

Horticulture Forum Gives Evidence to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

On 10 November 2015 members of the Horticulture Forum gave evidence to the Assembly's Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. The witnesses were: Elaine Shaw (Chairperson of the Forum and representative of Northway Mushrooms); Shane Donnelly (vegetables and cut flowers); Hamilton Loney (apples); and Pat Smith (vegetables).

The witnesses drew the Committee's attention to the significant contribution that the diverse horticultural industry makes to Northern Ireland's economy. It does this with minimal support from Government or the European Union.

The witnesses continued by explaining the difficulties currently being faced by the industry: downward pressure on prices; upward pressure on labour costs (because of the National Living Wage and pension contributions); the need for help with capital investment; and the threat to research and technology transfer that is being faced particularly by minority enterprises.

Forum Chairperson, Elaine Shaw, said, "Opportunities like this are so important for our industry. We make a positive contribution both to the economy and to wellbeing. Because of our industry's diversity and fragmented nature, however, there is always a danger of our needs being overlooked by policy makers. This meeting allowed us to put our case forcefully to the Committee and we left them in no doubt about our needs."