

24th May 2024

Dear Ms Balbin,

I have carefully reviewed your letter dated 20th March, 2024 and would like to address the concerns raised regarding the treatment and working conditions of migrant workers at Haygrove. Below, I provide detailed responses to each point mentioned in your correspondence, with the aim of clarifying our practices and the actions we have undertaken to ensure the welfare of our workers.

Overall, we have grave concerns that these allegations are not only materially incorrect, but also that they give the false impression that there are serious and systemic issues with the way in which Haygrove's seasonal workers are treated in the UK, akin to labour exploitation or modern slavery. We refute such allegations in the strongest terms.

Our business has operated for 35 years in the UK, recruiting and employing more than 1,000 seasonal workers annually from many countries. In 2023, we have employed 1,146 seasonal workers of 21 different nationalities, including 134 Latin American workers. We take great care in ensuring fairness and equality in our recruitment and working processes. Most of our seasonal workers share a very positive experience with large numbers coming back.

In response to the points you make in your correspondence:

Recruitment Fees:

We are aware that some workers recruited to work in the UK horticulture industry have allegedly paid significant fees to secure employment, this not the case for those workers recruited for Haygrove. In any case, this matter pertains primarily to the recruitment agency, in our case Fruitful, rather than Haygrove directly. Both Haygrove and Fruitful take such matters seriously and collaborate to ensure that this does not occur in our recruitment pipeline.

Health and Safety (H&S) and PPE:

Pickers at Haygrove are not exposed to chemicals as their job does not involve handling such substances.

Working Hours and Breaks:

Working hours are subject to weather conditions, resulting in variability. We ensure overtime is paid at 1.25 times the standard rate for hours worked beyond 48 per week. Regular breaks are provided, compliant with the UK's Working Time Regulations, and workers are guaranteed a minimum of 32 paid hours weekly, regardless of actual hours worked.

Travel Between Sites:

Where possible, we accommodate workers on the farm at which they will work for the duration of their tenure to minimise movement between sites and travel time. For a short (cherry-picking) season, however, we transfer some workers from Ledbury to the Kington (cherry-picking) site.

We offer on-site accommodation at Kington to minimise travel time for workers, but some workers choose not to move (20 spaces for accommodation at Kington were not taken up). [REDACTED]

For those travelling from Ledbury, we provided free daily buses between Ledbury and Kington for those workers.

Following this feedback we have taken the decision to pay the workers for their additional travel to work time in 2024, as a goodwill gesture.

Pay and Flight Costs:

We operate full transparency for voluntary deductions from pay. Our recruitment documentation makes applicants aware from the outset that Haygrove will pay for worker plane tickets by means of an interest free loan. We provide workers with the opportunity to repay this loan in weekly instalments, which they voluntarily pay, usually by debit card. It is up to them when and how repayments are made. Haygrove make this interest free loan available to workers to reduce the risk of workers taking out a loan from unscrupulous lenders in country and being subject to a debt burden before they start work.

We are aware that, when some Latin American workers were sent their plane tickets, there was a discrepancy between the face value printed on the ticket and the loan value. We purchased these tickets as a group booking with our third-party travel agent and therefore knew the total booking value, but not the price of individual tickets. The £1,511.00 originally communicated to workers represented the total group booking cost split equally between them.

Having been made aware of this discrepancy, we communicated again with workers by email that they would only be charged the actual face value of their plane ticket, and our investigations into this matter with the travel agency were ongoing.

[REDACTED] Those that did request changes to their flights for earlier departures were done so with Haygrove paying the additional cost. Workers are not unduly burdened by these costs.

During the recruitment process applicants are given a verbal indication of typical earnings at (40-50 hours per week in a typical July cherry harvest), at no time would these have been promised or contracted. All workers are, however, paid at least the National Living Wage for their minimum contracted 32-hours per week .



Contract Signing:

Contracts of employment are sent to workers prior to their arrival in the UK. We ensure that workers are fully informed about the terms and conditions.

Wages and Deductions:

Workers are paid at least the national living wage. Deductions are made in accordance with legal accommodation offsets and for wage advances only. Utilities are included in the accommodation charge.

Living Conditions:

Our accommodation meets the required standards and are regularly inspected. Separate sanitary facilities for men and women are provided. No charges are made for gas or electricity. We have received no reports of sexual harassment or abuse.

Weather-Related Delays:

Employment contracts state a minimum of 32 hours pay in accordance with the Seasonal Worker's Scheme obligations. These are provided to workers on arrival at the farm, and any concerns covered in the onsite induction. All documentation is translated into a worker's native language.

Due to unprecedented cold weather in July 2023, crop yields were 25-30% lower than forecast and we had less work to offer than anticipated. This meant that some workers who arrived at that time were unable to start work immediately.

In weeks where less work was available than expected workers were provided with cash pay advances of up to £100 per person so that they could purchase food and other essentials. Many workers took advantage of this offer. In this situation and where work was not immediately available, we made no deductions e.g. for accommodation.

Where any amount of work was available, workers were paid the National Living Wage for their minimum contracted 32 hours per week, even where this amount of work was not available.

Our workers' hours, pay and payslips have been audited by both the Home Office and the GLAA, both of which were satisfied there were no discrepancies or wrongdoing. We therefore refute any allegations regarding pay and substantial measures are in place to support workers during time of low earnings.

Debt Bondage:

Wage advances are provided to assist workers upon arrival and are repayable through their earnings. The amounts are limited to ensure manageable repayment.

Freedom to Leave:

Workers are free to leave if they wish, with return flights arranged at no cost. Transfers between farms are managed smoothly by labour providers.



Reporting Exploitation:

Whistleblowers in the UK are protected under the grievance procedure from day one. No official grievances have been logged, and any dismissals were due to abusive behavior, not for reporting issues. Farm transfers are common and not as a result of punishment.

Farm Inspections:

Farms are regularly inspected and must adhere to SEDEX standards. Haygrove complies fully with these requirements.

Future Job Opportunities:

Offering future employment opportunities is not a means to silence complaints but to provide continued work for those who wish to return. The overall seasonal worker return rate in 2024 is over 80% in Haygrove UK.

Wage Promises:

While no specific weekly wage is promised, contracts guarantee the minimum wage with at least 32 hours of work per week. Variations in expected hours are due to uncontrollable weather conditions.

Addressing Human Rights Impacts:

All documentation is translated into the workers' native languages. Surveys are conducted to understand worker issues, and a robust grievance procedure is in place.

Preventive Measures:

Following feedback we are responding by improving our communication with applicants and workers through an increased number of worker meetings in the field, providing additional whistleblowing channels and training team leaders and managers to identify signs of modern slavery or exploitation and report it immediately to the Haygrove Head of people. We have developed an improved farm-specific recruitment presentation and regular review and training.

We appreciate the opportunity to address these concerns and reiterate once more that we strongly refute the allegations made. We are committed to the continual improvement of our practices to ensure the fair and ethical treatment of all workers.

Yours sincerely,

Angus Davison
Chairman, Haygrove