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Subject: Consultation on food supply chain quality schemes and branding
Date: 17 October 2008 16:19:02

Dear Mr Attenborough,

Please find below the response of the British Ornamental Plant Producers (BOPP), a quality management certification scheme which covers the ornamentals industry (representing a mixture of 85 growers, packhouses and growing media producers) to the questions set out in the consultation document on food supply chain quality schemes and branding.

The response of the BOPP Technical Advisory Committee to question 1 (should AHDB invest levy payers money to promote the quality and standards of its sector product, i.e. single framework across all sectors?) was no. This response may appear slightly at odds coming from a quality management certification scheme, however there are a number of unique circumstances within the ornamentals sector which have prompted this -

1. There are many different sectors within the ornamentals industry (nursery stock, bedding plants, pot plants, bulbs, cut flowers etc) and each sector offers a vast array of products, produced via a diverse range of methods to a wide number of different markets. It would therefore be difficult to create a general product quality scheme which would address the needs of both edible and non-edible crops. Any generic product quality scheme designed for use across all of horticulture and agriculture would probably have limited relevance to the ornamentals industry.

2. Similar problems of product diversity also arise in the case of product promotional programmes, although generic type promotions do occur within the ornamentals industry (e.g. Horticultural Trade Association and 'Plant For Life' and British Protected Ornamentals Association and 'Plant Colour Now'). The problem with branding individual products is also complicated by the lack of any shelf life dates on 'growing' ornamental product (excluding cut flowers). Product quality marks are pointless if the product (for example a container grown shrub) should have been sold weeks, months or even years ago on a retail site. Where the product is of very poor quality as a result, any visible quality mark would actually be self defeating.

3. The HDC have had a good track record investing in research and development projects and the Committee would find it difficult to justify promotional projects which reduce the amount of money available for these projects in the future.

The response to question 2 (does there need to be a rationalisation of existing quality marks?) is yes from the perspective of the consumer, but as pointed out in answer to question 1 to achieve this within the industry, and for it also to convey any real significant value for each particular sector, would be extremely difficult.

The response to question 3 and 4 are covered by the response to question 1.

In response to question 5 (which products or market segments do you believe would most benefit from promotion?). Tied in with the answer to question 1 this is difficult to determine for the ornamentals industry due to the diverse range of products and the actual cost:benefit ratio of investing in any one particular product. Generic promotion would be more appropriate and two example campaigns were mentioned in response to question 1.

In response to question 6 (accepting other AHDB sectors working together at sector level on a scheme). The BOPP Committee does not have a problem with this, as long as the levy money destined for the ornamental industry is ring fenced and not used in the creation of such a scheme.

Question 7 (should any promotional scheme follow EU guidelines?) is not applicable in light of the response to question 1, though obviously for any scheme to maximise its funding it would have to comply with EU guidelines.

Even though the consultation appears to be aimed primarily at the horticultural food industry rather than the ornamentals industry I trust you find these comments of use.

Regards

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