



## New biosecurity strategy to protect food security, trade and plant health

**A** new action plan to protect plants from pests and diseases was published today (Monday 9 January) by Defra, in partnership with the Forestry Commission and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

The Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain sets out a five-year vision for plant health, consisting of an action plan to secure national biosecurity, protect native species and drive economic growth. It positions the UK as a global leader in plant biosecurity, setting out the vision to create a new biosecurity regime and bio-secure plant supply chain, which will safeguard food security and help mitigate the effects of climate change. It comes following updated figures which show that plants provide an annual value of UK £15.7 billion to the United Kingdom.

Specific actions include expanding the Animal and Plant Health Agency's Internet Trading Unit to step up monitoring of online retailers and social media sites for the trade of high-risk plant products, in order to stop potentially devastating pests and diseases from entering the country. Additionally, the strategy sets out how more than 30 signatories, including Defra, the Royal Horticultural Society, National Farmers Union and the Woodland Trust, will deliver an ambitious programme of behavioural change across society through the Public Engagement in Plant Health Accord. This one-of-a-kind collective commitment will kickstart a national conversation around biosecurity and promote the actions that the public can take to protect tree and plant health.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, says, "This landmark strategy sets out how we will protect Great Britain's plants, with the government, industry and the public working together to tackle the risks posed by plant pests and diseases. In light of climate change, tackling these varied and mounting risks will be critical to maintaining our food security, as well as facilitating safe

trade amidst a challenging economic backdrop.

"Today's announcement demonstrates this Government's ironclad commitment to protecting and restoring our natural environment for future generations, as we deliver on our tree planting targets and ambition to achieve net zero."

Nicola Spence, UK Chief Plant Health Officer, says, "Plant pests and diseases know no borders. As the global trade in plants and plant products continues to grow, our precious ecosystems, native species and biosecurity are at risk. The resultant threats posed to our treescapes, food security and the global economy are all too real.

"Therefore, I am proud to officially launch the Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain, which will deliver a step change in our plant health protections, actions and behaviours. This will position Great Britain as a global leader in plant biosecurity and set an example for the world to follow."

Lesley Griffiths, the Welsh Government's Minister for Rural Affairs, says, "The Plant Biosecurity Strategy emphasises our commitment to protect the health of our plants. Plants are the foundation of our ecosystems and provide life to the whole food chain. The strategy outlines what we will do, working with others, to further protect this vital resource."

Sara Lom, The Tree Council CEO, says, "The Tree Council was created nearly 50 years ago in response to Dutch elm disease and now leads activity into the devastating impacts of ash dieback. From first-hand experience, we know that effective biosecurity is vital in defence of Britain's trees and plants.

"We welcome the launch of the Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain and look forward to working with Defra and partners to protect our treescapes."

The Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain will also set out how enhancements to the UK Plant Health Risk



Register, which currently lists 1,200 pests and diseases of potential threat to our biosecurity, will improve our understanding of complex and cumulative risks to plant health. As part of this, an array of new plant health IT systems will bolster our outbreak preparedness and emergency response.

Incorporated into the strategy is a commitment to work with the UK Plant Health Alliance to develop a new five-year roadmap for the Plant Healthy certification scheme, which provides biosecurity certification to nurseries, businesses and charities operating in the horticultural sector. RHS Garden Harlow Carr in Yorkshire has become the first public garden in England to be certified as Plant Healthy, in recognition of its work to prevent the introduction and spread of plant pests, diseases and invasive species and promote good plant health.

The strategy also emphasises the collective role and responsibilities we all have in upholding high standards of biosecurity — for example, the importance of not bringing home plants, trees, fruit and seeds from overseas, as

doing so could inadvertently cause pests, diseases and invasive species to be introduced or to spread in new areas. This aligns with the UK Government's long-running 'Don't Risk It!' campaign, which featured on the Animal and Plant Health Agency's Gold Medal-winning stand at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2022.

The strategy builds on the work achieved under the previous 2014 strategy as well as the consultation launched in September 2021 by Defra, the Forestry Commission, the governments of Scotland and Wales, and our agencies and delivery partners. It follows the convening of the world's first International Plant Health Conference in London last year, which brought together 500 policymakers, academics and experts from over 74 countries to address current and future plant health challenges.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the publication of the GB Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Strategy in early 2023. This will set out coordinated actions across society to prevent the arrival of new INNS and tackle the impacts of those established – securing our biosecurity and minimising their environmental and economic impacts.