

# ASSURANCE MATTERS

Ornamental Horticulture Assurance Scheme

## Notes from the Committee Chair



**Aaron Bicknell**  
OHAS Committee Chair

Welcome to the summer 2024 issue of Assurance Matters. Assurance schemes have moved on from the days when they focused on good agricultural practice and were adopted as a means of showing best practice was in place to meet any due diligence customer requirements. Today, there are many issues which face

all industries, not just horticulture, such as social and ethical compliance, carbon footprint minimisation, and protection of the environment.

To cover all these topics in a single standard can make it a burdensome and time-consuming task, especially if elements are not so applicable to your own business. To provide greater flexibility for members, schemes are now becoming modular in their approach, offering key elements as bespoke, individual standards. This approach however does have its issues, the main one being how you maintain the underlying ethos of the scheme and ensure the standards remain robust and complement each other, while offering the flexibility.

This is where the OHAS Scheme currently finds itself. For almost 30 years it has been the leading assurance scheme dedicated to the ornamentals industry,

encouraging best practice in all business operations. The Scheme now needs to develop to incorporate topics such as biosecurity, input recording and benchmarking, product footprinting, and social compliance. The HTA and the OHAS Committee, with the assistance of Adrian Jevans, are exploring the best way to achieve this, while offering flexibility to its membership.

The process will take several months, but we will keep you updated on how plans develop and what the intentions will be to move the Scheme forwards.

In the meantime, the Grower Standard is currently being benchmarked to the new Global G.A.P Flowers and Ornamentals Standard and both the Grower and Packhouse Standards are being updated with new versions planned for later in the year, watch this space.

### Scheme development

Working with Adrian Jevans, HTA and OHAS are exploring the potential to develop the OHAS Scheme into a number of compatible modules so that important areas such as input recording and benchmarking, biosecurity, product footprinting, and social compliance can be brought into the Scheme without causing the Standards to become overly cumbersome. An initial review will examine the viability of a modular format, and if deemed to be appropriate, the format will be developed and applied to the Standards, which will then be tested prior to any release. If successful, the plan



will be to adopt the new Standard modules later in 2025. During the remainder of this year the Grower Standard will be benchmarked to Version 6 of the GlobalG.A.P Flowers and Ornamentals Standard and both the Grower and Packhouse Standards will be updated in several areas. Release date for both updated Standards will be late 2024.



## Changes to the OHAS Committee

In the last few months there have been a number of changes to the [OHAS Committee](#). As can be seen from the Committee Chair notes, Aaron Bicknell (Double H Nurseries) has replaced Greg Hill (Hills) in the role of Committee Chair. Rebecca Grant (Joseph Rochford Gardens Ltd) who has been a member of the Committee for many years and an OHAS stalwart has stood down. As a result of his retirement, Malcolm Tanner (Bordon Hill Nurseries), another long-time Committee member, has also resigned his position. Joining in their place are Mark Eves, General Manager at PS JE Ward Ltd, and Hannah Brittan, a direct replacement for Malcolm from Bordon Hill Nurseries. The Committee extends a warm welcome to both.

## FutureGrow Expo

The Expo is a unique HTA organised event showcasing new technologies, automation and robotics suitable for use in the protected, container-grown, and field-grown ornamentals sectors. Entitled 'FutureGrow', the event will be staged on 8 October 2024 at the Stoneleigh Showground and Exhibition Centre, near Kenilworth in the UK, to give manufacturers and researchers an opportunity to get their products and messages across to the UK production base, and for the industry to see the range of technology, automation and robotics being developed. As well as exhibits, there will be a chance

to see demonstrations, visit the R&D hub, attend a series of presentations, and network with funders and policy makers.

## Conservation does not need to cost the earth!

There are two compliance criteria within the OHAS Grower Standard that cover biodiversity and conservation. They require businesses to carry out an 'environmental audit' and to produce a 'conservation plan'. Both might seem a little daunting as they are not necessarily day-to-day activities that most businesses perform.

If the thought of undertaking an audit and producing a plan seems like hard work, here are a few no-cost/low-cost ideas to try. Why not start by asking staff for help. You might be pleasantly surprised to find out that some employees, their family or friends have an interest in nature or are already involved in conservation projects outside of work. Anyone with an interest or experience would probably find it rewarding to carry out an audit of the flora and fauna on site.

Nature is a wonderful thing, but it can appear very complex with lots of different genus and species, so getting a complete picture of what is on site in one go will probably be difficult. To help build up more detail of what is present in and around existing habitats, consider some of these events.

**Wildflower surveys** – a chance to record what plants are living in surrounding grasslands, field margins, hedges, ponds and other water courses. Once you know what habitats are present, document how they are managed and maintained to minimise the impact the business has on these areas.



**Pollinator walks** – involving a simple summer site walk to list all the butterflies, day-flying moths, bees, wasps, hoverflies and beetles to name a few.

**Bird spotting** – a great all-year round activity. If there are bird feeders on site, the birds will come to you, so monitoring can occur at break-times or before and after work. An easy win!

**Moth nights** – this needs a little bit of setting up to be successful. If there isn't anyone who has a moth trap, it may be worth contacting your local butterfly conservation group to see if your site could host an event. Be prepared to be surprised by the number of these night-time creatures encountered.

**Pond/river dipping** – if there is a body of water, such as a pond, stream or river on site, a fun thing to do is find out what creatures lurk below the water surface. Best done in the spring or summer, all that is needed is a net and a shallow tray to put any animals into to make it easier to identify them.

There is a vast array of free apps and online identification guides that cover all these topics and many more. If you need further support to get started, there are organisations that would be more than happy to help. Depending on your needs you could consider contacting some of these groups: local natural history societies, area wildlife trusts, [Butterfly Conservation](#), [British Trust for Ornithology](#), sustainable farming groups and [The Woodland Trust](#) to name but a few.

Once a detailed survey of the flora and fauna has been completed, the information can be used to produce a conservation plan with action points. These points should consider business activities to protect what you have and reduce any further environmental impact. Where possible, actions should include those that enhance habitats and their biodiversity, or actions to rectify deteriorated areas. Also, if there is unproductive land this could be included as part of any conservation work.

Improving local habitats could include creating wildflower areas and planting trees or hedging. Making these improvements might encourage new species of fauna, something to keep an eye out for during future surveys. By not mowing or strimming habitats a food source is created for mammals, birds and insects. If hedges are cut each year, consider

cutting only one side each time so you provide additional shelter and food. If this task is left until February, it will help native fauna get through the depths of winter. Doing more for wildlife by doing less!

Other activities include erecting bird nesting boxes, it's best to tailor the boxes used to the species on site. Bug hotels can be easily made from materials found on most nurseries or purchased cheaply online.



With the general decline in habitats and wildlife, OHAS members have an ideal opportunity to do their bit for their local environment, hopefully without costing the earth!

## Water use efficiency

After almost an entire year without the threat of any water use restrictions its easy to become complacent about water use efficiency within a business. However, the seasonality of rainfall for large parts of the UK, and the fact that water demand is often greatest in the areas of least rainfall, is leading to important changes nationally in how this natural resource is managed. Mains water is becoming ever increasingly expensive, and although potable, may not be the best quality for use in plant production. Water abstraction from natural sources is also set to become more expensive and there are increasing restrictions on when water can be accessed and what quantities can be taken. Careful planning is therefore required to enable more water to be stored in times of plenty, or to capture and recycle rainfall throughout the year, which is reflected in the OHAS compliance criteria within the Grower and Packhouse Standards.



Total reliance on mains water is no longer a viable option, and a more resilient, robust water strategy is required, using water abstracted from surface and groundwater sources, coupled with on-site water harvesting and recycling.

Water storage in above-ground tanks or reservoirs is another essential element of any business water strategy. In the case of short-term storage, it is recommended that storage is sufficient to meet at least 48 hours of peak irrigation demand, and that longer-term reservoir capacity should meet the demand needs of at least a week.

In terms application efficiency, overhead sprinkler irrigation systems which are still dominant due to low cost, ease of installation, and flexibility, are not the most efficient option to irrigate crops. The efficiency of such systems is often less than 50%, depending on plant spacing and crop canopy development. Appropriate irrigation line spacing, nozzle selection and recycling can assist in improving efficiency.

The [AHDB Irrigation Calculator](#) software is a useful tool to assist in the optimisation of application efficiency of installed systems. When developing new production areas, serious consideration should be given to drip or sub-irrigation, placing water as close to the plant or container as possible. Any system should be well maintained to avoid leaks and prevent blockages. Irrigation application schedules should also be re-assessed when moving from peat-based to peat-free growing media blends.

Water saving initiatives can vary from the basics such as a well thought out bed design, windbreak placement, use of shade screens, staff training, and use of growing media additives and mulches, to the use of substrate/soil moisture monitoring equipment coupled to irrigation systems. Various systems can assist with irrigation decision making, such as estimates of plant water loss using an electronic balance or evapotranspiration sensor such as the 'Evaposensor', to electronic moisture probes placed directly into the substrate or soil.



## CONTACT US

### 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 and Operating Procedures, 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 certificated'.

### 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](mailto:ohas@hta.org.uk), and our OHAS team will guide you through it.

### 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 membership and Standards enquiries

For general OHAS enquiries, email us at [ohas@hta.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:services@hta.org.uk) or [ohas@hta.org.uk](mailto:ohas@hta.org.uk)

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