

EU reform could affect subsidies

By Sophie Barnett

Discussions were rekindled last week concerning the European Commission's reform of the fruit and vegetable industry, after they were previously laid out in January.

The reforms to the Common Market Organisation (CMO) for fruit and vegetables would bring an end to the current CMO and revise or scrap many of the subsidies paid to farmers and growers.

The reform aims to decouple subsidies for producing and processing fruit and vegetables if ministers agree – intended to break the link between the quantity a farmer produces and the amount of subsidy received from Brussels.



Fischer Boel would consider a transitional period before decoupling subsidies

The NFU believes the more would be positive for growers in the UK but southern European members want a transitional period before they come into effect as they fear it will leave them out of pocket.

EU agriculture minister Mariann Fischer Boel said she would be wil-

ling to consider a transitional period before bringing in the decoupling.

NFU chief horticultural adviser Phil Hudson said the NFU was also concerned about a section in the reform for crisis management, which would help growers in times of difficulties.

He said: "What we want is for them to properly define 'crisis'. In the UK, we define it as something like extraordinary weather conditions that ruin crops. But we do not want crisis management to step in when people just overproduce. We do not see overproduction as a crisis but something that can be avoided." It is expected the reform will be concluded in June.

Herbicides save peas and beans

Chemical company BASF is recommending some post-emergence options for pea and bean growers affected by difficult weather conditions earlier this spring.

BASF pulse product manager John Young said: "This year growers have managed to drill their peas and beans, but have been held up applying pre-emergence herbicides because it has been too wet or too windy."

Young said Basagran SG (berlazon) is one of the rare post-emergence options in beans and peas and that UK growers have this year only to use Pulsar (berlazonne + MCPB) mixed with cyanazine, to good effect in peas.

Pulsar and cyanazine are contact-acting herbicides for post-emergence broad-leaved weed control in peas.

Growers are wary of regulations in the wake of GLA actions

Concerned growers have been contacting the NFU for advice in the aftermath of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) action of stripping labour providers of their licences.

All seven of the labour providers that supplied food processor Bonforbs have appealed against the revocation of their licences and are awaiting the outcome.

But NFU horticulture board chairman Richard Hirst said it had led to an "increasing number of queries from grower members" to

check they are working within the requirements of the law.

Hirst told Grower: "Particularly after the recent developments people are taking note. The whole idea of the legislation was to make sure that labour source and supply were treating people fairly from all sides."

"It is becoming apparent that people are using fewer gangmasters than they used to and employing people directly and this is leading to new confusions."

He said determining whether or not growers' activities meet the

licensing requirements is not always easy.

In his current Horticulture & Potatoes newsletter Hirst highlighted how a grower found he was not following the regulations by employing through a contractor, who was not a licensed labour provider, and explained the way around the problem.

He has encouraged members to email their queries to Chris. Hartfield@mfu.org.uk

The GLA is also available for advice on 0845 602 5020.

RHS shows off British produce

British growers are preparing to showcase just what they are capable of at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The NS&I: Growing Britain display is a partnership between National Savings & Investments and represented by the NFU and aims to show just how diverse, dynamic and professional the horticulture industry in the UK is.

The display will be constructed from materials sourced entirely from British suppliers and shows more than 60 different types of fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, herbs and other plants.

Designed by Penny Riley, the display will have the produce in 25 galvanised steel cubes and towers.

Seed company Thompson & Morgan, in conjunction with Three Countries Potatoes, will take visitors through the history of potatoes on their stand, ranging from the Mayan Gold – a descendant of wild potatoes eaten by inhabitants of the Andes more than 10,000 years ago – to the present day.

Anti-freeze product protects 90 per cent of apricots from freezing

Farm manager Simon Foad is hailing the success of an award-winning plant anti-freeze product, saying it saved his £18,000 crop of apricots.

Highland Court Farm, Kent, which recently won Soft Fruit Grower of the Year in Grower's 2007 awards, is the only commercial apricot farm in the UK.

When it suffered a severe frost in February of -5°C, Foad said he would normally have lost 90 per cent of his crop.

But he claims the crop was saved because he used Cropaid, which won Technical Product of the



Against the odds: Highland Court Farm saved £18,000 worth of crops

Year in the Grower awards.

Foad said: "It would normally have decimated all the apricots but I still had blooms and apricots left."

He said he used to use Antifrost, but because of the difficulty

in getting it from the US he decided to try something new.

"I was pleased because it worked better – you can use it when plants are flowering, post-flowering and at other times."

Cropaid director Aydin Tanseli said he too had been astounded by the success. He said: "I think it's amazing. [The farm] had no hope to save the crops – it's left people so overwhelmed."

"Even more amazingly, he didn't follow our recommendations. He put it on 10 days before the frost and we recommend the day before, and it still worked."