

5th February 2021

George Eustice MP
Secretary of State
Dept for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email: Secretary.State@defra.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

The Future of the Horticulture Statutory Levy – an Open Letter from the Growers' Better Levy Group

We are writing as a concerned group of businesses to provide a suggested, and importantly, grower supported, framework for your future decision regarding the statutory levy for British fruit and veg, potatoes, plants and flowers.

The levy raised is growers' money, 0.45% of our turnover, and we feel strongly that we must have a greater say in how this money is spent. The money is critical to the future of our sector of British business, a sector worth £3.7 billion. Our levy underpins the applied research that is imperative to future innovations such as new fruit and vegetable varieties, new growing systems, new pest and disease work to reduce pesticide usage, research into workforce, skills development and knowledge sharing (TIAH), water efficiency, irrigation, reduced energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions. We believe in the fairness of a statutory levy. The statutory instrument that governs the levy mechanism is outdated and requires parliamentary time to modernise it.

The current ballots that are underway are a vote for or against the continuation of the statutory levy, but it is being perceived by growers as a vote on the future of the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), the body responsible for administering the levy. This comes as no surprise. We believe AHDB requires root and branch reform, but we would prefer to work with AHDB, on behalf of all growers, to try to achieve these reforms, rather than see a "no vote" require the sector to start again to establish a new grower focussed, applied research funding organisation.

The Growers' Better Levy Group released a press statement (a copy of which is attached to this letter for your reference) on 8 January 2021 setting out the detail of suggested legislative changes to the statutory instrument and the reforms we expect to see happen within AHDB. The detail of this press statement can also be found at <https://britishgrowers.org/growersbetterlevygroup/>

The outcome of the changes we are proposing for AHDB will be an agile, grower-led component of the levy body serving levy payers through proper governance and transparency. This will deliver a world leading, investor-funded service which returns significant and measurable benefits to levy paying investors in a highly challenging and fast evolving primary food and plant production landscape.

We would appreciate an urgent meeting to discuss these points with you before the result of the ballot is declared on the 18th February 2021.

Your sincerely

Mr Philip Pearson (Chairman)

The Growers' Better Levy Group

The Growers' Better Levy Group:

- Philip Pearson, APS Produce Ltd (Protected Edibles)
- John Shropshire, Cambs Farms Growers Ltd (Field Vegetables)
- Marion Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms (Soft fruit)
- Angus Davison, Haygrove Ltd (Soft fruit)
- Martin Emmett, Walberton Nursery LLP, Binsted Nursery LLP, Fleurie Nursery Limited (Ornamentals)
- James Broekhuizen, Cucumber Growers' Association / Anchor Nurseries Ltd (Protected Edibles)
- Sophie Bambridge, B & C Farming Ltd (Potatoes)
- James Harrison, EG Harrison & Co. (Potatoes)
- Tom Hulme, AC Hulme & Sons (Tree Fruit, Potatoes, Livestock, Combinable Crops)
- Martin Evans, Fresh Growers Ltd (Field Vegetables)
- Derek Wilkinson, Sandfields Farm Ltd (Field Vegetables)
- John Chinn, Cobrey Farms (Asparagus, Potatoes, Soft fruit, Combinable Crops, Wine)
- Philip Morley, British Tomato Growers' Association / APS Produce Ltd (Protected Edibles)