

Media Release



NPA press release
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EFRA report on labour a wake-up call to Government - NPA

The National Pig Association (NPA) has called on the Government to learn from the recent crisis and work with the industry to address the labour issues that have crippled the pig sector over the past year.

This follows the publication of a damning report by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that highlighted the desperate problems the shortage of butchers in processing plants have caused the pig sector and accused Ministers of not taking them seriously enough. The influential cross-party committee's report gave huge credence to evidence given by the NPA during its inquiry into labour shortages in the food and farming sector – and it has adopted a number of the NPA's asks in its recommendations.

These include calls for the Government to make a 'step change' in how it engages with industry and act promptly on its concerns, and for it provide direct support to pig producers affected by the industry crisis.

There are also helpful recommendations on adding roles to the shortage occupation list, lowering the English language requirement in the Skilled Workers scheme and the timing of the Government's fairness in the pork supply chain review.

Thorough and insightful

NPA chief executive Zoe Davies said: "This is an incredibly thorough and insightful report that has got to the very nub of the labour issues facing the food and farming sector.

"The report is clear that labour shortages, brought about in part by changes to Government policy, have had a huge impact on the pig sector, which is still fighting for its survival.

"The Government now needs to take stock and adopt these sensible recommendations in full. We want to see the Government, and the Home Office in particular, take this issue seriously.

"Ministers need to stop arguing that labour shortages are not a problem, stop deflecting blame onto the industry, and as the report suggests, sit down with us to understand the problems and look at how we can work together to find solutions.

"I want to stress that the NPA agrees with the report's long-term goal of reducing our reliance on migrant labour. But there is much to work through before we can get there, and we need to rethink the policies currently in place so that the industry can employ enough people to produce the products the British public demand.

"We are hugely grateful to Neil Parish and his committee for delivering such a coherent and balanced report – and sincerely hope it can lead to better things."

Specific recommendations

NPA senior policy adviser Charlie Dewhurst highlighted some of the report's key recommendations:

Secretary of State to intervene with measures aimed at providing support for pig farmers, rather than pork processors.

Charlie said: “We have been calling for many months for direct support for pig producers in England to reflect the enormous financial pressures placed on them over the last year through no fault of their own. Producers in other parts of the UK and across Europe have already received compensation. We have written to Defra again to request that this support is forthcoming for producers in England, too.”

The Government’s review of fairness in the pig supply chain to be taken forward as a matter of urgency and the final report to be published before the end of July 2022.

Charlie said: “Again, this is something we very much support. We have welcomed Defra’s review, but producers cannot wait for a lengthy inquiry to see changes made in how the supply chain operates. We need a rapid conclusion and urgent change.”

Home Office must immediately lower the English language requirement to a ‘basic user level’ for those Skilled Worker Visa roles in the food and farming sector.

Charlie said: “The English language requirement is set too high and creates an unnecessary barrier to recruiting much-needed skilled butchers.

This policy change is essential, and we see no reason why it should not be made.”

Government to consult with the sector to establish what additional costs businesses face when applying for visas for vital overseas labour and to develop an action plan to minimise bureaucratic barriers and process costs.

Charlie said: “This is another very helpful recommendation that reflects the need to address the extra costs and barriers businesses face in recruiting labour.”

Government to immediately add the food and farming roles that were contained in its MAC’s September 2020 recommendations to the shortage occupation list (SOL).

Charlie said: “We have been calling for skilled butchers to be added to the SOL for a long, long time. The Government should listen to its own advisers and to the EFRA Committee, which fully understands the issues, and respond immediately.”

Wake-up call

Charlie concluded: “This should be a wake-up call to Government, which will now have to respond to each of the recommendations. We need a cross-departmental approach to solving these urgent problems when they arise and a recognition that migration policy should be flexible in responding to unforeseen circumstances, such as the pandemic.

“We are delighted that the EFRA Committee has taken on board all of our concerns and we look forward to working with Government to address the many issues raised.”

Notes to editors

- You can access the full report on the EFRA website [HERE](#)
- As the NPA seeks financial compensation for producers in England, you can see how producers in other countries have received financial support [HERE](#)
- The NPA is currently calling for the pig price to be significantly increased as soaring input costs threaten the future of producers. More [HERE](#)

More information

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