

BARRIERS TO NEW ENTRANTS – YOUTH AND CAREER CHANGERS

The barriers identified to attracting new entrants into a career in farming, according to respondents, include a lack of promotion of the industry, limited exposure to farming and related career information, and the lack of any obvious pathways into farming for people who are not from a farming background. It is recognised that there exists a difficulty in transitioning from urban to rural locations, for example, particularly without assistance or facilitation.

“I think it wouldn’t be so much that they had the ability to do it, it would be more supporting that kind of journey into the countryside to actually move out, move out of a large town and go and live remotely somewhere, that is quite daunting” (City farm 1)

There is believed to be a significant disconnect between people and farming which further exacerbates the problem of encouraging people to consider it as a potential career.

“I’d hear an adult stood with their child sort of saying, oh look at the, and they didn’t know if it was a donkey or a cow, and it was a donkey” (City farm 1)

Such comments are reported to have come from people of all backgrounds.

Organising schemes to encourage young people and career changers into the farming workforce is a challenge initially, for many of the reasons listed in section 2.3. Further issues reported by individuals directly working in this field include:

- Difficulty finding farms willing to host a work placement.

“We can go out and promote them, but, unless industry steps up to the mark and offers these opportunities then they won’t be there” (Labour expert 3)

- Funding

“Because we didn’t accredit the course we didn’t get any support funding. We got grants from various trusts over the years to help run it but effectively the bulk of the cost had to be passed on to the trainees, so it did end up being quite expensive, and that was a challenge for some people” (Career changers 1)

- The main reasons given by some participants for being motivated to change to a career in horticulture demonstrated a lack of awareness as to what the job actually entails.

“A lot of [the recruits] were quite politically motivated. They cared about the food system and they cared about organic production and they were coming at it from an ethical as well as a personal choice. But again, that doesn’t always mean that the job suits you” (Career changers 1)

- A lack of courses in horticulture have forced larger units to create their own in-house training schemes, leaving smaller farms with a vacuum of educational establishments for new entrant learning.

“The big growers will provide it in house. Partly because what was out there for a while wasn’t really fit for purpose and now there really isn’t anything. Effectively the big growers have had to develop their own schemes. So they’ll have in-house training that effectively delivers that but it will be very much designed around the needs of that company. But for small growers they obviously don’t have the option to do that” (Career changers 1)

Factors that might discourage farmers from investing time or money into training new workers include the vulnerability of the current climate, as well as limits to their own resources.



3.5.3. ENCOURAGE AND FACILITATE THE EMPLOYMENT OF MILITARY VETERANS/SERVICE LEAVERS

"I think the bottom line probably is that the industry wants efficient, reliable workers. And if these schemes can deliver efficient and reliable workers, then that would be of interest" (Labour expert 2)

Over 14,000 people leave the armed forces every year (Gov.UK 2020c) with around 81% of those going into paid employment (Deloitte 2018). The ease with which veterans are able to find work depends upon their location, their willingness to move for work, their salary and career progression expectations, and their gender. For example, women are more likely to experience finding the right job as 'very difficult' compared to their male peers. Service leavers, overall, are well-supported to transition from the forces to civilian life, particularly through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). The CTP is the official provider of resettlement for service leavers, assisting ex-service people to find a new civilian job or career. It is reported that agriculture as a career is currently not well-represented by the CTP.

Numerous initiatives do exist, however, via which service leavers can find work in land-based careers, including agriculture. While most of these initiatives currently operate on a small scale, the operators perceive service leavers as highly suitable potential candidates for a career in agriculture.

"When I started to make connections in the veteran community and the service leaver sector, I realised that there are a lot of people who are interested in getting into agriculture" (Service leavers 1)

Up until recently, matching service leavers to farm positions has occurred rarely. Respondents believe that this is due to several factors, one being that there exists very little information for people in the services regarding the potential of work in agriculture.

"Fourteen thousand people a year leave the armed forces at various stages in their lives and careers and for lots of different reasons, but there is a bit of a blind spot. An awful lot of people don't even consider [farming] because they don't know about the huge range of careers that are available to them" (Service leavers 3)

SUITABILITY

"One of the highest skills they have got is being able to deal with a situation with the tools that are provided, which is pretty much exactly the same as if you find a cow in a river or a machine breaks or you get stuck. It is having that ability to think on their feet, stay calm in situations, and understand what is going on" (Service leavers 1)

One initiative operator described the matching of service leavers to a career in farming as a 'match made in heaven', a sentiment echoed by several other respondents in the study. This is due to the discipline, experience and training in abilities such as 'thinking on your feet' that is required of the services, as well as physical skills and training in health and safety awareness.

"Problem solving, motivation, being able to stay on task. Working on their own or working in a team. Brilliantly good communicators. I think it just maps over absolutely perfectly" (Service leavers 2)

Service leavers are known for being able to maintain calm in difficult situations, for their punctuality, dedication and reliability, and for their skills in training others.



Figure 8. Words used by respondents to describe service leaver qualities relevant to a career in farming.

Service leavers are recognised as being particularly well-qualified for management roles in farming due to their leadership skills and ability to train others.

“Everyone [who] leaves the forces, has lots of experience teaching because the armed forces are one of the best trained organisations in the country, which means we all train each other, we all know how to teach” (Service leavers 3)

One initiative operator believed such abilities should encourage employers to fast-track service leavers to management roles in their business as a result of such skills.

“So I call those sort of roles gateway roles, where 60 to 80% of the job is all the soft skills that they’ve got from their leadership and professional training armed forces, and the 20 to 40% sector knowledge they can learn on the job. Whereas, of course, most employers not just in the land-based sector but most employers, recruit on the basis of you must have five, ten, twenty years sector experience before we will consider you for this management role” (Service leavers 3)

LIKELIHOOD THEY’LL BE EMPLOYED BY FARMERS?

The perception of farmers regarding the suitability of ex-military individuals to a job in farming varies significantly among farm business owners, initiative operators and other stakeholders. According to one respondent:

“People are sceptical but they also need manpower” (Service leavers 3)

Initiative operators are optimistic that the demand and openness to employ is already there among many farmers.

“The agricultural industry is open to taking people on who have no experience or pre-conceptions about how things should be done. A lot of farmers I talk to, say, ‘if I have got someone who is basically completely new to things it may take them longer to get into the job and up-to-speed, but they will be doing the job as I want it done myself’” (Service leavers 1)



Such a change in perception is attributed to the perfect storm of circumstances occurring in unison politically, economically and culturally, further heightened by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have got huge change in a paradigm of farming and land management in this country, through Brexit and then through the heightened awareness nationally over this [COVID] crisis-agriculture bill-food localisation narrative taking hold in the country. More people [are] eating more at home and therefore more familiar with how their food is produced” (Service leavers 3)

One respondent felt that service leavers were suited not only to more permanent careers in farming but might also be able to assist with any shortfall in seasonal labour, although there is no evidence to suggest that this is likely to be a popular idea.

“There is the proof through the seasonal work farm discussion this year that the majority of British workers aren’t up to working outdoors, whereas you know, everyone understands that armed forces people are resilient and robust, even if they don’t understand anything else about them” (Service leavers 3)

It is recognised that an initial investment, mostly of time, will be required to help workers develop the necessary skills in farming but that such an investment is ultimately worth it.

“A farmer needs to accept that there is an excellent pool of talent, a consistent pool of talent coming in, who may require a little bit more training or may not be as quick or as knowledgeable about either working with cattle for example or sheep, or hitching up an implement. There are people out there who might just need a little bit more coaching or a little bit more support. However, the long-term rewards are potentially huge” (Service leavers 1)

There appears to be a lack of awareness among some respondents as to what service-leavers can offer the agricultural industry as workers. Some initiative operators say that there is a risk of perceiving the move towards more service leavers in farming as being a ‘charitable’ drive.

“I very deliberately don’t focus on [social responsibility] because the charity sector focusses on that and I do not like, what I see as, an over-focus on charitable needs on a minority of service leavers which is dominating the narrative in this country. I look at this as a career change for people who have decided to leave the forces for reasons other than medical reasons and if you look at the incidents of suicides/PTSD, the incidence levels in the armed forces veterans community, it is currently less than in the farming community. So I don’t think it is a helpful narrative. It is also not a helpful narrative because obviously it makes it more difficult for people to agree to employ forces leavers because they think they are all damaged” (Service leavers 3)

The farm business owners interviewed for this study said that in principal they are open to the idea of employing service leavers. One farmer viewed this in terms of rehabilitation rather than a business move.

“I would love to try and find a way to use it to rehabilitate servicemen. I feel like they have been given a hell of a bad stick in life as well. So, I would be 100% up for trying to do that” (Farmer 4)

An industry stakeholder also viewed this employment route in terms of rehabilitation and social responsibility. Instead of looking at employing service leavers as a charitable act, initiative operators would prefer that the focus remained on the potential for farmers to benefit from the positive qualities that can be brought to their business by following this employment route.

Evidence that the matching process works!

‘An individual who was in the process of leaving the army after a 22-year career driving, then commanding, and finally instructing others on main battle tanks really wanted to move into doing something with tractors. Tank crews must be able to carry out first-line maintenance and fault-finding on their machines and so he had a good understanding of such transferable matters as morning safety checks, engines as enclosed service packs and the difference between managing mechanical elements and computerised management systems. Working with a large manufacturing company, a partner organisation identified the opportunity to give him work experience in two areas: as a field service engineer and as an instructor on in-house training courses for such engineers. He thrived in the field engineer role and is now very happily and successfully employed in this role’.

RECRUITMENT

“We should be looking for the right people in the right roles doing the right stuff, and we should, as an industry, be benevolent, open-handed and encouraging those people who are less employable in any sector to see our industry as a place where they can thrive and be useful to society”
(Farming rep 3)

The lack of provision by the CTP is currently perceived to be one of the most significant barriers to recruitment of service leavers to agriculture, and has been referred to as a ‘blind spot’. Initiative operators, therefore, currently have to rely on alternative recruitment methods such as word of mouth, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn), formal and informal networking events, and recruitment fairs. Once initial interest has been sparked, initiatives then introduce potential employees to land-based roles through events such as insight days, or week-long information, experience or training programmes, some of which eventually lead to short or long-term work placements on farms.

While there appear to be no specific criteria in place as to who might be targeted for work, operators of initiatives look to gather as much information as possible about potential recruits according to their location, their family situation and how well they might match with an employer.

“Depending on where the service leaver is based or wants to be based, I can then start to connect up to farmers either through social media or farmers that have registered via the website, and see what opportunities are available. Or, likewise, if a company or a farm is looking to recruit someone from the armed forces, then I work the process backwards and see who is interested in maybe moving to a new part of the country, or is in that area looking for work” *(Service leavers 1)*

It is also crucial that the employing farmer gains some knowledge regarding service leavers before agreeing to employ them. By gaining an understanding of the process of transition from the armed forces to civilian life, employers can not only better appreciate their employee but potentially assist with the transition, such as with housing.

The success stories demonstrate the likelihood that a farmer who has had a positive experience with a service leaver is to be more open to employing others in the future. And according to one respondent, this is particularly important as:

“If an employer has already got someone from the armed forces then already you have a support network for someone new coming in” *(Service leavers 1)*

Another example of success!

A young woman who had been an officer in the Royal Navy was interested in farming but did not know how to enter the industry as a worker. She attended an initiative training week.

"She actually volunteered and she was milking every morning and she fell in love with working with cows on that course."

Afterwards she temporarily found work in another industry, during which she attended another land-based training day.

"Through the various insights, literally, that she got there she realised that what she really wanted to do [was farm] and she could pursue that career. Somebody got in touch with me to find a dairy manager for their farm. I thought of [this young woman] but there was absolutely no way she was qualified to go and do that job."

However, with the help of the initiative operator, the farmer agreed to let her spend a week working on the farm.

"By day four the farmer was so impressed with her understanding of how to manage staff, her ability to learn the books, her project management and her organisation, all the skills we talk about that armed forces people have, that he employed her."

And the rest is history!

"She is now known as the General Manager of that farm which is extraordinary. The farmer has since come back to me and asked me to help him find other staff. So it is absolutely the case study of what, I think, we can achieve with the military community and farming and the wider land-based sector but it needs management. If she had applied for that job [on her own] she wouldn't have got anywhere near it."

BARRIERS

***"There is this blind spot. Farming until the last few years has been such a closed business and because it is small businesses that have, you know, generation upon generation, they haven't gone outside the local community to look for staff"* (Service Leavers 3)**

Apart from the obstacle presented by lack of representation by the key resettlement programme, the CTP, other barriers to recruitment reported by respondents include the lack of exposure to, and knowledge of, opportunities in agriculture.

Further potential barriers mirror those mentioned in section 2.3, such as lack of attractiveness of the career based on pay, conditions, and the potential

culture disparities that might arise on-site (e.g. working alongside migrant workers speaking a different language). But over and above these, the recruitment process of the farm businesses themselves can also act as a constraint.

***"I uncovered several barriers to the military "going into this career" which is effectively stopping them. Financial, systematic, but mostly a lack of information and a lack of informal mentors to follow into the sector. They are fascinated. They didn't know it was an option and once you show them what is possible, they are very interested, and we've placed people as a direct result of them attending"* (Service leavers 3)**

Deloitte (2018) also discovered other barriers which might potentially affect recruitment drives matching service leavers to agricultural positions. These include

the fact that the majority of veterans would not consider moving for a job opportunity, and that they place significant value on jobs offering work/life balance with opportunities for career progression, not necessarily attributes associated with a career in agriculture.

Issues reported to have been experienced by some initiatives so far include a lack of organisation or mismanagement, initiative profiles not being sufficiently established to gain levels of funding required, poor financing strategies inhibiting effective delivery of the programme, and a lack of network and/or connections.

“It needs a lot of work and that is why it hasn’t been done before, because it is actually very difficult” (Service leavers 3)

The UK is believed by some respondents to be behind a number of other countries where such initiatives are already in place and proving successful.

“In terms of career change into agriculture the US is streets ahead. I think in this country, as we’ve discussed, we are missing a trick” (Service leavers 3)

Due to the skills, experience and career expectations held by service leavers upon departing the armed forces, it is unlikely that they would contribute significantly to filling the seasonal worker shortfall expected to occur in the coming years. However, for more permanent, skilled and managerial positions, they hold the potential to be excellent recruits to the industry.

Example of initiatives matching service leavers with employment opportunities in farming include:



➤ <https://forcesfarming.co.uk/>



➤ <https://ruralink.org.uk/>



➤ <https://highground-uk.org/>



• <https://www.farmable.co.uk/>

3.5.4. ENCOURAGE AND FACILITATE THE EMPLOYMENT OF EX-OFFENDERS

“You need to believe that good people can do bad things and it’s ridiculous to throw them on a scrapheap for life and assume that they’re worthless and they’ve got nothing to offer. Some people do deserve a second chance” (Ex-offenders 2)

The current prison population in the UK stands at just under 90,000 people, with each prison place costing at least £30,000⁷ per person per year (Sturge 2020). Approximately 60,000 prisoners are released every year (Gov.UK 2020b) with a reoffending rate of roughly 30% in the first 12 months. Leaving prison can be extremely challenging for prisoners, as they try to find housing, employment and attempt to rebuild their lives. Entering employment as an ex-offender can not only be difficult but also daunting for

⁷ This number varies across England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as prisons are devolved.

the prison leaver. Facilitating the process is therefore crucial as 'employment is thought to be one of the biggest factors in curbing recidivism' (Cunningham 2017: 1).

Several initiatives are already in place in the UK to assist prisoners or ex-offenders to enter the workplace on their release. All of these initiative operators felt strongly that facilitating a match between employers and prison leavers was important not simply from the perspective of social responsibility but also because they believe that if the process is conducted effectively, ex-offenders can make exceptional employees.

“If you look at reoffending as a cost to the taxpayer, it’s estimated that it’s costing the UK taxpayer eighteen billion pounds a year. It’s been proven that employment is a key factor to reduce reoffending. So, the way we look at it, is that anything we can do as a business to divert people away from committing crime, that means that our communities are safer, that means there are fewer people in prison, that means prisoner’s families aren’t impacted by people going into prison and the taxpayer saves. So it’s a win-win. The second reason we do it, and again we don’t shy away from this, is that the people that we employ with an offending background are just great colleagues and a huge asset to us” (Ex-offenders 2)

One particular business initiative working with ex-offenders trains approximately 1,000 people a year, with 200 of those going into an employed position and the rest continuing training or being supported into further education. The operator of this particular programme claims that it is important to begin the training early so that not only those who are leaving prison immediately are 'work ready' but also those who still have a portion of their sentence left to serve can gradually become 'work-ready' over time. Well-established initiatives with the experience and

structures in place to deliver high numbers moving through their programmes demonstrate that such initiatives can be hugely impactful.

Until recently, few efforts have been made to actively match ex-offenders with careers in agriculture in the UK. The ex-offender employment initiatives that already exist tend to be operated by large commercial businesses who have developed their own recruitment model, or they operate in non-agricultural industries such as construction. The government has run a variety of resettlement schemes assisting with employment, with the most current New Futures Network following on from the RSA's Future Prison Project. The New Futures Network is an initiative set up by the Ministry of Justice which seeks to connect employers and ex-offenders across a range of industries. It acts as a broker between prisons and local and national partners in various sectors, rather than being a service provider, and is the platform best placed to connect ex-offenders with employers in the agricultural sector and related industry partners. To date, few matches have been made between farmers and ex-offenders but agriculture is included under the remit of the new scheme.

SUITABILITY

“These people have often been turned down again and again. They’re aware that they’ve got a criminal conviction. They’re aware that they’re gonna have to disclose it to employers and often they’re not gonna be even considered for employment. Now, because we don’t do that, we give them that opportunity, we give them that trust, they tend to be fiercely loyal and they don’t wanna bite the hand that feeds them” (Ex-offenders 2)

Initiative operators were unanimous in their belief that ex-offenders have the potential to be excellent employees. And according to respondents with loyalty comes honesty.

“Once they have decided that they want to change their lives they will be more devoted and more determined than anybody. So, they will be fantastic employees” (Ex-offenders 3)

Similarly to service leavers, there was a tendency among some respondents to regard the employment of ex-offenders purely as a charitable or socially responsible act. While the latter might be important to some employers, there is a risk that adopting such a stance will prevent people from recognising the opportunities and potential that exists in the employment of an individual who was once in prison.

RECRUITMENT

“I would have thought that if you were in the right place and you were offering people a job in the right way [this could be effective]. Maybe that is a bit of work that would have to be done within the agricultural industry in terms of the way they recruit” (Ex-offenders 3)

Recruitment of ex-offenders can occur via several routes. The first is through the provision of training on ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence). This usually follows a stringent interview process, including a risk assessment, and helps to identify the suitability of the individual to the work. Prisoners leave prison for the day, complete a full or partial day of work, and then return to prison at the end of the day.

While not all initiatives rely on ROTL, those that incorporate it into their recruitment process report it as being very effective.

“We have huge success with that. The vast majority of people who join us on ROTL end up working in our business post-release” (Ex-offenders 2)

Secondly, where the above options are not viable, due to either prison sentence length, or the type of category of the prison, recruiters base their recruiting decisions on interviews and risk assessments alone.

Thirdly, referrals from police, probation officers and other third party organisations assist with the matching process. And by building up a reputation as a business which is open to employing ex-offenders, on occasion individuals with a criminal record might contact a business directly looking for employment.

Finally, a ‘training ground’ can be set up within the prison grounds or on a prison estate and an experienced manager (of farming or pertaining to whichever industry is relevant) teaches the necessary skills to those prisoners who are interested/selected to take part. Obviously for some industries this is easier than others. Due to the fact that so many prison farms have been closed, this might not be as easy as it once was for the farming industry.

Prison farms and horticultural training units

Prison farms used to be a common feature of many prisons across the country. The first farm was set up in 1852 at HMP Dartmoor (Devine-Wright et al 2019) and between the 1960s and the 1990s, agriculture and horticulture played an important role in prison industries. At one point, 2,000 prisoners were employed annually, generating a profit of over £3 million and feeding up to 47,000 inmates three times a day (Wright 2017). As of the 1990s, and for a number of reasons, prison farms gradually began to close. The closure of local slaughterhouses (and thus increased transport costs), a change in animal welfare regulations, staffing costs, the diversion of resources away from qualitative assets (such as the benefits attained through farm work) to core services, the urban nature of the majority of prisoners, and the decreasing viability of agriculture as a career as the demand for labour decreased, as well as more stringent criteria for work-release causing labour shortages within the prison farms all led to these closures. According to Wright (2017), it was also the



introduction of home detention curfew (HDC) which dramatically cut the number of eligible prisoners. In 2001 there were 21 farms and today there are only five, although there exist a greater number of horticultural projects still running.

CRITERIA

Different initiatives adopt different criteria in the recruitment and employment of ex-offenders. For example, some will not employ sex offenders, those who have committed terrorism offences, or arsonists. However, all respondents who have experience working with ex-offenders were keen to state that every offence has its own range of severity, therefore those at the lower end of that range might be considered. Recruitment should, therefore, be considered on a case-by-case basis.

How criteria is ultimately defined for the purpose of recruitment can be an extremely sensitive issue. Those responsible for organising the matching process between worker and employer must take into account the environment, other workers on-site, and the perception of consumers, among other things.

“We are a commercial business and we’re not afraid to say that. So, we’re not do-gooders. We aren’t a charity. We believe in what we do. We think it’s the right thing to do for society and it’s obviously fantastic for the people that we help and their families, but we have got a reputation to consider” (Ex-offenders 2)

Recruitment should be targeted according to the requirements of the business, say respondents. A retail-focussed business is, for example, likely to need different skills and personality traits than an agricultural business.

“It’s important to note that different employers and businesses have completely different requirements” (Ex-offenders 2)

LIKELIHOOD THAT EX-OFFENDERS WILL BE EMPLOYED BY FARMER

“I think if it was being put forward as the entire solution to the problem of labour then that would probably be more likely to land poorly than if it’s being put as a part of the mix” (Labour expert 2)

The farmers we spoke to during this study were open to the possibility of employing ex-offenders, though often with the caveat, ‘it would depend what they’d done’. However, they expressed concern about having to do so with any lack of support.

“I would want an awful lot of support. I wouldn’t just want to be left with them. I would almost want to employ them off of an organization that is placing past offenders and taking a sort of paternal interest in their continuing life and careers. No farmer has got the time or the energy to start getting involved in all sorts of social problems and so we would need support from an organization who looked after those aspects of that job” (Farmer 4)

Other workers within the business would also need to be considered. Some initiatives are very transparent about their employment of ex-offenders, while others believe that it is up to the worker to disclose their history when they feel ready. This potentially poses ethical dilemmas.

“It ain’t a problem to me but it would be a problem for a lot of my workforce, yeah it would. It depends, it depends what they’ve done” (Farmer 1)

However, experienced initiatives who have been successfully assisting ex-offenders in their transition from prison to the workplace state that issues with other workers might not be as commonplace as might be assumed.

Another respondent believes that such a situation should be dealt with on a case by case basis.

“They said ‘we’re gonna be doing this and everybody please be on board’ and lo and behold everybody was. It was a huge success. We’ve just done it now for such a long time, it’s so embedded in our culture, it’s completely normal. We very, very carefully choose the right people. So, these people just come in and just slot right into our business. We don’t hear a peep out of them” (Ex-offenders 2)

HOW MIGHT IT WORK?

For initiative operators wanting to facilitate, or farmers considering, the employment of ex-offenders, a number of factors require consideration. These include:

- Attempts to employ ex-offenders would benefit from the aid of an experienced facilitator (unless the employing business is large and has the resources to specifically recruit and train prisoners).
- Establishing a good relationship with the prisons involved is crucial.
- Beginning the process long before individuals are due to leave prison is helpful.

“The idea is your farm if you like or your transition, whatever it was, would be not just starting from the moment they walk out, but beginning that work inside and that is critical for two reasons. One is you want to kind of know your people. You want to have a sense of risk and capability and so on, but the other part is you have to have the prison on board, you know? Prison governors are extraordinarily powerful” (Ex-offenders 1)

- Prisoners need assistance with other aspects of their transition over and above simply being provided with employment.
- Being up-front from the beginning as to what the job entails and terms of pay and conditions.

“I think that real clarity managing expectations on both sides so everyone is really clear. [Meaning] there is a job description and people know what they are coming out to, they know how much money there is, people know what the progression is” (Ex-offenders 3)

- Career progression should be offered where possible.
- Buddy systems are useful if planning to employ more than one ex-offender.

“They have got buddying systems where, when people come out, one of the guys on-site will look after them and make sure that they are okay, and they know how to deal with people from disadvantaged groups or prisoners or anything else” (Ex-offender 3)

- Introducing employers to prisoners prior to release, as well as to other farm businesses already employing ex-offenders or prisoners. The latter point is particularly relevant as peer-to-peer sharing is extremely important in agricultural circles.

- Make sure any strategy is realistic.

“I think that the challenges are going to be regional. I was getting quite involved with whether we could send people to fruit pick, for example. In that case you would be putting people in a caravan for an indeterminate period of time for a job that wasn’t suitable because there would be no support. She said ‘it is a bit like putting them back in prison. They are going to be stuck in this thing with somebody they might not like and they won’t have immediate access to anybody and quite frankly I don’t think it is a great idea’. However, if you said that you would possibly relate it to regions where there are prisons or there are specific organizations, I think you would be in a very good position” (Ex-offenders 3)

- If recruiting directly from within prisons, you need an efficient strategy in place to streamline the process and ensure that only those deemed as ‘work ready’ are presented as interviewees. This can be achieved by giving the prison a list of criteria or a job specification and asking them to match potential individuals as closely as possible to these criteria.

Any strategy to match employers to prisoners or ex-offenders needs some commitment from the farming industry itself to go in and promote careers, as few prisoners today will be aware of the potential of agriculture as an industry within which to work.

Elsewhere in the world such initiatives have been effective. New Zealand’s Department of Corrections, for example, offers training in agriculture (among other industries) via prison farms in the form of dairy farms, dry stock farms, piggeries, sheep farms and several nurseries (Department of Corrections 2021), training approximately 400 prisoners a year. Prisoners are able to gain a vocational qualification following

their training. The farms also run at a significant profit.

BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT OF EX-OFFENDERS TO FARMS

Several barriers exist which potentially impede the recruitment of ex-offenders to farming businesses. The first of these is **stigmatisation and discrimination**. As one interviewee said:

“Employing ex-offenders is not a binary issue, it’s a significantly complex issue that requires a business to make significant policy decisions. So if you’ve got two hundred workers sharing accommodation and things start going missing and you’ve employed people who have been convicted of burglary then this raises questions. However, I’ve painted a very negative picture there. If you actually look at the positives of employing ex-offenders that’s another issue but that can only come down to individual farm decisions” (Labour expert 1)

Such stigmatisation might not only come from the farmer but also from their employees, the surrounding community and even some prison workers. There is a belief among interviewees that not everybody is pro-rehabilitation when it comes to offenders .

“The critical question is what are prisons for? They have these three objectives in the documentation: public safety, so they are there to serve the public [and] they are there to provide security, so just keep people in. And they are there to rehabilitate. And the tensions between those is where all of those sit” (Ex-offenders 1)

However, it is believed that the majority of prison workers are on board with resettlement programmes and employment assistance.

Another barrier to recruitment is the fact that **prisons tend to be too far away from agricultural workplaces.**

Finding sufficient funding.

Not enough prisoners/ex-offenders available to fill all seasonal roles.

“I’ve had questions before on ex-offenders or even current prisoners being suggested as potential sources of labour for seasonal roles, but I think the actual current prison population didn’t equate to the overall workforce needs” (Labour expert 2)

Farm labour is sometimes associated with ‘hard labour’. It is crucial that any attempt to rehabilitate prisoners into a life outside of prison through a career in farming be achieved through providing education, training, qualifications and opportunities for long-term, fulfilling employment, rather than trying to transfer the same pay, conditions, potential for exploitation and limited opportunities suffered by migrant workers to another societal group treated as ‘low-status’. Physically capable, serving prisoners might act as one potential solution to fill seasonal positions, should the individual seek to earn some extra money and be consenting. But forced labour should never be considered as an option to solve the seasonal farm labour crisis.

Some states in America use ‘convict leasing’, where prisoners’ labour is leased to private parties (including agricultural businesses). Unfortunately many of these workers are underpaid or unpaid and the process is described as ‘a sickening replication of the recently abolished relationship between slave and slaveholder’ (Whitehouse 2017: 95). Convict-leasing is controversial and the UK should be wary of attempting to go down this route. It has been suggested that prisoners on early release, community sentences, or reaching the end of their sentence could be offered paid seasonal work on farms, but due to the nature of the work, this must be voluntary.

Also, those who have already examined this premise as a possibility recognise that numbers of suitable candidates would not make up the shortfall. It should be ensured that opportunities offer potential for ex-offenders to find long-term employment, not a chain gang solution to seasonal work.

A strategy such as that used by some US states promoting firefighter jobs to prisoners and leavers might be more advantageous, where incentives such as shortening prison terms as a condition of employment, expunging records, and/or waiving parole are employed (Mossberg and Almasy 2020). This way, there is the potential for both employers and workers to benefit.

“If you were going to do it as a farming community, then you would get fantastic credibility for it, if they started a programme which was a kind of ‘from prison to farming’ or whatever you would call it” (Ex-offenders 3)

3.5.5. HOMELESS

There are currently very few projects aiming to match homeless people to work on farms. Some of the existing projects include:

- **St Mungo’s** ‘Putting down roots’ project: <https://www.mungos.org/tag/putting-down-roots/>
- **Springstart** – A new project with the objective of matching homeless people to roles on farms: <https://www.springstart.org.uk/>
- **Project Speranta**: <https://labourproviders.org.uk/project-speranta-a-labour-sourcing-opportunity-for-alp-members/>

While many homeless individuals are categorised as vulnerable for a variety of reasons, the latter two initiatives are focussed on matching people to full-

time jobs on farms, rather than acting wholly as social enterprises for rehabilitation.

“It wasn’t intended to provide a solution for those with, for example, serious addiction or mental health issues” (Labour expert 1)

According to one respondent, the benefits of employing homeless people include the fact that:

“It would have a dual purpose of satisfying a labour shortage and also addressing a social challenge with regard to a proportion of those who would otherwise be homeless in the UK” (Labour expert 1)

One project in its infancy was described in the following way:

“It was for those individuals who come to the UK without much of a plan and there are loads of them like that, without much money, to find themselves in a situation where they could go down that path [of illegal labour] and find themselves exploited and at risk. Or, you can direct them into a channel where there is the opportunity for work, to earn money, to work via a GLAA licenced labour provider, to work in an environment where there will often be many of their own nationality working there and somewhere where there is accommodation” (Labour expert 1)

There is still much work to be done with this category of people and the likelihood is that, alone, such initiatives will contribute very low numbers of workers to the industry. However, as a small part of the solution, they present an excellent opportunity for potential workers and employers alike.

Many respondents felt that the decision to employ people from alternative backgrounds would likely not be sustainable if driven purely by the desire to do so from a social responsibility perspective. However,

many industries are now either compliant with social responsibility in the workplace or choose to engage for myriad reasons.

3.6. RESPONDING TO A CRISIS: THE PICK FOR BRITAIN SCHEME

“It didn’t work as well as everybody thought it was going to work but it did work to an extent. The problem that we had was that there was a large turnover of domestic staff” (Farming rep 1)

What was it?

Pick for Britain began as a targeted campaign, publicly endorsed by HRH the Prince of Wales. Its objective was to try and rally a domestic ‘Land Army’ to help harvest fruit and vegetables that would normally have been picked by the migrant workers apparently unable to enter the country due to COVID-19. Second world war rhetoric was woven throughout the messages sent out to the British public and due to the large proportion of workers who had been furloughed, the labour market seemed ripe for the picking.

Did it work?

Due to the number of recruitment platforms involved, as well as the private recruitment practices of some farm businesses, actual numbers of applications, interview acceptances and posts taken up by domestic workers are difficult to gauge. One organisation stated that 50,000 people expressed an interest in farming roles, but only 150 jobs were accepted. Another received 36,000 applications but only 6,000 made it to interview (Adkins 2020). One of the farm businesses we interviewed employed up to 500 UK residents for seasonal jobs over the course of 2020, while a farm industry expert referring to an industry survey stated that the workforce in 2020 was made up of 11% U.K resident labour market, an increase from 1%, the estimated percentage of domestic workers in seasonal jobs prior to 2020. Defra’s Workforce Planning and Access to Labour team suggest a wider range of 10-35% of the

domestic workforce fulfilling edible horticulture roles in 2020 (Defra 2020d). Feedback from interested parties, employing farmers, third party organisations

Why was it not entirely successful?

According to respondents, the following reasons affected the ability to recruit domestic workers during the Pick for Britain campaign:

- Those applying were not made sufficiently aware of exactly what the job entailed. This partly counters the argument that Brits are 'lazy'. Several respondents referred to the fact that a lack of awareness of what a picking job entails (early starts, long hours, physical labour, meeting targets) discouraged people who had not previously been made aware of these facts prior to taking up a post.

“They had no idea what they were letting themselves in for” (Farming rep 1)

- Furlough acted as a safety net for many of those who had shown initial interest.

“We did have quite a few phone calls of people looking for work. But they didn't materialise once the work started, they didn't want to do it, changed their minds or were doing something by the time it got to about June” (Farmer 2)

- Timings of the Pick for Britain campaign and actual demand for labour did not match up.
- Rural locations and lack of parking acted as a deterrent.
- On-site housing was not appealing to the majority of the domestic labour force.
- Lack of skill/experience meant that some workers were actually damaging crops so could not be kept on, e.g. strawberries (leads to wastage and threatens contracts with customers).
- While some employers were keen to increase numbers of domestic workers, others

and recruitment agencies also varies, but the overall sense is that recruiting and retaining domestic labour is a challenge.

preferred to 'hold out' for migrant workers to return.

- Restrictions eventually eased, opening up passage for migrant workers to travel, and decreasing the need to recruit local workers.

But was it really that bad?

Not all farm businesses reported a negative experience.

“It was great. We had an amazing response to our Feed the Nation campaign” (Farmer 3)

According to this particular respondent, in order to ensure the use of domestic labour worked, it was necessary to change the system of recruitment and working process. They said that interviews, which would normally be ten minutes long for migrant worker, would take half an hour for domestic workers, which when interviewing for thousands of positions is extremely time consuming. But this allowed the employer to describe the job and answer questions, ultimately discouraging any applicants not interested in the role from moving forward with the application process.

“Once we had done that people did turn up. And a lot of other growers have reported that people didn't turn up. But because we spent a lot of time with them pre-offer stage. We got to that stage and offered them a job, and they did come” (Farmer 2)

However, productivity rates dropped to approximately 60% of what would normally be expected and staff retention tended to be much shorter, at around 30 days rather than 6 months. Students apparently arrived with a set value to earn, after which they left, and as other industries slowly opened up again, workers gradually drifted back to jobs which they were more familiar with.

One employer reported having employed a small number of 'great workers' from the domestic labour market and would happily do so again. But the key to success, according to this employer, was that they needed to be extremely flexible as few workers wanted to live on-site. Many would drive long distances and required parking which had to be supplied.

“The whole management team had to motivate people in a different way. We redeployed, so our head of learning and development and our training officer went out to be like harvest managers. Out there dealing with queries and helping with communication, training constantly, sorting out where they were going to park their cars. Everything” (Farmer 3)

The same recruiter would, in hindsight, adapt their recruitment process, but is keen to continue trying to employ domestic workers for picking jobs in the future. The most important thing, according to this respondent, is identifying the motivating factor for applying for the job.

“If I was to change anything, in terms of an interview question, [I'd ask] ‘why do you want the job’? Last year [the answers] would have been: ‘I really want to help out’, ‘we really need to get lovely fresh healthy food on the shelves’, ‘I really want to be part of the food supply chain’. That is what we would have expected. Whereas if it was now I really would want people to be saying ‘I want to earn money’. You know? ‘I really want to work hard and earn money’. There is a kind of different motivation isn't there?” (Farmer 3)

The same respondent described how using domestic labour affected costs.

“We were having to give them an extra three pounds to pay the minimum wage. In terms of work rate, they would only earn five pounds [So, it was more expensive as an exercise to do that?] Yes because we were having to contribute three pounds for every hour that a British person worked” (Farmer 3)

Another interviewee believed that filtering for the right candidates should occur at the point of interest, such as the Pick for Britain website.

“The Pick for Britain website could help, but it would need filters on it, very clear filters, e.g. are you suited to agricultural work? Answer these six questions, because this is what's required. Can you work seven days a week? Can you live on site? Can you work? Are you prepared to work no hours on some days and twelve hours on other days? So stuff like that which reflects not the fact that these are bad employers but the fact that a crop doesn't stop ripening at five o' clock on a Friday afternoon” (Labour expert 1)

The Pick for Britain campaign was eventually scrapped by the government in early 2021 as a result of the low take-up of domestic workers in 2020.

Further research is required examining the responses and experiences of the Pick for Britain campaign, highlighting in particular the lived experience of the domestic workforce in order to identify means by which to encourage workers to work in the fields in the future.

HOW ARE OTHER COUNTRIES APPROACHING THE SAME PROBLEM?

While many other countries suffering labour shortages have more lenient immigration restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic created similar situations to that occurring in the UK, whereby new strategies were required in order to harvest the crops.

Australia – The Australian government introduced a Harvest Trail relocation assistance programme which offered citizens up to \$6,000 to move to a different location to work on farms. At the end of 2020, this initiative managed to recruit 453 in one month. Some businesses have also reportedly increased wages to attract local workers.

Russia – The Russian government is aiming to simplify its entry requirements for migrant workers to help industries suffering from shortages, including farming.

Ireland – Facing drastic labour shortages across its workforce, Ireland, in 2019, chose to increase permits to EU citizens.

4. WHAT NEXT?

"I think there will be more mechanisation and so it will be different skills we need. I don't think we will ever not need a skilled workforce but it will be different" (Labour expert 3)

A new professional body, The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH), has been set-up to drive forward skills, standards, and career routes in agriculture, with the backing and support of the AHDB and the NFU. Such recognition of the labour force crisis in the agricultural industry is a significant one, as the future of some farms in the UK in the short-term will depend, to some extent, on the availability of labour. Automation to replace human roles will not be available immediately for many sectors, nor accessible to all who need it due to cost. This is the case not only for horticultural units but for all sectors reliant upon external labour. The political decision to reduce net migration will have a significant impact across society but it is vital that farm labour requirements are reviewed frequently. The definitions of, and value placed upon, 'skilled' and 'unskilled' workers need to be revisited and the points-based system adjusted accordingly to prevent the farming industry from being disadvantaged by the new immigration policy. In the meantime, efforts to recruit from the domestic labour force need to be rapid, systematic and realistic. Seasonal work and

permanent roles in farming differ markedly therefore recruitment measures need to be targeted accordingly.

Seasonal work

It is extremely unlikely that the UK domestic labour market will ever be able to fully fill those positions normally filled by migrant workers. The economy has changed significantly but it has never really succeeded without the assistance of non-British workers (Nye 2016).

Seasonal worker recruitment cannot rely upon a national conscience of 'working to save the nation' as it has been shown that this is not an effective motivator for productivity. Nor can it be assumed that the rise in unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will automatically create interest in seasonal worker roles. The squeezing of price margins by supermarkets and a consumer base accustomed to cheap prices currently prevent worker pay from going above a certain level. The combination of low pay and physically challenging and repetitive work is not an attractive option, nor are the conditions currently associated with the work. Farms will need to become more competitive, flexible and attractive places to work in order to drive recruitment. This applies to both domestic and migrant workers.

At the same time it is not useful to classify all Brits as lazy. Many employers had positive experiences with some of their British workers, and attaching the label of lazy not only alienates potential workers but also fails to present the bigger picture which is that, structurally, the current offer is not acceptable to the British worker.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the living conditions of workers on many seasonal units, exposing their vulnerability to contagion, and

consideration needs to be given to this in terms of health and safety in the future.

Permanent work

Multiple factors have led to farming as a career becoming an invisible option to potential entrants. At the same time, careers in agriculture have evolved to become more skilled due to advances in technology, and salaries are comparable to other, more popular, industries. In addition, various studies have shown high levels of job satisfaction among people working in farming (Nye 2017b). A career in farming is, therefore, a viable option for many new entrants and recruitment drives need to act fast to bridge the gap which already exists in terms of labour shortfalls. Farms will need to become more competitive and attractive as places to work and the industry itself needs to improve its self-promotion, with any schemes that are introduced being effectively created and supported to succeed. Land managers need to collaborate with relevant industry bodies and educational establishments to ensure the appropriate skills are in place but farmers themselves are also responsible for developing their own skills in management and leadership in order to ensure staff retention and worker satisfaction.

There is no one-size fits all solution to the farm labour crisis in the UK. Automation, migrant workers and domestic labour will all be required to contribute to the country's food production. Young people, career changers, ex-offenders and service leavers can each form part of the wider solution but no cohort in itself is capable of filling the gaps. At the same time, the agricultural community needs to open itself up to the non-agricultural community in attempts to increase recruitment. Farms, the agricultural industry and the government need to stay vigilant, be flexible, and get creative before the crisis damages the structure of the industry permanently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For research and policy

- The seasonal worker scheme must accommodate the needs of all sectors currently reliant upon migrant workers, including those requiring year round staff, so as not to discriminate between sectors.
- Definitions of, and value placed upon, the skills of farm workers need to be revisited by the Migration Advisory Committee to ensure that the farming industry is not disadvantaged by the new immigration policy.
- Research should be undertaken to establish the attitudinal baseline of prisoners, service leavers, young people, and potential career changers to identify current attitudes towards careers in agriculture. This should be mirrored with farmers (i.e. their attitudes to employing people from these groups).
- Use of online portals should be encouraged to facilitate the exchange of workers between businesses, such as the Association of Labour Provider's (ALP) *Extra Workers Needed Portal*.
- Introduce new data collection strategies to identify, with more certainty, where labour shortfalls exist across all sectors. This could be led by AHDB.
- Defra should commission a thorough evaluation of the seasonal worker pilot scheme prior to introducing any new worker scheme.
- Payments under ELMs and other schemes should include 'social conditionality' such that any farm payments are conditional upon the social and human rights of farm workers being respected and enforced, and penalties introduced for businesses not adhering to the policy.
- Establish a cross sector working group to identify ways to encourage gender and ethnic diversity in recruitment to the industry.
- Liaise with the MoD to include explicit inclusion of agricultural opportunities within the Career Transition Partnership.

For industry

- Supermarkets should participate in consumer awareness campaigns directly associated with corporate responsibility and fair worker treatment. All supermarkets should introduce corporate human rights policies into their overall policies, making living wages for all food workers a key priority (See Oxfam's Supermarkets Scorecard 2021). Consumers need assurance that not only are farm workers protected but also that farmers receive a fair price for their products.
- Assist in the facilitation of 'halfway' training schemes similar to the Access to Agriculture scheme run by Harper Adams, aimed at people from non-farming backgrounds.

For scheme operators

- Create lasting networks. Some of the most effective schemes in place, whether training courses, or other initiatives, or on-farm placements said that lasting networks have proved extremely important to participants.

For employers

- Measures need to be enforced to mitigate the risk of contagion under farm living and working conditions in terms of health and safety in the future.
- Create a reputation for being a good employer and undertake management and leadership skills training where possible.
- Ensure compliance with all employment laws and policies to ensure worker rights are fulfilled at your place of employment.



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