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By Michael Barker

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## 'Massive' reinvestment needed in UK horticulture



New Food Research Collaboration report calls on Defra to do more to reverse declining fruit and veg production

Professor Tim Lang

**T**he UK horticulture industry is in a 'weak' state and will struggle to support new advice to consume more fruit and veg, a major new study has claimed.

The report, by City University's Professor Tim Lang and research fellow Dr Victoria Schoen on behalf of the inter-university Food Research Collaboration (FRC), argued government must put the British fresh produce industry at the heart of its upcoming 25-year food strategy in order to reduce the reliance upon imports and help reverse an alarming decline in production.

The report comes after Public Health England last week updated its Eatwell advice to sideline sugary products and increase the prominence of fresh fruit and vegetables within diets. Currently, British adults eat an average of 3.6 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, with children managing just three portions.

UK growers should be in prime position to supply the nation's needs, but a succession of issues are hampering this push, according to the report. These include low wages, a reliance upon migrant labour, poor returns and wasted land and resources. That has led to a substantial decline in self-sufficiency, with a 27 per cent drop in the horticultural production area between 1985 and 2014.

"These factors should receive more attention," the authors wrote. "And politicians need to look very carefully at the sector. Dairy farmers have been understandably 'noisy' about being squeezed by rising costs and powerful supermarkets [but] the public needs to be more aware of a not dissimilar situation in fruit and veg."

Fruit and vegetables are the biggest source of UK food imports, and the trade deficit in horticulture has risen to £7.8

billion, representing 37 per cent of the £21bn food trade gap. Brassicas, mushrooms, lettuce, apples and pears have all suffered declining domestic production.

Lang and Schoen have made a number of recommendations on the back of their findings. They believe Defra should apply a 'health lens' to the focus on 'Brand Britain' in its food strategy, while government, growers, land use specialists, industry and regional bodies should plan the infrastructure needed for a massive reinvestment in, and policy support for, horticulture.

They also said academics and civil servants must encourage consumption of home-produced fruit and veg, and there should be funding for modelling studies into how to narrow the supply and demand gap.

Finally, they called for a new research

strand to examine sustainable production,

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

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and the creation of a unified voice to  
champion British horticulture.

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