

Research and development

Innovation is key to sustainable growth. To maintain and increase their competitive edge, businesses must have access to relevant, locally-validated research and development. AFBI has supported some research and development, particularly in the top fruit and mushroom sectors, but more is needed in all sectors.

See *Going for Growth Recommendations: 20, 95 and 98.*

Education and technology transfer

CAFRE has a long history of educating new entrants for the industry and providing targeted education, training and technology transfer services to horticultural businesses. This service must be safeguarded and extended to help businesses to remain competitive and capable of operating in an increasingly demanding marketplace.

See *Going for Growth Recommendations: 99.*



Promotion of horticulture as a career option and succession planning

The horticulture industry has a poor age structure with younger people being under-represented. To ensure continued vitality, horticulture must

have a reliable supply of appropriately qualified new entrants to the industry. The provision of a horticulture degree course would help Northern Ireland retain those of its many talented young people who are interested in a career in horticulture.

See *Going for Growth Recommendation: 99.*

Market intelligence

Many horticultural businesses are keen to exploit opportunities for export and import substitution. Support in identifying and developing these opportunities is crucial to future success.

See *Going for Growth Recommendations: 3 and 95.*

Promotion of landscape development

Local landscape companies are involved in designing, creating and maintaining the parks, gardens and landscaped spaces used by all in Northern Ireland. They also have a key role in shaping visitors' first and lasting impressions of Northern Ireland through their work at ports, airports, train stations and tourist attractions, the places all our visitors see. The sector brings long-term economic and health benefits and deserves strong support. Landscaping is key to attracting inward investment and should be factored into all new construction and infrastructural development projects from the planning stage.



HORTICULTURE FORUM
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Why the horticulture industry matters in Northern Ireland



The purpose of this document is to seek the support of the Assembly in helping to grow the horticulture industry.

The Horticulture Forum for Northern Ireland was first established in 2005 following a recommendation within the DARD Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Commercial Horticulture Sector in 2002. The Forum is an umbrella organisation that supports a stronger horticulture industry in Northern Ireland.

Website: www.horticultureforumni.co.uk

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Why the horticulture industry matters in Northern Ireland

“The Year of Food and Drink in Northern Ireland in 2016 was a wonderful celebration of our food producers, including horticultural businesses, and restaurateurs. Tourists have recognised our unspoilt natural environment and the skills of our horticulturalists in harnessing our soils and climate to such delicious effect.

“But it’s not just about food. Our horticulture industry is as adept at appealing to the eye as it is to taste buds. Local horticultural businesses play a key role in ensuring that our hotels, golf courses and parks and gardens continue to attract a growing number of tourists to Northern Ireland.

“I am delighted to be associated with the Horticulture Forum, and to celebrate their achievements to date.”

Dr. Howard Hastings OBE, LI.B, ACA, M.Sc,
Managing Director, Hastings Hotels

“Horticulture is the science, technology, art and business of cultivating and using plants to improve human life. Horticulturists and Horticultural Scientists create global solutions for sustainable nutritious food and healthy/restorative and beautiful environments.”

Chartered Institute of Horticulture



Why horticulture matters

Economy

- 2,700 people are employed in production (fruit, vegetables, mushrooms, ornamental plants and cut flowers and foliage).
- 4,000 people are employed in amenity services (landscaping, parks and gardens) and 1,100 work in garden centres and florists.
- 2,500 full-time jobs are provided processing fruit, vegetables and mushrooms.
- The farm gate value of fruit, vegetable and mushroom production amounts to £100m annually.
- The farm gate value of ornamental plants and cut flowers amounts to £20m annually.
- The value of sales from the fruit and vegetable processing sector was £314m in 2014, with 32% of sales to NI, 49% to GB and 19% exported.

Contributing to draft Programme for Government outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.



Environment

- Many studies attest to the environmental benefits of horticulture.
- Horticulture is a source of much needed biodiversity, providing habitats and food for a range of endangered species (e.g. birds, bumblebees and butterflies).
- Tree planting can reduce the risk of flooding and soil erosion.
- Plants can insulate buildings, reducing heating costs (and carbon footprint) in winter and keeping them cool during warm weather.
- Plants in urban areas have a role in reducing air pollution and provide a range of benefits linked with health and wellbeing (e.g. stress relief).

Contributing to draft Programme for Government outcomes: 1, 2, 4, 11 and 13.

Food security

- By increasing the amounts of fruit and vegetables grown here we can reduce food miles and our reliance on imports.
- Floral diversity provides a resource for pollinators, such as honeybees and bumblebees, upon which many food crops rely to achieve economic yield.

Contributing to draft Programme for Government outcome: 1.

Health and wellbeing

- Fruits and vegetables are recognised as vital components of healthy diets and may reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other serious diseases.
- Gardening is good exercise, helping reduce obesity and heart disease, and promotes good mental health.
- Urban green spaces provide valuable opportunities for traffic-free recreation and exercise.
- Community gardens enable social cohesion and community development, promote healthy eating and help people learn new skills.
- Providing children with opportunities to experience horticulture has led to improvements in behaviour and performance at school.

Contributing to draft Programme for Government outcomes: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Tourism

- In 2014, 2.2 million tourists visited Northern Ireland and spent £514m. Our beautiful landscapes, of which green spaces, parks and gardens are an important component, are an important reason why tourists visit.



- Food tourism has seen significant growth in recent years and is worth £350m a year. Our food has an international reputation for quality. The Armagh Bramley apple, for example, was awarded Protected Geographical Indication status under the EU Protected Food Name Scheme in 2012.
- Golf tourism generated £33m in 2014 with golf visitors then exceeding 139,000. The NI Assembly’s vision is to grow golf tourism to £50m per annum, and in doing so to remind golfers worldwide that Northern Ireland is where golf champions are born and play. Well managed golf courses are fundamental to this vision.

Contributing to draft Programme for Government outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12 and 13.



What horticulture needs to thrive

Investment

Horticulture operates on an all-island basis. The Republic of Ireland’s Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector provides much needed assistance for its horticulture industry at approximately €3m to €5m per annum. The lack of an equivalent scheme in Northern Ireland and the Regional Development Programme’s focus on mainstream agriculture puts our industry at a competitive disadvantage. Help for capital investment in, for example, high density orchards, specialist small scale equipment and new glass houses, is urgently needed.

See Going for Growth Recommendations: 47, 57, 96 and 97.



Sustainable prices and control of labour costs

Competition between supermarkets has led to sustained downward pressure on prices while the National Living Wage is substantially increasing labour costs. Horticulture is a labour-intensive industry with few opportunities to reduce costs. For horticulture businesses to remain sustainable, help will be needed to develop new ways of working together (e.g. producer organisations) and they will need a ready supply of hardworking seasonal labour. Renewed effort will also be needed, perhaps through the Supply Chain Forum, to ensure that primary producers receive a fair return on their produce.

See Going for Growth Recommendations: 7, 9, 14, 15, 18 and 101.