

The Irish Hardy Nursery Stock Association (IHNSA) is a commodity sector within the Horticulture Section of the Irish Farmers Association. It is the representative body of nursery stock producers whose main objective is to advance and protect the interests of primary producers in the hardy nursery stock sector.

The past year has been very difficult for growers contending with the various lockdown measures compounded by Brexit. In addition to these unprecedented events, the industry faces many challenges such as peat extraction, labour shortages, rising input costs and market disruptions.

Amenity horticulture sector is worth over **€77m** to the national economy, which includes €19m of exports. Growers in Ireland operate to an extremely tight margin and chairman Val Farrell urges all garden centres, retailers and consumers to support the **Irish amenity sector**. Below are some of the key areas of activity undertaken by the organisation over the past year.

Bord Bia in conjunction with the IHNSA were successful in their application for the next tranche of the Green Cities for a Sustainable Europe project. It is a three-year programme beginning this year. **Green Cities for a Sustainable Europe** is a platform that encourages the greening of public spaces by providing innovative ideas, scientific research, and technical expertise. The project is 80% funded from the E.U, with the remaining 20% funded by growers. Growers are strongly encouraged to support this initiative.

The IFA/IHNSA continue to lobby on issues relating to the extraction of peat, which is a major concern for the sector. The IHNSA understand the need to look at alternative substrates for use in the amenity sector however, there is currently no viable alternative to peat.

- IFA completed a detailed submission re Key Issues Consultation Paper in Relation to a Review of the use of Peat in the Horticultural Industry.
- IFA has written to the Minister for the Environment Eamon Ryan, requesting a meeting regarding issues relating to peat extraction, which is of major concern to the horticulture sector.
- IFA have ongoing interaction with GMI who are the representative body for peat companies.
- Minister Malcolm Noonan has also been contacted in relation to IFA participating in the 'Use of Peat in Horticulture Consultation Group'.



IHNSA chairman Val Farrell and Eileen Kelly at the trolley fair in Kelly's Nursery February 2020.

IFA/IHNSA, together with Bord Bia organised a plant fair on the 25th of February 2020.

The plant/trolley fairs are organised for nursery stock producers aimed at reducing the importation of nursery stock produce. Unfortunately, the second trolley fair was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

- IFA Horticulture chairman Paul Brophy, addressed the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture meeting in February calling for urgent introduction of new legislation to allow horticultural peat harvesting to resume.
- IFA President Tim Cullinan highlighted the issue with Minister Pippa Hackett at the IFA AGM in January.
- IFA/IHNSA met with Bord na Mona in January and a follow up meeting is scheduled for mid-February.
- Val Farrell IHNSA chairman urges growers to lobby their local politicians.



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The **Covid-19** pandemic has caused profound market disruption for the sector.

- IFA/IHNSA made a submission to the EU Commission and Irish government on the adverse effects of the pandemic on the sector.
- IFA/IHNSA lobbied for seasonal foreign workers from other EU Member States to be classified as essential workers/
- Throughout the pandemic IFA/IHNSA wrote to Minister Michael Creed and An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar (at the time) detailing the amenity sectors current position.
- IFA/IHNSA will continue to campaign for the selling of plants to be considered an essential service, as it contributes to positive physical and mental wellbeing particularly in the domestic setting. A number of EU countries such as the Netherlands and Germany have recognised this fact and allowed garden centres to remain open despite widespread restrictions.

IFA/IHNSA continues to work with the Department of agriculture on simplifying the **EU plant health regulation**. The IHNSA are working continuously in this space both nationally and at European level with the European Nursery Association to minimise the disturbance for the sector.

Brexit implications continue to cause concern for the sector. Due to the weakening of sterling, Irish exports to the UK are less competitive. IFA is continuing its meetings with government and EU officials on this critical issue.

IFA/IHNSA continues to lobby for the reopening of the **Work Permit Scheme**. IFA has contacted DBEI regarding reopening the pilot work permit scheme and met with Minister Damian English on the re-opening of the scheme.

IFA made a submission to the Public Consultation on the **General Scheme of an Employment Permits (Consolidation and Amendment) Bill**. This proposed to take certain operational elements out of primary legislation, ensuring that the rules governing employment permits for non-EEA nationals can be nimbler and better adapted to the evolution of the Irish labour market. IFA made the point that seasonal work permits would be particularly valuable to the horticultural sector.

IFA Employment Service

The service enables members to become and remain compliant with employment law legislation. This service is exclusively available to IHNSA/IFA members at affordable rates from €450 per year.

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