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By Thomas Hobbs

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BGA warns government over SAWS



The British Growers Association has urged the government to develop an alternative to the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)

The British Growers Association has warned the government that there will be a reduction in domestic production of fruit and vegetables if it fails to develop a successor to the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS).

Welcoming a report this week, released by the government's independent Migration Advisory Committee, which highlighted the critical role of seasonal migrant labour in maintaining competitiveness in the UK fresh produce industry, the BGA has warned the government that the end of SAWS could also result in a greater dependency on foreign imports and will drive up higher food prices.

SAWS will close at the end of this year when transitional controls, that allow an annual quota of 21,250 Bulgarian and Romanian workers to enter the UK, for a maximum period of six months, are lifted allowing the workers free entry into the European labour market. The foreign workers currently account for

one-third of Britain's seasonal agricultural labour force.

The report by the Migration Advisory Committee advises the government to consider enacting proposals for a replacement scheme which could utilise workers from non-EU countries such as Ukraine, where there is a high number of agricultural students.

"The committee's conclusions are clear - the current scheme is well-managed and benefits UK growers, migrant workers and consumers while not disadvantaging UK workers," said BGA chief executive James Hallett in defence of SAWS.

Estimating that the fresh produce industry could potentially increase its value to £5 billion within the next 10 years, Hallett has called on the government to end the uncertainty regarding the future of SAWS and take on the report's suggestions of developing an alternative or risk damaging profits for the UK food industry.

He concluded: "By continuing

uncertainty over access to seasonal migrant labour, when sufficient workers cannot be found here in the UK, represents a major threat to future production and investment plans. Without adequate and reliable staffing levels it is almost inevitable that many UK growers will cancel investment plans and switch production out of the UK. Ministers need to act swiftly and decisively to establish a successor scheme in the interests of growers, consumers and the UK economy."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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