

Growing Together

A STRATEGY FOR THE WEST SUSSEX GROWING SECTOR

March 2010



Executive Summary

The West Sussex growing sector is of national significance. It has the largest glasshouse area in England, grows produce with a retail value of more than £500m and provides an estimated 4,290 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs (including industry-support/ancillary workers) and almost twice as many seasonal jobs (such as harvesting and packing) to the local community. In addition, the open field sector provides a significant contribution to the West Sussex economy. The excellent soil and light conditions make West Sussex one of the best places for domestically grown edible and ornamental produce in the country. Some of the sector's finest growers that supply to retailers the length and breadth of the country are located in the Chichester and Arun districts of West Sussex. Ornamental production in the county remains a traditional strength and good opportunities currently exist for customers of these businesses to substitute imports for West Sussex-grown hardy nursery stock, bedding and garden plants.

Horticulture in West Sussex is a high value added industry, combining high level technical skills and technologies with dynamic business models, together offering excellent growth potential and benefits for the local economy. Recent developments within intensive horticulture in the region include:

- The growing of energy crops (e.g. maize);
- The adoption of renewable energy systems into business models, such as Combined Heat and Power and biomass applications (plant waste to energy);
- Food initiatives such as local sourcing; and
- The increasing cultivation of non-traditional crops such as soft fruit, baby leaf salad and vines and novel production such as organics and hydroponics.

The West Sussex growing sector has undergone significant changes in the past twenty years. Trade liberalisation and ever-changing consumer demands have meant that the sector has had to adapt to compete effectively with imports, whilst the dominance of supermarkets has made it increasingly difficult for smaller suppliers to survive and prosper. This has led to a change in the structure of the industry, where units have needed to increase in size in order for businesses to thrive through achieving better economies of scale, investing in new technology and deploying new, more efficient working practices. Where smaller, often family-owned horticultural businesses have succeeded is as specialist producers of one or more edible or ornamental crops at sufficient volumes to supply multiple retailers, thus playing a major and continuing part in the West Sussex horticulture sector.

Despite its importance to the local economy, it is a sector that is not well understood. It has an outmoded image and is often perceived to provide low paid and low skilled jobs. Land ownership issues and a limited and fragmented supply of available land can make glasshouse expansion difficult and, sometimes, prohibitively expensive. In addition, local residents have concerns about additional traffic that is caused by the transportation of produce along the inadequate road infrastructure, and the visual impact of large glasshouses on open spaces.

Further investment in applied research and development (R&D) in the sector is required as well as an increased supply of quality new recruits to take forward both scientific and technological innovation and effective business management. Many of the people who work in the sector have good skills, but not all have qualifications that recognise them and local learning provision does not appear to be fit for purpose for the modern production horticulture sector.

Despite on-going efforts by individual businesses and representative groups, the image of the sector still needs to improve. It needs to excite young people about the opportunities within it and to explain the economic and wider benefits that the sector brings to the local economy. Poor past experiences of recruits by employers and some negative experiences of people who have tried working in the sector have created some mutual suspicions, but popular, high profile events and open days put on by local growers are testament to the commitment that the growing businesses have to their communities.

At national and at local levels, there are many factors that support the development of the growing sector and there is an opportunity, through effective collaboration between businesses in the sector and by better engagement with local residents to change the perception of the industry; to demonstrate its contribution and value and to showcase the opportunities that are available to people who choose to join its workforce on the technical or the business management side.

Climate change, an unstable geo-political environment and greater public awareness about nutrition and healthy eating have pushed food security back up the agenda, and there is renewed interest in locally sourced produce. Demand for domestically produced horticultural products is expected to grow, and as one of the few sectors of the economy that is largely recession-proof, opportunities within the sector are likely to be more favourable than in many other parts of the economy in the foreseeable future.

For these opportunities to be maximised and for the sector to be able to attract and retain the right talent, its businesses need to work together and to agree common priorities that can be taken forward together. It needs to take the local community with it,

recognising and where it is able to, supporting local priorities; whether that is providing good quality, year round jobs, improving people's understanding of the food they eat or taking an active role in healthy eating campaigns. But businesses in the sector also need the support of their partners in the statutory sector. They need this support to help them promote the benefits that horticulture brings to the local community; to improve its image; to contribute to local strategic priorities; to help engage and excite potential new recruits; and to help secure the developments that they need to ensure that it can grow in a sustainable way to become widely recognised as a key part of the West Sussex economy.

Over thirty sector representatives and statutory sector partners have been consulted in the development of this strategy. It has been overseen by a Strategy Development Steering Group, made up of key West Sussex growers. Collaboration, partnership and engagement are central to this strategy. It contains twenty-two actions and nine 'strategic support requirements', (where support is needed from public sector partners), under the following four strategic priorities:

- Strategic Priority 1:** Ensure that Planning and Land-Use Policies Support the Sector and Identify Suitable Locations for Development
- Strategic Priority 2:** Improve Understanding of the Sector within Local Communities
- Strategic Priority 3:** Improve the Attractiveness of the Sector to Young People and Potential Recruits
- Strategic Priority 4:** Develop and Maintain the Structures to Implement the Strategy

The strategy will be taken forward and reviewed by a Strategy Implementation Group, the membership and terms of reference of which are currently under development.

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1: Why We Need a Strategy

West Sussex is home to one of the UK's most important horticultural clusters, producing salad crops (including tomatoes, lettuce, peppers and aubergines), vegetables, soft fruit (including strawberries and raspberries) herbs, cut flowers, containerised/pot plants and hardy nursery stock that are sold throughout the country. The sector has changed significantly over the past two decades, however; consumer demands and international competition have resulted in a restructuring of the industry, with many of the once commonplace family-run nurseries being replaced by much larger units that provide better economies of scale.

The sector is recognised as being a key feature of the local economy and, both individually and through organisations such as the West Sussex Growers Association (WSGA), the horticultural sector has engaged with the local community, provides good quality local jobs, puts on educational and fun open days and contributes year-round wealth to the local economy.

However, there remain challenges to the sector if it is to grow to reach its full potential and if it is to fulfil its role as a key sector of the local economy, maximising job and wealth creation and inspiring learning within the local economy. Some of these challenges are addressed by individual growers, but others are best delivered through a co-ordinated and collective approach from the growing businesses and their public sector partners. Indeed, the CEO Director of the Horticultural Trades Association has suggested that the sector needs to unite and create a strong voice to lobby policy and decision makers¹, while the Chairman of the NFU's Horticulture Board has stated: "*We have a fresh produce industry to be proud of in this country producing fruit and vegetables that are second to none in terms of taste, quality and value for money. We need to ensure measures are put in place to help it compete and thrive.*" The measures identified include: the need for a continued focus on R&D and access to expertise and facilities to allow UK growers to remain at the forefront of world production; access to sufficient labour through a new SAWS scheme and schemes to encourage British nationals to take up seasonal work; and reflecting the importance of food security in national planning policy.²

¹ *Institute of Horticulture conference identifies need to influence decision makers*, 28th September 2009, Institute of Horticulture website: <http://www.horticulture.org.uk/news/#2>

² *Our to do list for horticulture*, 27th January 2010, NFU website: <http://www.nfuonline.com/your-sector/horticulture/news/Our-to-do-list-for-horticulture/>

This strategy has been developed by a partnership of West Sussex growers (the Strategy Development Group), who have come together to identify and then to address issues faced by the sector, with the aim of ensuring the long term sustainability and profitability of horticulture in West Sussex.

Challenges that the sector faces can be grouped into three broad categories:

- a) National issues that are particular to the horticultural sector;
- b) Local issues that are not particular to the horticultural sector; and
- c) Local issues that are particular to the horticultural sector.

In developing this strategy, the Strategy Development Group has been careful to identify where it is best placed to act and where it is best placed to influence local policy.

There are intractable national issues, such as the need for greater research and development in the sector and a review of the relationships between the growers and the supermarkets. The Strategy Development Group recognises that for these issues, actions are often best led through existing national structures and organisations.

There are also on-going local issues, such as the need for improvements to the A27 and its feeder roads that are concerns of organisations, residents and businesses throughout Coastal West Sussex. These national and local issues will continue to require a strong voice from the growers in West Sussex over the medium to long term, when engaging with representatives of central and/or local government as appropriate.

The main focus of the priorities and actions contained in this document is on practical, commonly identified local issues that are of direct relevance to the horticulture sector, and where a collective approach can more effectively deliver the solutions that the sector requires.

This includes ensuring that there is a secure supply of good quality labour; ensuring that new staff can be trained and the skills of existing employees updated; ensuring that there are suitable sites for the development of the sector and that these are supported

by good access and the right infrastructure (e.g. water abstraction rights, water storage facilities, gas pipeline, electricity and access roads) for expansion; and ensuring that the sector is as efficient as it can be in its use of energy and resources.³

Above all, the growing sector is a part of the community, not just providing job opportunities, but contributing to its identity and the learning, health and well-being of its residents. Engaging with the community and contributing to its goals and aspirations are central to the prospects of the sector and key to the successful implementation of this strategy.

Twenty-two actions and nine 'strategic support requirements' have been identified in the strategy under the following four strategic priorities:

Strategic Priority 1:

Ensure that Planning and Land-Use Policies Support the Sector and Identify Suitable Locations for Development

Strategic Priority 2:

Improve Understanding of the Sector within Local Communities

Strategic Priority 3:

Improve the Attractiveness of the Sector to Young People and Potential Recruits

Strategic Priority 4:

Develop and Maintain the Structures to Implement the Strategy

These actions, support requirements and priorities have been developed following consultation with 24 growing businesses or sector representatives and with 11 representatives from partner organisations in West Sussex. Progress towards achieving them will be achieved through commitment, a better common understanding and the development of sustainable and effective partnerships between the businesses in the sector and their public sector partners.

³ Growers have been exploring opportunities to co-locate to share onsite energy efficiency and generation systems such as energy centres, Combined Heat and Power (e.g. via an interconnector), renewables and novel energy systems.

2: The Growing Sector

This section of the strategy provides an outline of the growing sector, assessing its scale, the changing focus of its activities and the challenges that it has both faced and is yet to overcome at national, regional and local levels.

2.1 The National and Regional Context

Scale and Focus

The growing sector is pivotal to the health and well-being of the nation. It produces the fruit and vegetables that contribute to its health and it provides the flowers and plants that soften our urban spaces and lighten our special occasions. But it also provides wealth and jobs to the United Kingdom.

It contributes around £1.2 billion to the national economy and provides regular employment for an estimated 37,000 people⁴ and a further 20,000 full-time equivalent part-time and seasonal jobs.⁵ The volume of seasonal workers (30,000 each year, according to the National Farmers Union⁶) means that the sector relies on migrant labour more than many other parts of the economy;⁷ the UK government has allocated 21,250 places under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) for 2010 and 2011.⁸

⁴ National Farmers Union, 2008, *Why Horticulture Matters*, pg 7

⁵ Other estimates have suggested that production horticulture employs 95,000 employees and has a sales value of £1.9bn: Source: R&D Needs for the UK Horticultural Industry. National Horticultural Forum (2006)

⁶ National Farmers Union, 2008, *Why Horticulture Matters*, pg 7

⁷ The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) allows growers to employ Bulgarian and Romanian nationals for up to six months.

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/saws/> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/workingintheuk/saws/saws-leaflet-english.pdf>

⁸ Continuation of restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian workers in the UK (03/11/2009)

<http://ukinbulgaria.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/?view=News&id=21121597>

It is both labour intensive and energy efficient, utilising the naturally high light levels found in West Sussex combined with heat and water resources in controlled growing climates to create marketable and healthy products. Furthermore, it is a sector that is largely recession-proof, and in 2009 saw strong sales growth, as the weak pound made local produce more competitive compared with imported produce from the European Union⁹ and many other parts of the world, in addition to increased domestic demand for garden and ornamental plants. The storage, packing, transportation and sale of local produce also provide jobs in wholesalers, packhouses, food manufacturers, distributors, suppliers of goods and services, garden centres, retailers and caterers.¹⁰ In short, the sector contributes to our health, our wealth and the quality of both our natural and urban environments.

The sector has two broad sub-sectors – ornamental production and the production of edible crops, both of which typically utilise glasshouses and/or polytunnels in their production methods. There are eight major glasshouse areas¹¹ across England, stretching from Lancashire and Humberside in the North to West Sussex and Hampshire & the Isle of Wight in the South.¹² Of these, West Sussex (167 hectares of glasshouses) is now the largest.

The overall area of protected cropping has been in decline (the area of glasshouse coverage in England has reduced by 13% [271 hectares] since 1993)¹³; with most of the decline occurring within the protected salad and vegetable sector, although small increases did occur in the area of protected fruit (especially strawberries) and ornamental cropping.¹⁴

In addition, the sector has undergone considerable change in the past twenty years in response to international competition and changing consumer tastes and demands. As a result, the scale of horticultural businesses is increasing; larger, more efficient

⁹ <http://www.freshinfo.com/index.php?s=n&ss=nd&sid=50498>

¹⁰ National Farmers Union, 2008, *Why Horticulture Matters*, pg 7

¹¹ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Table 2.2, pg 6

¹² Major Glasshouse Areas in England: West Sussex (167 hectares in 2007); Essex (153 hectares in 2007); Humberside (157 hectares in 2007); Lancashire (135 hectares in 2007);

Lincolnshire (126 hectares in 2007). Kent (87 hectares in 2007); Hampshire & Isle of Wight (54 hectares in 2007);

Hertfordshire (34 hectares in 2007);

¹³ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, pg 5

¹⁴ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, pg ii

glasshouses are being erected to achieve economies of scale in initial construction costs; efficiency gains, especially in labour and energy use; and production gains from better glasshouse and equipment design.¹⁵ Despite the reduction in the overall areas of protecting cropping, there are areas of growth in the sector. These include soft fruit, which had a retail value of £645 million¹⁶ in 2009; tomatoes, peppers and other vegetable crops¹⁷; pot herbs and pot plants. The annual farm gate value of herbs grown in West Sussex is now more than £12m.

Customer tastes, international competition and technological innovation have all made horticulture a forward-looking industry, planning for ongoing investment in its assets, creating efficiencies in its resource utilisation and managing an intensive production process each year during the main growing season.

Supplying Multiple Retailers

Multiple retailers now account for an estimated 80% of UK fresh produce sales and they negotiate contracts with a minimum number of large suppliers.¹⁸ Larger nurseries or distributors often hold the contracts, with smaller growing businesses supplying to them. The perceived dominance of the supermarkets has led the Competition Commission to create a Supermarket Ombudsman, which will have the power to enforce a new Groceries Supply Code of Practice that aims to redress the balance between supermarkets and their suppliers.¹⁹

Research and Development

Innovation in the industry is threatened by a reduction in funding for horticultural research and development (R&D). Industry leaders have highlighted the “financial fragility” of horticulture’s research stations (the largest remaining organisations are Warwick HRI,

¹⁵ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg ii

¹⁶ <http://www.thecourier.co.uk/output/2009/07/15/newsstory13457232t0.asp>

¹⁷ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg ii

¹⁸ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg ii

¹⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8183535.stm>

East Malling Research and Stockbridge Technology Centre) and a “bottleneck in the pipeline” between theoretical research and research the industry can turn into “product, process and business.”²⁰

In 2006, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) re-focused its R&D strategy away from crop-oriented research and towards R&D that directly support its strategic priorities of climate change, environmental impacts and sustainable communities.²¹ Some transition funding has been allocated until March 2012 and £13m has been allocated to the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) for applied research into sustainability of production/food security, crop protection and local production. However, this leaves only a limited source of funds for applied, crop specific R&D that is raised through the Horticultural Levy by the Horticultural Development Company, with only growers funding competitive, near-market R&D.²²

Defra’s move away from crop-oriented research has not diminished the need for the sector to find innovative solutions to a range of challenges through ‘strategic R&D’ including utilising alternative energy sources, new planting systems, reducing product wastage, improvements in packaging and increased mechanisation and use of information technology. According to Jamieson, a key challenge for the sector will be to demonstrate that R&D in the agricultural and horticultural sectors is compatible with public policy goals on climate change, the environment, rural sustainability, diet, health and food security.²³ There may also be scope to seek recognition of horticulture as a special case for the allocation of funds (from HEFCE/Institute of Horticulture) to maintain the supply of BSc and MSc graduates for the sector.

Professionalising the Workforce

The success of all sectors of the economy is dependent on being able to attract and retain skilled and motivated staff, but the United Kingdom skills base has long been seen as a national weakness. *Skills for Growth: the National Skills Strategy (2009)* has identified a need to improve the intermediate skills of the UK workforce, focusing particularly on apprenticeships and the creation of a new modern ‘class of technicians’. The strategy emphasises the need to build better bridges between business and learning providers, so that the skills system is both responsive and more understandable to businesses. The 2009 Skills Strategy for the

²⁰ <http://www.horticulture.org.uk/news/>

²¹ *A review of the provision of UK horticultural R&D*, Brian Jamieson and Associates on behalf of the National Horticultural Forum, pg 5

²² *A review of the provision of UK horticultural R&D*, Brian Jamieson and Associates on behalf of the National Horticultural Forum, pg 26

²³ *A review of the provision of UK horticultural R&D*, Brian Jamieson and Associates on behalf of the National Horticultural Forum – Executive Summary

Agriculture and Horticulture²⁴ recognises the important role that the industry has in developing an education and training system that meets the needs of its businesses.²⁵

The 14-19 reform programme, which includes the introduction of new Diplomas and proposals to increase the age of compulsory learning participation to 18, is part of a long-term strategy to improve the skills base of the economy. The National Skills Strategy proposes to “dramatically” expand the apprenticeship system for young adults, engage businesses in the importance of investing in skills and improve the quality of learning provision.²⁶

The horticultural sector has had challenges in attracting and retaining highly skilled and motivated staff. The LANTRA Skills Assessment of the Production Horticulture sector suggests that it is a sector that has highly skilled staff, but this is not reflected in qualification levels and the Sector Skills Strategy highlights the need to influence the development of recording and validating qualification systems so that they fully reflect the skills within the sector.²⁷

Its ability to attract good quality staff is hindered by the preponderance of micro-businesses and an outdated image of the sector. One quarter of the production horticulture workforce holds no qualifications, compared with just 15% across all UK industries, but modern production horticulture is a sophisticated operation that requires people with high levels of business management skills, acute environmental awareness and a high level of technical expertise.

The sector tends to have a high level of ‘hard to fill’ vacancies, which may be due to its relatively high reliance on people with technical skills, which are acknowledged as a national weakness. While there is demand for new recruits at all levels due to the need to replace existing workers and improve succession planning, there is a particular need to attract better qualified people who are able to run increasingly sophisticated businesses and skilled staff who are able to adapt to new technology that is driving change in the sector.²⁸

²⁴ <http://www.lantra.co.uk/agriskills/>

²⁵ *Towards a New Professionalism The Skills Strategy for Agriculture and Horticulture*, pg 12

<http://www.lantra.co.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid=15062>

²⁶ *Skills for Growth National Skills Strategy* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009)

²⁷ *Towards a New Professionalism for Food Security and a Sustainable Environment: The Skills Strategy for Agriculture and Horticulture – Draft* (November 2009)

²⁸ The Production Horticulture Industry Factsheet (2009) LANTRA

Food Security and Sustainability

The key elements of food security are the availability of food, access to affordable, safe and nutritional food and the resilience of the food system to significant disruption. The UK imports over £31bn of food each year²⁹ and this globalisation and international trade has weakened the emphasis on self sufficiency, which had been a feature of economies until the 1970s. In 2008, the UK produced 38% of the domestic demand for fruit and vegetables. The decline in the UK's self sufficiency ratio and concerns about climate change and an uncertain geo-political environment have raised the issue of food security up the political agenda. Defra's Food 2030 strategy emphasises the importance of developing a strong agriculture and food sector, which will require a more co-ordinated approach to food production and supply by the whole food supply chain.³⁰ In October 2009, Defra announced the establishment of the Fruit and Vegetable Task Force, the aim of which is to increase consumption and production of domestic fruit and vegetables in England.

Although the recent weakness of the pound has resulted in more favourable competitive conditions for UK growers, it is other factors that will maintain its competitive advantages over the longer term. These include high quality pest and disease control, good labour relations within the UK sector, good nutritional value of domestic produce and the quality of the domestic water supply.³¹

²⁹ *Food 2030: How we get there*, pg 21, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2010)

³⁰ Comment by National Farmers Union, in *Food 2030: How we get there* Summary Document, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2010), pg 22

³¹ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg ii

2.2 The Growing Sector in West Sussex

Profile and Focus

The West Sussex glasshouse sector alone produce crops with an estimated retail value of £500m, and the county is an important centre for UK horticulture; its mean temperatures and good light levels enable cropping to start earlier,³² the season to continue longer and less energy used to grow produce than in many other parts of the United Kingdom. The local growing cluster produces salad crops (including tomatoes, lettuce, peppers and aubergines), vegetables, soft fruit (including strawberries and raspberries) herbs, cut flowers, containerised/pot plants and hardy nursery stock.

Historically, the West Sussex horticultural landscape is influenced by the Land Settlement Association (LSA). In the inter-war period, the LSA allocated approximately 120 smallholdings for West Sussex horticulturalists, out of just 500-600 smallholdings across the whole of the United Kingdom. However, only around 20 of the original smallholdings remain in operation today. In Arun the majority of businesses are based on the coastal plain around Littlehampton and Worthing, and in Chichester within especially designated Horticultural Development Areas (HDAs) at Tangmere, Runcton, Sidlesham and Almodington. The county has seen the smallest reduction in glasshouses among the major glasshouse areas of England and now contains the largest area of glass of all eight of the specialist areas;³³ 167 hectares.

Locally the glasshouse sector alone has a reported production turnover of £120 million and a retail value of around £500m, as well as wider economic contributions to the local economy through its supply chain of ancillary businesses. The West Sussex protected crops cluster employs more than 1,300 full-time equivalent staff³⁴ and its activities generate additional seasonal employment for thousands of seasonal workers, many of whom are able to gain skills and insights into career opportunities within the industry. A

³² West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg iv

³³ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, pg 6

³⁴ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, pg 87

significant number of industry-support/ancillary workers are also associated with the sector, such as structural, refrigeration, irrigation, heating and environmental computer engineers, as well as transport, logistics and IT services companies.

Estimated workforce

Provisional estimates for the workforce associated with horticultural businesses in West Sussex are shown in Table 1 below. These provisional figures were derived from estimates discussed with members of the Strategy Steering Group.

Workforce grouping	Estimated ratio	Estimated FTEs
Protected cropping – permanent employees	<i>base</i>	1,300
Protected cropping – industry-support/ancillary workers	0.65:1	845
Protected cropping – seasonal workers	4:1	5,200
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Open field – permanent employees	1:1	1,300
Open field – industry-support/ancillary workers	0.65:1	845
Open field – seasonal workers	2:1	2,600
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<i>Estimated total permanent + ancillary jobs (excluding seasonal)</i>		<i>4,290</i>
<i>Estimated total seasonal jobs (protected cropping plus open field)</i>		<i>7,800</i>

Table 1: Estimates for horticultural workforce components in West Sussex

The importance of the sector to the South East rural economy is recognised at regional level in SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy, which emphasises the need to ensure that there are sufficient suitable sites for rural enterprise and the need to promote the career opportunities that are available in the land-based industries:³⁵

- 'Understand and seek to influence the regulatory burden on rural-based businesses'
- 'Ensure provision of sites for rural enterprise, particularly existing rural buildings'

³⁵ The Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016, A Framework for Sustainable Prosperity, pg 114-115

- ‘Ensure that an understanding of how the countryside works, rural skills and potential careers in land-based industries feature in the development of school curricula’; and
- ‘Work with the land-based sector to find new solutions for seasonal jobs’.

West Sussex County Council has taken a spatial approach to its economic development, based around three key areas (Coastal West Sussex, the Rural Economy and the Gatwick Diamond), whilst both Arun and Chichester District Council acknowledge the significance of the horticultural sector to the local economy. In Arun, horticulture has been identified as one of the four key strategic sectors. *Open for Business, the Arun Economic Strategy 2009-2026* recognises that demand for horticultural products is set to grow and that all employees within the sector need to be encouraged to improve their skills. The strategy recognises the likely demand for larger sites and the need for the relationship between Arun District Council and the local growers to continue to be “a positive and constructive one”³⁶. The technical elements of the sector could also link well with knowledge-based manufacturing, another of the key sectors, whilst its local distinctiveness can contribute to the area’s strong tourism offer.

Chichester District Council’s *Focus on Strategic Growth Options* identifies horticulture and agriculture as “key sectors of the District’s employment”³⁷ and strategic objective 3 of the economic development strategy³⁸ outlines the council’s intention to “support local producers...” and to “develop new opportunities” for them.³⁹

Many of the factors that are driving in the sector nationally are reflected locally and mean that businesses need to expand to remain competitive and to respond to anticipated increased levels of demand for local horticultural products.⁴⁰ The sector needs suitable sites for expansion; to attract and retain a reliable supply of high quality labour; and to be at the heart of improving the health and well-being of residents within local communities.

³⁶ Open for Business: An Economic Strategy for Arun 2009-2026 (Draft)

³⁷ Chichester District Council, January 2010, Focus on Strategic Growth Options: A consultation on the options for major development in Chichester District 2011-2026, pg 70

³⁸ Chichester District Council, January 2010, Summary Guide, Focus on Strategic Growth Options: A consultation on the options for major development in Chichester District 2011-2026

³⁹ Chichester District Council, Economic Development Strategy 2009-2019, pg 10

⁴⁰ Arun District Council, An Economic Strategy for Arun 2009-2026 (Draft), pg 20

Land Availability and Development

Identifying and obtaining sites with a suitable configuration of infrastructure and planning permissions presents numerous challenges for businesses in the sector.

In Chichester District, the price of land in the designated Horticultural Development Areas (HDAs) can be prohibitively expensive, far exceeding the price of farmland in the district. The southern HDAs in particular have also become fragmented because of previous permissions for residential development, limiting potential development opportunities for larger businesses within the zones. Whilst opportunities for smaller, local growers still exist through small-holding rentals from West Sussex County Council, these opportunities are diminishing as the supply of available land reduces.

There is an increasing need for large areas of new glasshouses, both large (e.g. more than 10 hectares) and small, whilst existing glasshouses that have a lifespan of around 30 years need to be replaced or extended. However, the high visibility of glasshouses and the perceived increased traffic flow that larger units generate present planning challenges and can raise anxieties or objections amongst local residents. There is an average annual demand of eight hectares for new or replacement protected cropping, but only around fifty-five hectares of new glass has been permitted in the past seventeen years.⁴¹

Improving the Infrastructure

The capacity of the road network is vitally important for the logistics element of a horticultural business' expansion plans; as produce can be turned away by supermarket customers if deliveries are delayed. Access roads have previously been added by expanding businesses, but the current infrastructure is viewed as being not fit for purpose. It is widely recognised that the A27, in particular, needs to be developed further to avoid hindering the growth of the local economy.⁴² ⁴³ This is not an issue that is specific to the horticultural sector, however. The County Council plans to construct a new link road on the Chichester Bypass and two grade

⁴¹ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, pg iii-vi, pg 49

⁴² Arun District Council, *Open for Business: An Economic Strategy for Arun 2009-2026 (Draft)*, pg 37

⁴³ Chichester District Council, *Economic Development Strategy 2009-2019*, pg 5

separated junctions on the A27, but construction is not expected to begin until 2015⁴⁴ and the problems at Arundel and Worthing have not been addressed.

Access to an adequate water supply is crucial to the operations of horticultural businesses but obtaining this can be an issue. The Environment Agency (EA) controls and limits the number of water abstraction licences for the area. Talks between the EA, WSGA and NFU are ongoing to resolve issues of further water abstraction, but growers have had to invest heavily in alternative water supplies by buying in more mains water, harvesting rainwater into large reservoirs, re-circulating, sterilising, and re-using irrigation water. Many growers use closed hydroponics systems that reduce run-off and waste water to almost zero. The security of good quality water supplies and flooding risks are particular issues for all growers on the West Sussex coastal plain.

Growers need the support of their public sector partners to help to identify and secure suitable sites for development. The preparation of Local Development Frameworks presents an opportunity to secure such strategic support, through policies that promote sustainable production and rural economic development.

Building A Better Workforce

West Sussex growers have world-class expertise in their industry and continue to adopt the latest technical developments in structures and production systems,⁴⁵ exemplifying the emergence of 'technical horticulture' as a strategically important form of economic activity for the UK. This development requires a suitably qualified workforce and although West Sussex is home to one of the most important horticultural clusters in England, businesses in the sector find it difficult to recruit staff and there is an insufficient supply of students with the skills that businesses are looking for from the local learning providers. In common with the national picture, the image of the sector does not always appeal to young people and there is a need to re-brand it to students and young people as young and dynamic. There are currently no specific production horticulture courses run at Chichester College and the course that is run covers all aspects of horticulture, but there appears to be a need for two learning programmes: one that covers the technical side of horticulture (building upon the collaboration with Chichester College in developing accredited qualifications which can be delivered in the workplace) and one that focuses more on business management. There may also be scope to

⁴⁴ The West Sussex Transport Plan 2006-2016, Summary, pg 12

⁴⁵ West Sussex Growers Association, 2009, *Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in West Sussex: Prospects for the future and likely Scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years*, Executive Summary, pg iii

develop to adapt some existing management courses so that they contained a horticultural component, whilst the development of bite-sized learning programmes could be provided for the sector's seasonal workers (who currently receive training at Plumpton College and also in Holland).

Public sector agencies recognise the importance of the sector to the local economy and that behind the more visible lower skilled workers, who can represent the image of the sector in some people's eyes; there are highly skilled engineers, business managers, designers and analysts. Previous poor experiences of applicants amongst growers and poor experiences of employment amongst applicants have meant that there are reputational bridges that need to be built on both sides. This can be done through engagement with Jobcentre Plus, which runs a Work Trial scheme and a work experience programmes and by engaging with the development of new vocational Diplomas through the Education-Business Partnership, which is responsible for developing links between local businesses and learning providers to help to improve understanding of work place expectations.

The academic research base is also important to the sector locally, but it has declined in recent years and research centres have closed down. Reading University has recently suspended its horticulture degree course. There is concern that higher education providers see horticulture as a high maintenance but low demand subject and as universities struggle to fill courses, horticulture businesses are left with an insufficient pool of graduates from which to recruit.

At regional level, there are already initiatives in place to address this. There is a Horticultural Workforce Champion for the region,⁴⁶ whose role is to identify and promote good practice in developing a sustainable workforce for the sector that is able to respond to the opportunities that the industry has through the healthy eating and food security agendas. There is a website, www.growingjobs.org that will contain a 'growers' checklist' covering areas like workforce management and training and development and a forum for best practice exchange.

Engaging with Communities

Individual businesses in the growing sector have a strong history of engaging with their local communities, holding Open Days, providing work experience placements and attending careers events at local schools and colleges. However, the industry does not

⁴⁶ New champion seeks answers to horticulture's workforce dilemma, CLA South East Article available at: http://www.cla.org.uk/In_Your_Area/South_East/Regional_News_Archive/Food/Employment_Law/1000475.htm/

always have a favourable impression amongst local residents, who have concerns about the visibility of large glasshouses, anxieties about the traffic that transports produce along the narrow roads, and who can view the sector as providing jobs for seasonal and migrant workers. There is a lack of understanding of the sector and the opportunities within it; the contribution that it makes to the local economy and the health of the nation. There is, however, a growing interest in healthy eating and locally sourced food. These provide an opportunity for the sector to collectively identify and support local agendas that promote the health and well-being of residents and that help to inform and encourage sustainable living. The growing sector has the opportunity to demonstrate what it can and does contribute to the community and to change its image into a sector of opportunity and technology and to work more collaboratively to improve efficiencies and share resources.

Growing Together – A Strategic Plan

This plan has been developed to support the strategy. It contains four strategic priorities, which are underpinned by 22 actions and nine strategic support requirements, where the growers sector is seeking the support of its statutory sector partners. The strategic plan builds on existing work and seeks to strengthen existing relationships between the sector and its local community. It recognises that the success of the sector is centred on these relationships and on establishing a common voice amongst the growing businesses about the priorities for its development.

The plan has been developed by the West Sussex Growers Strategy Development Group, with support from Business Link (Sussex) and Step Ahead Research. Twenty-four growing businesses or sector representatives and eleven partners have been consulted in the development of the strategy, which is intended to be a dynamic document that will be reviewed by the Implementation Group and refined in the light of external and planning developments, and developments within the sector over the lifetime of the strategy.

Strategic Priority 1:

Ensure that planning and land use policies support the sector and identify suitable locations for development

Rationale

Chichester District Council operates a policy of Horticulture Development Areas (HDAs), but Arun District Council does not. The difference in the approaches is not seen to be a significant problem for the sector. However, the HDAs are no longer considered fit

for purpose in their current format, and do not enable the sector to develop in the way that the modern operating environment demands. Increasingly, the sector has become dominated by larger units, as increasing cost and competitiveness pressures have led to the need for better economies of scale. This means that there needs to be more flexibility around the boundaries of the HDAs to enable these larger units to grow.

The HDAs were developed to respond to a sector that had a much greater number of smaller units. Their designation and the limited development opportunities outside the areas have resulted in opportunities for development being dependent on a small number of landowners, who are not always sympathetic to the sector. To an extent, this has been recognised within the Chichester Employment Land Review (7.1.3). Planning Policy RE11B in the Chichester Local Plan allows development outside the HDAs, but only if it is associated with existing glasshouses.

The sector would like there to be a more flexible approach in securing a more rapid expansion of sites, to enable businesses to remain dynamic in responding to competitive pressures, with each proposal considered on the basis of the soundness of the business case. Planning policy could recognise the developments that provide year round activity and which result in growing local produce. The sector would also welcome support from public authorities in their negotiations with landowners.

Indicative Actions

- 1.1: Develop a co-ordinated response to emerging policies to support the Local Development Framework by presenting a vision for future planning requirements to outline: the sector's development plans and its economic potential; identify obstacles to achieving business growth; and policies which will enable it to achieve this potential.
- 1.2: Use the criteria for new horticultural development sites to map suitable potential sites for development and consider the option of co-location of 2-3 business on a 20-40 hectare site, for which the requirements of water, gas and electricity supply can be integrated into a business plan for future expansion.
- 1.3: Explore the practicalities for a centralised energy plant providing a hub for large scale use; sharing resources between growers within a hub model (and possibly as a co-operative) to speed business growth including: crop rotation; collaborative

approaches to distribution and logistics and supermarket supply chains; water collection and storage; energy centres including Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant, renewable energy installations; and the sharing of machinery and infrastructure costs.

1.4: Develop collaborative approaches to take advantage of grants and incentives for renewable energy installations.

Strategic Support Requirements

- 1: Planning applications to be considered fairly and equitably on the basis of the soundness of the business case presented under revised planning policies as part of the new Local Development Framework, which reflect favourably on developments providing additional benefits such as year-round usage, offering continuity of employment and supporting locally grown produce.
- 2: Request local authority economic development and/or planning representation on the West Sussex Growers Strategy Implementation Group to improve understanding of the sector and to help facilitate links between growers and landowners and to advise on on-going matters such as changes of land use.

Strategic Priority 2:

Improve Understanding of the Sector within Local Communities

Rationale

The growing sector is a key part of the Coastal West Sussex economy and is one of the few significant horticultural clusters in the country. It has world-recognised expertise and provides good employment opportunities for people with high level business and engineering skills. The total production value of all West Sussex horticultural produce exceeds £200m, representing a retail value of approximately £500m. The sector is a significant provider of local jobs; estimated at 4,290 FTE production and industry-support/ancillary jobs and 7,800 FTE seasonal jobs (see Table 1, above). Despite this, its economic and environmental contributions and strategic importance are perceived to be not well understood by the wider public, restricting the growth of the sector locally and limiting the supply of good quality recruits. Businesses within the sector put on a range of community events, such as Corn Fest at Barfoots and West Sussex Growers Association Nursery Open Days. However, more needs to be done to engage with the local community in a co-ordinated way. This includes developing “media friendly” events; supporting other local priorities (such as health, tourism and educational campaigns); producing newsletters to engage local opinion formers and developing an on-going programme of engagement with local communities that helps to improve the image of the sector within local communities.

Indicative Actions

2.1: Develop a ‘key facts’ local marketing campaign, based on the Reading Agricultural Consultants study that highlights the economic contribution of the sector, the range of jobs that are available and its role in supporting key local strategic objectives, such as energy efficiency, local produce and countryside protection, through organisations such as A Taste of

Sussex and the Chichester Green Business Awards.

- 2.2: Promote the sector by finding ways in which it can become a key part of the education and tourism offer in West Sussex, for example: by offering site tours through Open Farm Sundays and LEAF; participating in local events such as West Dean Tomato Festival and Farmers Markets; and identifying common goals for attracting visitors with the National Park Authority.
- 2.3: Engage with the Primary Care Trust and schools about how the sector can contribute to local 'healthy eating' campaigns, e.g. through Taste of Sussex initiatives and local gardening/floral initiatives.
- 2.4: Provide a sector update newsletter, to be sent to Councillors and other opinion-formers and decision-makers every sixth months to highlight the plans, achievements and community involvement of the sector on a regular basis.
- 2.5: Develop a co-ordinated, on-going programme of talks/visits to key local opinion formers to promote a better understanding of the sector.
- 2.6: Identify and apply good practice from elsewhere through the growing jobs website (www.growingjobs.org).

Strategic Support Requirements

- 3: Support from Visit Chichester to advise on how the sector can help to promote itself to visitors and become integrated with the wider visitor offer.
- 4: Support from the Economic Development teams to identify the most useful 'key messages' that should be developed for Members and opinion formers to develop a presumption that the growth of the sector represents a net benefit to the county and its residents (with the opportunity of sustainable growth in the industry as themes such as food security, healthy living and outdoor activity become increasingly important).
- 5: Recognition of the importance of the sector by local authorities and its role in promoting local sustainability.

Strategic Priority 3:

Improve the Attractiveness of the Sector to Young People and Potential Recruits

Rationale

Businesses in the sector find it difficult to attract the right quality of staff from local sources. The sector is perceived to provide mainly low-paying jobs with limited skills and can be seen to favour migrant labour, rather than providing “jobs for local people”. However, the West Sussex cluster has world-recognised expertise and has had to become more efficient, utilising sophisticated technology, providing employment opportunities for people with strong technical, business management and leadership skills. There are also significant seasonal opportunities locally, but in recent years, many growers have found it easier to recruit these workers from accession states and from Romania and Bulgaria through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS). Many of these staff have become permanent members of staff.

Although many growers have links with schools, colleges and universities, there is not a co-ordinated approach from the sector to this type of engagement. Supply of staff and training from the local specialist college appear limited, despite the importance of the sector to the local economy. Training tends to be delivered by the private sector instead. There are different views as to why this happens. Student choice may have resulted in a greater demand for equine and amenity horticulture training, for example, rather than reflecting the needs of local growers.

There is a suggestion that the sector has become fragmented, limiting the demand for common training modules that make courses viable for colleges to run. There are perceived to be difficulties in attracting higher level staff across the sector as a whole, and there has been a contraction in the research and development capability associated with the horticultural sector.

Growers need to refocus how they engage with learning providers and agencies that work with potential recruits. This may mean

working together on recruitment, training and education-business partnership activities, refocusing promotional activities so that they are more attractive to young people, perhaps targeting technology, engineering, business studies, and economics students, as much as focusing on growing itself.

Indicative Actions

- 3.1: Focus on attracting business studies, economics and engineering students in sixth forms to highlight the business management and technical aspects of running a growing business.
- 3.2: Meet with West Sussex Education Business Partnership to develop a co-ordinated approach to engaging with schools, colleges and universities to define the work-based experience that can be offered to their students (candidates could include engineering students and students on the new land-based diploma) and a co-ordinated seasonal recruitment campaign.
- 3.3: Work with local people and Job Centre Plus to identify flexibilities and working arrangements to facilitate more local recruitment opportunities (e.g. develop an 'offer' including transport options, work patterns and up-skilling new employees).
- 3.4: Establish benchmarked skill levels based on transferable skills and knowledge of both business disciplines and production horticulture to support career progression within West Sussex growing businesses.
- 3.5: Continue collaboration with Chichester College on developing accredited qualifications which are delivered in the workplace for the training of technical staff.
- 3.6: Continue to participate in 'Work Skills' experience events with Chichester College.
- 3.7: Collaborate on providing PhD work placements and joint investment into Research and Development facilities.
- 3.8: Expand the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships that businesses are involved with.

Strategic Support Requirements

- 6: Support from the West Sussex Education-Business Partnership to develop a co-ordinated programme of growing based learning activities.
- 7: Flexibilities in interpretation of benefit rules to improve recruitment of seasonal workers from the local economy.
- 8: On-going dialogue between West Sussex growers and Chichester College to improve responsiveness of training provision.

Strategic Priority 4:

Develop and Maintain Structure to Implement the Strategy

Rationale

Much of the sector is already well represented by the West Sussex Growers Association (WSGA), but there are growers that are not represented by the WSGA. If the sector is going to operate with a collective voice, it needs a supporting structure to take forward the actions within the strategy, to review and monitor progress and to become a voice for the sector when engaging with public sector agencies on emerging issues. Without a co-ordinated approach responses could continue to be fragmented, activities duplicated and potential efficiency savings lost, inhibiting the growth and the development of the sector.

Indicative Actions

- 4.1: Establish a Strategy Implementation group with clear terms of reference and agreed membership to take forward the strategy and to review and evaluate the actions on an on-going basis.
- 4.2: Develop a programme of talks from invited specialist guests to discuss issues relating to Strategic Priorities 1 – 3 that impact on the sector, including planners; Connexions advisors; school, college and university staff; health promotion officers and business support advisors.
- 4.3: Agree protocols for engaging with public sector organisations and key lobbying issues.
- 4.4: A quarterly review to identify progress against actions; monitor public sector responses achieved and timescales for actions.

Strategic Support Requirements

9: Request Implementation Group membership from Business Link (Sussex) and the Local Authorities.

Annex 1: List of Contributors and Steering Group Members

This strategy has been funded by Business Link (Sussex). The consultation, background research and development of the strategy document was undertaken by Bruce Nairne, Alex May and Joanne Whitehead of Step Ahead Research in partnership with the Strategy Development Working Group.

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