

CONCLUSION

It is unlikely that the industry will ever enjoy the same degree of access to the labour force it once did. However, future prospects are bright for those who are innovative, forward thinking, and well motivated. The emphasis towards environmental issues is likely to accelerate and the garden market seems set to expand as the media profile and popularity of gardening continues to rise. It is important to take advantage of this and promote the positive features of the industry. This, combined with improved levels of labour efficiency, automation, and mechanisation is the way ahead.

The Influence of Government on UK Nursery Stock Propagation and Production

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INTRODUCTION

The Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (MAFF) has a beneficial interest in plant propagation and production and this can be illustrated with reference to two aspects of MAFF activity. First, there is the policy towards regulation of the sector and, secondly, its efforts through the research and development programme.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION

Much regulation is essential, for example to safeguard animal, public, or plant health or to protect the environment. Above all, Government priority through MAFF legislation is to safeguard the interests of consumers. Consumers need to have confidence in the products which growers place before them. Good regulation enhances consumers' confidence in growers' products and in the regulatory authority. That is the reason for the Pesticides Safety Directorate and for the Food Standards Agency which is shortly to be established.

Food Safety and Environmental Protection thus have priority under the MAFF regulatory programme. But the Ministry is nevertheless concerned to keep regulation to a minimum. The test for good regulation is that it should be transparent, properly targeted, proportionate to the problem, consistent in application, and those of us who make regulations should be fully accountable for them. Wherever possible, except in emergencies, the Ministry consults all those who would be affected by a new regulation and tries to let them know what its impact will be.

These arrangements apply where MAFF designs the policy and the legislation which implements it. It is not quite the same in Europe where the U.K. is one voice in 15. However, MAFF's representatives still seek to get the "better regulation" message across and, once regulations are agreed, the Ministry takes care not to implement beyond what is required. This is not always easy to do. Other member

states sometimes have a different understanding of the nature of the problems to be addressed. European agreements on less regulation are not always easy to reach but the U.K. recently achieved such an agreement during the U.K. Presidency on Council Directive 91/682 concerning quality standards for the marketing of ornamental plant material.

Those working in the industry did not like the original directive. It was put into effect by MAFF in a manner which imposed the least possible burden on industry but it remained a problem, because it was highly prescriptive and badly written. The industry and MAFF agreed about the directive. When the Commission nominated the regulation under its SLIM exercise (Simpler Legislation for the Internal Market) MAFF was pleased. The Commission invited five officials from member states (not including the U.K.) and five industry representatives (including one from the U.K.) to a series of meetings in 1996 to consider the need for regulation in this area. The Commission then issued a proposal for simplifying and clarifying the directive in January 1998. The U.K. gave the proposal priority under our Presidency and reached an agreement which was formally adopted at the beginning of the Austrian Presidency as Directive 98/56. It entered into force on 1 July this year.

The new directive now applies to all ornamental plant species, rather than a limited list as before, but it is now confined to propagating material; there is a simplified registration procedure for producers and we generally now have something which industry accepts and agrees to be workable. This success partly arose because of the close consultation with industry doing the negotiations. When it came to implementation, MAFF arranged for the registration of suppliers to fit in with existing plant health registrations and inspection visits are included in existing programmes. It is to be hoped that there will be other similar success stories.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

MAFF has an £11 m research and development budget for horticulture which feeds into the £3.5 m programme undertaken by the Horticulture Development Council. The objectives of MAFF's research and development programme are to encourage a competitive industry, encourage the production of safe and affordable plants, and to enhance the environment.

The programme is one of strategic science which means that MAFF is seeking to understand the complex interactions which are involved in plant growth and development. The programme centres on improving the understanding of mechanisms controlling vegetative propagation including plant/water relations in the establishment of cuttings, the process controlling rooting and subsequent growth, and understanding the qualities of material best suited for rooting substrates.

The MAFF programme on plant propagation at East Malling costs £400,000 per year from a total spent on research and development in hardy nursery stock of £1.5 m. The largest proportion of MAFF's budget is spent in the area of pest and disease resistance and control in order to reduce reliance on chemical control methods.

In addition, a hort-LINK project started in April 1999 on micropropagation of hardy ornamental species. The LINK consortium involves six industrial partners. A further LINK project, concerning improving water use efficiency in hardy nursery stock, is on the way and involves ten industrial partners plus the HDC and the HTA.