

ASSURANCE MATTERS

ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURE ASSURANCE SCHEME



GREG HILL

Committee Chair

NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Welcome to the latest edition of Assurance Matters. For a lot of OHAS members, it will arrive at an intensively busy time of the year when much of the country are looking forward to winding down and getting some festive decorations up.

For the first time ever, festive ornamental horticulture has had a bit of a boost, the battle for the top spot, for who had the best UK Christmas advert this year, had a clear winner. The star of the show was green, living, and in a pot, putting ornamental horticulture at the front of everyone's thoughts this Christmas. We're all keeping our fingers crossed that there is a positive halo effect and sales are strong through the festive period!

"FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, FESTIVE ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURE HAS HAD A BIT OF A BOOST"

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Thankfully, ‘Snapper the Venus fly trap’ fails to discuss his preferred growing media, but one assumes it’s an issue when considering the future of its commercially grown offspring. I’m sure, like the rest of us, ‘Snapper’ is waiting patiently for the government to provide firm dates to the industry of when any change to peat-free will become law. In the meantime, to address these concerns and to assist the wider OHAS community, we are focused on ensuring that we share as much information as possible as we look to transition to a peat-free existence.

As we wait for clarity, OHAS and the HTA are working closely with the growing media manufacturers to ensure that the OHAS Growing Media Standard evolves, ensuring that the scheme develops to take on the challenges that these new products will bring from a compliance and best practice standpoint.

Whilst peat is a big issue for the future, there are other changes on the horizon. Following a recent benchmarking exercise, 2024 will also see new versions of both the OHAS Grower and Packhouse Standards being released, see the news section below for more information.

In the meantime, can I take this opportunity to wish all our members a successful trading period this season.

NEW VERSIONS OF THE OHAS GROWER AND PACKHOUSE STANDARDS FOR 2024

To ensure international recognition of the OHAS Scheme, it is periodically benchmarked to the GlobalGAP Flowers and Ornamentals Standard. Version 6 of this standard came out this year, which means that the OHAS Grower Standard must be benchmarked against it. This process has been ongoing through the autumn, courtesy of Paula Edgington. To keep version changes to the OHAS Standards to a minimum, both the Grower and Packhouse Standards will be reviewed and updated as necessary during the winter, and any changes combined with the benchmarking additions. The new versions of both Standards will be announced in 2024 and a time allowance put into place for members to make any necessary changes, before the versions go live.

NSF UPDATE – AUDITING THE OHAS SCHEME

One of NSF’s senior assessors, Adrian Jevans, is unfortunately retiring from OHAS auditing at the end of this year. Adrian is well known to OHAS members having audited businesses against both the Grower and Packhouse Standards for many years. We thank Adrian for providing the necessary quality and consistency required in the auditing process over the years and wish him well in his future endeavours.

NSF, the Scheme Certification Body, are currently working on upskilling assessors to the OHAS Standards and recruiting new assessors, both within the UK and internationally.

The assessors used by NSF have the required qualifications and experience to audit against the OHAS Grower, Packhouse and Growing Media Standards, as well as the GlobalGAP Flowers and Ornamentals Standard and LEAF. Assessors can therefore audit against several standards, where multiple assurance schemes are adhered to, improving audit efficiency, and reducing costs significantly.

OHAS SUBSCRIPTION AND NSF AUDITING RATES FOR 2024

We are very aware that members have experienced substantial rises in the cost of various inputs this year, and we are therefore pleased to announce that both the OHAS membership subscription rates and the NSF audit costs will be held at 2023 prices next year. The subscription fees covering additional packhouses will also be revoked, so that the subscription fee paid by packhouse members solely reflects the business turnover. OHAS membership subscription rates will be confirmed via renewal letter prior to invoices being raised in January 2024.

The fees are summarised in this table:

Band	Business Turnover	2024 Subscription (ex VAT)*	2024 Subscription (inc VAT)*
1	Below £500,000	£201	£241.20
2	£500,000-£1M	£397	£476.40
3	£1M-£5M	£652	£782.40
4	£5M-£10M	£986	£1183.20
5	Over £10M	£1314	£1576.80

* Where VAT is applicable

HTA JOINS THE FLORICULTURE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

The HTA is pleased to announce its approval for membership of the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI) 2025, uniting global floriculture stakeholders to enhance sustainable practices and streamline industry standards. The FSI Basket of Standards, which includes OHAS, provide a framework for seamless comparison and transparency, and HTA are keen to play an active role in its ongoing evolution. HTA commitment also extends beyond involvement, with an undertaking to drive best practices for sustainability throughout the horticultural sector.

As UK Environmental Horticultural representatives, the HTA-FSI membership aims to integrate reporting standards across supply chains. HTA will champion their inclusion in certification schemes, like the OHAS Assurance Scheme, supporting members in adopting practices aligned with sector-wide goals, such as net-zero, water resilience, and packaging waste reduction.

Recognising the opportunity in FloriPEFCR (the new European standardised method for environmental footprint calculation) adoption in the UK over the coming years, HTA are also eager to contribute to collaborative sustainability networking, connecting businesses globally. This milestone signifies a dedication to a more sustainable and interconnected horticultural future.

Read more about FSI [here](#).



PEAT-FREE MEDIA ADOPTION

Although the wait goes on for the government to confirm its timeline to implement a ban on the professional use of peat, the current situation should not be used as an excuse to delay peat-free adoption plans, there is still a pressing need to ensure plants can be successfully and profitably grown in such media. The process of transitioning to peat-free growing media is a complicated one requiring many aspects of production to be considered and re-evaluated. Below is a checklist of actions which need to be addressed during the process:

- Define what you need from your growing media for your own particular crops.
- Speak to a range of growing-media manufacturers about what they can offer.
- Attend training events to view results and to network with other businesses.
- Start your own structured small-scale trials with a range of media and plant species.
- Measure plant performance and other parameters to aid better comparison.
- Begin to build up your cultural knowledge from larger scale trials.
- Adjust cultural inputs, especially irrigation and nutrition, and plan for media storage.
- Look at all the costs, not just the price difference of the growing media.
- Agree your product specifications and future supply with your preferred manufacturer(s).
- Talk to your customers throughout and discuss in store plant care and shelf life.
- Analyse the media used and monitor your crops regularly.
- Track growing media and crop performance from year to year.

To further assist in the process, there are a range of [HTA technical webpages](#) on peat-free adoption and the RHS have an ongoing [five-year fellowship](#) covering the transition to peat-free.

BEST PRACTICE WHEN STORING AND USING PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS

The [Official Controls \(Plant Protection Products\) Regulations 2020](#) enable regulatory authorities to support compliance and enforce legal requirements in terms of plant protection product (PPP) use. As part of the Regulations [HSE Pesticide Enforcement Officers \(PEO\) will be visiting farms and nurseries](#) over the coming months. The aim of the visit is to check how well businesses are complying with their duties under plant protection product law. During the visit a PEO may ask to see:

- Information relating to the active substance, co-formulants and/or formulated PPP.
- PPPs product packaging and labelling.
- The storage facilities for PPPs.
- Examples of PPPs held.
- Certification held by distributors and/or users.
- Records required to be kept under plant protection product law.

To assist businesses undertaking their own internal audit of PPP storage and use, an extensive checklist can be found on the [HTA website](#). Certification to the OHAS Grower Standard is a useful step in ensuring compliance with the Regulations, it also shows to the PEO that the business is following current best practice procedures in the way it approaches PPP storage, use and record keeping.

SUSTAINABLE FARMING INCENTIVE (SFI) ACTIONS FOR INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

The [SFI actions for integrated pest management](#) are focused on:

- Increasing knowledge and identifying opportunities for an integrated pest management (IPM) approach.
- Creating habitats for natural crop pest predators.
- Using companion cropping to suppress weeds, reduce diseases and provide protection from crop pests.
- Minimising the use of insecticides.

The four approaches include:

ASSESSING INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS AND PRODUCING A PLAN

- This approach consists of arranging for a relevant BASIS qualified adviser to visit your business to:
- Assess your current approach to crop pest, weed and disease management.
- Identify and discuss opportunities for using IPM.
- Help you to produce a written IPM plan.

A payment of £989 is available for the assessment and plan per year.

INTRODUCING FLOWER-RICH GRASS MARGINS, BLOCKS, OR IN-FIELD STRIPS

To establish the flower-rich grass margins, blocks or in-field strips, a specific seed mix must be sown containing at least four grass species (not ryegrass), with the grass component not exceeding 90% of the total seed mix by weight, and ten wildflower species, with no individual flower species exceeding 25% of the total wildflower species component by weight. Once established, the flower-rich grass margins, blocks, or in-field strips, must be maintained to provide benefit for natural crop predators and pollinators.

A payment of £673 per hectare per year is available.

USE OF COMPANION CROPS ON HORTICULTURAL LAND

The companion crop does not have to be present for the full growing period of the horticultural crop, just as long as it's managed in a way to encourage natural crop predators, suppress weeds, maintain soil nutrition, and minimise erosion. The companion crop can be established by trap cropping (to attract crop pests away from the horticultural crop), inter-cropping (sowing the companion crop with the horticultural crop) or under sowing (sowing a companion crop to form a living mulch beneath the horticultural crop).

A payment of £55 per hectare per year is available.

NO USE OF INSECTICIDES ON CROPS

Any plant protection products containing active substances which have insecticide properties must not be applied to crops; herbicides, fungicides and plant growth regulators can be applied.

A payment of £45 per hectare per year is available.



OHAS MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION AND HTA MEMBERSHIP

If you are a UK-based grower or packhouse, you can become a member of the HTA and, as OHAS is a member benefit, you will not have to pay the OHAS subscription. You can read more about [HTA membership here](#). Please note, HTA membership is not available outside the UK.

Remember that, as detailed in the OHAS Scheme Rules, you will NOT be able to book or confirm any NSF audits if your OHAS subscription is unpaid. Your organisation must be an OHAS member to use the logos and describe yourself as 'OHAS certified'.

TO JOIN OHAS

If you would like to join the scheme and are not sure where to start, or which standard best meets your needs, please send your questions or request a call, via email at ohas@hta.org.uk, and our OHAS team will guide you through it.

To find us on LinkedIn, [click here](#)

OHAS MEMBER TOOLKIT

For all your OHAS template documents and current standards, go to the member toolkit zone on the HTA website here: [Member Toolkit Zone](#).

OHAS MEMBERSHIPS AND STANDARDS ENQUIRIES

For general OHAS enquiries, email us at ohas@hta.org.uk

OHAS AUDIT BOOKINGS AND ENQUIRIES

If you are already an OHAS member, or have joined us recently, and you would like to arrange your audit, please email the certification body NSF directly at ohas@nsf.org

KEEPING YOUR CONTACT DETAILS UP TO DATE

Have any of the primary contact details for your business changed (including contact phone number, email address, postal address etc.)? Has a member of your staff who was registered as the contact point with us left, and the details not updated? Please ensure that your contact details or details of the registered contact person are up to date. If you wish to amend any details, please drop us an email with the required amendments to services@hta.org.uk or ohas@hta.org.uk