



**HORTICULTURE FORUM
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Mr Robin McKee
16 Ballyhenry Road
Comber
Newtownards
Co Down
BT23 5JY
24 October 2013.

Simon Hamilton MLA,
Finance Minister,
Department of Finance and Personnel,
Rathgael House,
Baloo Road,
BANGOR
BT19 7NA

Dear Minister Hamilton,

AGRI-FOOD LOAN SCHEME.

The Horticulture Forum brings together organisations from throughout the production and amenity horticulture sectors in Northern Ireland with a common interest in the furthering the development of the Industry.

In July 2012 we published our own Development Strategy for the Horticulture Industry in Northern Ireland, in which we identified and quantified the growth potential for the industry here. This information was subsequently embraced within the AgriFood Strategy Board's strategic plan "Going For Growth".

The industry already makes a much greater contribution to the Northern Ireland economy than is generally recognised, with farmgate output from production

horticulture of some £72 m per year and at least £80m earnings by those in the Landscape and Amenity Services sectors. The industry as a whole provides employment for over 6500 people in at least 1500 businesses plus a further 1000 people working in local authority / public sector organisations.

The Production Horticulture sector also provides the inputs for approximately 50 food businesses, employing some 1,770 people and with a gross turnover estimated at £195.5m. This output is achieved with very limited support from Government or the EU, as compared to agriculture. The industry also receives nothing like the generous capital investment support which has been provided for many years to their closest competitors within the Republic of Ireland.

We identified the potential for growth in value of the production horticulture sector to £100.6 m by 2020. However, achieving this growth potential will require access to significant funds and so we very much welcome your recent announcement, with the DETI Minister Arlene Foster, of the Agri-Food Loans Scheme

We note in the first phase of the Agri-Food Loan Scheme is directed at broiler producers with subsequent extension to the pig, red meat, egg production and red meat sectors, where applicants “form part of an integrated supply chain”. No mention is made of the horticulture industry with its equivalent need for investment to deliver its growth potential.

We understand that discussions are under way with the banks on the extension of the scheme and would ask that the horticulture sector should be provided with the same facility tailored to meet its particular needs.

Yours sincerely,

Robin McKee. Chairman.