



## West Sussex Growers' Association

(Specialist Branch of the National Farmers' Union)

113 Limmer Lane, Felpham, West Sussex, PO22 7LR

### **Covid-19 – Update – 18<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

Dear Members,

The most important thing for everyone in the Horticulture Industry is that we all do the right thing and stay safe; however, there are business and political issues that we need to address.

West Sussex Growers' Association is lobbying hard on behalf of our Horticulture Industry and is in constant touch with stakeholders and influencers; including: Defra, MPs, NFU, HTA, CLA, RHS, LEPs and Local Authorities.

#### **1. Financial Support – Speed is of the Essence**

- CIBILS – Repayment Terms – Due to the devastating financial impact on many horticultural businesses, repayment terms for loans should be extended to 10 years from the current 6 years. It would also assist if the first year could be free of both capital and interest payments.
- Payment Holidays – These should be requested from all lenders, including with leasing firms.
- WSGA is speaking to the South East representative for the Bank of England on 20<sup>th</sup> April to update her on the current status of the Horticulture Industry.

#### **2. Compensation Scheme & the re-opening of Garden Centres**

- As soon as is practically possible, Garden Centres should be reopened. It is believed that adequate social distancing procedures can be sensibly managed at Garden Centres. They have already reopened in most European countries.
- The NFU & HTA have put forward proposals to Defra for a Perishable Goods Compensation Scheme that would be particularly helpful to the hard-pressed ornamental sector of horticulture.
- The Dutch Government has already provided massive additional financial support for its Horticulture Industry to the tune of 600m euros. If UK growers do not receive the support to survive, the level of plant imports will increase from this summer.

#### **3. Staff, Key Workers & Agencies**

- The Government has stated that if you can't do your job from home you can go to work, as long as social distancing is practised. This means that horticultural jobs such as food production, packhouse operations and care of plants (watering & maintenance of crops) should continue.
- Furloughed workers are eligible to work for other businesses whilst furloughed by their employer.

- Great care needs to be taken where car and mini-bus sharing is taking place between staff. Also, additional care measures need to be taken where staff are living in shared caravans and caravan sites and/or using canteens and other shared facilities.
- Businesses must take particular care to maintain social distancing and all other health and safety precautions for staff working in confined spaces, such as: packhouses where grading, processing & packing lines are in use.
- West Sussex Growers' Association is also operating a "Worker Availability" service on the website: [www.https://wsga.co.uk](https://wsga.co.uk) People looking for work can leave their contact details there and we will endeavour to link them to horticultural businesses in the area with vacancies. This service is also being promoted through West Sussex County Council.
- A "Pick for Britain" campaign is being launched by Defra, NFU, AHDB, ALP & British Growers.

#### **4. Supply Chain & Logistics**

- Ornamentals – Sales of garden and bedding plants from commercial growers to Garden Centres and the sheds are vastly reduced and most nurseries are running on skeleton staff.
- Edibles – Sales are holding up fairly well, but daily orders from key customers are extremely volatile due to disruption to the supply chain. Transport costs are rising rapidly, especially from Spain.
- Online and home delivery operations are increasing across the board; but compared to normal volume supplies to supermarkets, sheds and Garden Centres, these numbers are very small. Please use Google to find nurseries that can deliver in your area.

Many thanks, John.