



Tree and Hedging Group NEWSLETTER

Chairman's Notes



Ed Holmes, J&A Growers

What a difference a year makes! I'm writing this in mid-August, and so far this growing season has been the exact opposite of last year's, with a very short spring, then straight into warm and dry conditions, which have pretty much dominated since. It feels like the weather patterns these days are more prolonged, with extremes,

which makes growing crops incredibly challenging and the results inconsistent from year to year. This summer has no doubt been putting everyone's water supply and infrastructure to the test and making us question what we can do to help mitigate weather-related risks.

I am sure most tree producing nurseries in the UK would join me in thanking our devolved governments for their continued grower support via capital grants. I know many nurseries are still making significant investments, which wouldn't have been possible without this support. We are also incredibly grateful for the Tree Production Innovation Fund (TPIF) which has brought researchers and innovation into the tree growing sector, and I am sure this wouldn't have happened at such pace without it.

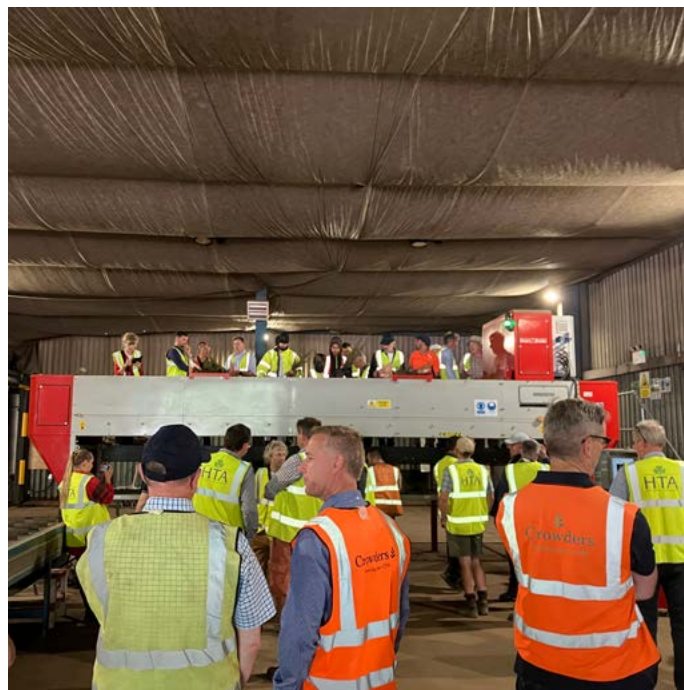
The initial three-year projects, and other shorter ones, have now been completed, and an overview of the results were presented at the Forestry Commission's knowledge transfer webinar events in May.

The projects have produced some useful results, and we now have proof of some new concepts which will no-doubt be game changing in the future, but for these concepts to move forward they need more time and money. Most new projects rely upon significant financial support to move through the 'valley of death' to become commercially viable options. This is the point where projects will give realisable benefits to the industry.

Grants can be so beneficial to our industry, but there are some instances when they can hinder too, and sudden changes to grants can switch off new planting. This was the case when the Higher-Level Stewardship capital grants were halted with immediate effect in late November 2024 following an "overwhelming demand for some capital grant items". Some would say this was inevitable when the rate for 'BN11 hedgerow planting – new hedges option' almost doubled from £11.60/m to £22.97/m. The backlog has since been cleared, and Defra is now working on those applications which were mid completion at the time of closure. Hopefully this will generate adequate hedging demand for this season, but I fear success will be gauged via monetary spending, rather than metres planted!

It was nice to see so many of you at this year's Tree and Hedging Group AGM and nursery visit which was kindly hosted by Crowders Nurseries in Lincolnshire. The AGM meeting was full of great content, and our guest speaker from Saga Robotics spoke about the Thorvald robots, passing over crops at night and exposing them to UV-C light which at the correct dose kills powdery mildew, and at the same time triggers a protective response in the plants making them less susceptible to further attack. It was very encouraging to hear there has been wide-spread adoption this year on strawberry farms, with more than 100 robots currently deployed across the UK. Hopefully we can persuade Saga Robotics to trial a machine on tree crops next year.

Wishing you all a good harvest and year ahead.



HTA Tree and Hedging Group AGM report, 10-11 June 2025, Crowders Nurseries Eleanor Radley-Moore, RJ Trees and Hedging

It was wonderful to see another well-attended AGM, generously hosted by W Crowder & Sons and held at the Kenwick Park Hotel, Lincolnshire. The meeting commenced with the usual updates and introductions, with a particular focus on recruiting volunteers for the Tree and Hedging Steering Group. The AGM this year featured two presentations, one from Saga Robotics and another on Forestry Commission grants.

Sergei Molina, Head of Robotics Software at Saga Robotics, introduced the Thorvald robot, an autonomous machine that uses UV-C light to control powdery mildew on crops. While it is currently used primarily on strawberries and grapes, the technology demonstrated clear potential for adaptation within our industry in the future.

A presentation on Forestry Commission grants was delivered by David Bole, Head of Green Economy and Skills, who provided an insightful update on current government investment in the Tree Production Innovation Fund (TPIF). The presentation also included details on upcoming TPIF events and guidance on how to access information about previously funded projects online.

On the second day, the group convened at W Crowder & Sons main base and container nursery. A warm welcome was extended to all by Simon Hawtin, Managing Director, followed by an extensive tour of their container production led by Alex Bell, Container Nursery Manager.

The tour proved both engaging and informative, with water storage and irrigation demand emerging as the most significant topics of discussion. Given the hot and dry spring that marked the start of this year's growing season, everyone appreciated the critical importance of efficient watering practices. The next location was the seedling grading facility, which houses the GeJo Grader and cold storage units. A live demonstration of the GeJo Grader was conducted, allowing everyone the opportunity to observe its operation from both the top and bottom of the machine.

Finally, the group travelled to Chapel Farm to visit the seedling production site, where they surveyed the field-grown seedlings. Throughout the tour, Simon Hawtin and Paul Thomas, Head of Production, were readily available to address questions and provide expert insights.

The tour was concluded with lovely a BBQ, the shining sun overhead, as people exchanged their farewells. Next year's AGM will be hosted by Chew Valley Trees near Bristol and coincides with the 40th anniversary of the nursery.

Please make a note of the dates - Tuesday 23rd and Wednesday 24th June 2026.



Where next with weed control?

Wayne Brough, HTA

Herbicides have provided the field-grown tree and hedging sector, and many others, with relatively cheap, reliable weed control for generations. However, the regular flow to market of new chemistry with herbicidal properties is now just an intermittent trickle at best. Although year-round chemical weed control programmes, which minimise the risk of resistance, can still just about be generated, as a result of the [HCP EAMU generation programme](#), and with the help of targeted hand weeding; the next few years should be spent getting to understand the up-and-coming future weed control options and those which work best for your business, prior to further product losses which will make robust chemical weed control programmes almost impossible to achieve.

There are numerous routes which can be taken – precision cultivation equipment, steam, electrical weeders, high powered water jet weeders, high temperature foam weeders etc., some of which were demonstrated at the [HTA non-chemical weed control event](#) in 2022. One area which has come to the fore is weed control via high energy light, whether this be via laser such as with the autonomous [Robot One from PixelFarming Robotics](#), or the [tractor mounted Carbon Robotics Laserweeder](#), or via concentrated light as used by [Earth Rover's CLAWS robot](#).

To help facilitate this transition to other methods of weed control, J & A Growers hosted an HTA FutureGrow event in July to allow businesses to examine the beta version of the CLAWS robot they have been using (in conjunction with its further development) on commercial production beds.

Although several Tree and Hedging Group members have already heard about and possibly seen the previous version of the CLAWS robot, the event allowed Jamie Dewhurst and Ed Holmes to summarise their experiences of the robot so far, and for delegates to see the beta version in action in a crop of Cornus and to meet the Earth Rover team. As Jamie explained, these machines are currently not the complete answer to alternative weed control but help to minimise reliance on herbicides and have a key part to play in any future weed control programme.



Driving innovation in tree production Jack Clough, Forestry Commission

Tree production has historically struggled to attract technological innovation, especially when compared to agriculture and broad acre horticulture. In response to stakeholder consultation highlighting this challenge, the [Tree Production Innovation Fund \(TPIF\)](#) was launched in 2021 to help address key barriers and strengthen the sector. Backed by the Nature for Climate Fund, TPIF is central to efforts to support domestic tree supply - ensuring it is resilient, diverse, and high quality - while helping meet England's statutory target of 16.5% tree and woodland cover.

To date, TPIF has awarded £7.8 million to support 41 projects, many of which completed in March 2025. The fourth round of funding - our most competitive yet - has recently concluded, with agreements issued throughout August and September.

The growing number of applications year-on-year reflects a rising appetite for innovation in tree production and a strong commitment across the sector to tackle long-standing challenges.

We’ve been delighted to see so many diverse collaborations between academia, industry, and practitioners. Projects have previously ranged from advanced automation and robotics to simple but impactful design improvements.

Here are just a few highlights:

- **University of Warwick:** Developing automated systems for grading (Smart Tree Production System) with J & A Growers, reducing reliance on manual labour.
- **Myerscough College and Hillier Nurseries:** Created [digital tools](#) to enhance water use efficiency in nursery operations.
- **RBG Kew, Elsoms Seeds, INP Greifswald and phenoLytics:** Exploring 3D X-ray phenotyping and plasma-based treatments to improve seed germination rates.
- **Rhizocore Technologies Ltd:** Introduced [pelletised mycorrhizae](#) to support sapling establishment.
- **SAF Woodland Management:** Developed a peat-free growing medium (Woodland Grow – now part of Re-Genus) enriched with beneficial microbes.
- **Proptek:** Designed hybrid air-pruning trays tailored for UK tree production - now widely adopted across nurseries.
- **Conifer Breeding Coop:** Advancing breeding populations of Norway spruce and Douglas fir to strengthen future supply.
- **Earth Rover:** Developed CLAWS (Concentrated Light Autonomous Weeding and Scouting) system using AI and targeted light treatment to identify and eliminate weeds.

We’re incredibly grateful for the sector’s continued engagement with TPIF, especially those who have consulted or collaborated on proposals.

The successful applicants from round four will be announced shortly, showcasing both returning innovators and new ideas with potential to further strengthen UK tree production practices.



A snapshot of the Danish hardy ornamentals sector

Wayne Brough, HTA

A group of 14 UK growers flew out to visit several Danish businesses in July on a three-day [HTA organised study tour](#). Most of the businesses visited were field-grown producers of tree and shrub species, along with a rose breeder and producer, hedging grower, and a container nursery stock grower.

Although many discussions were had on numerous topics, several themes regularly came up. Although seasonal and skilled labour were not necessarily difficult to obtain in Denmark, the cost of labour was high and impacted the business. Bent Jensen, Production and Propagation Manager at Gunnar Christensens Plantskole, calculated that the labour cost to the business equated to £30/hour, and that as a result, product on the nursery could not be grown to meet the lower price points demanded by multiple retailer businesses. It was noted however, that even at this hourly rate, most nurseries visited were no more automated than those in the UK.

In the UK there is a perception that we have fewer plant protection products (PPPs) to select from compared to growers on the continent. In the case of Danish growers this isn’t the case, almost every grower visited bemoaned the lack of PPPs available to their business, and this was confirmed after looking inside one or two pesticide stores. Much of the store content was made up of biorational products and biostimulants.

A foam stream type machine for weed control was in use at Gunnar Christensens Plantskole, and a ‘plant stem sprayer’ for applying a physical barrier against *Hylobius* weevil was observed at Johansens Planteskole.

As with some UK businesses, there was an issue instigating succession management in some of the businesses. Current owners were looking to retire or step back but didn’t have a natural successor or plan in place. Several were family-run businesses who were still wedded to traditional ways of production and marketing. However, a number were looking forward, and expanding, with interest from the next generation.

Many of the businesses sold their product into other Scandinavian or European countries as the Danish market was often insufficient in size, and this often gave rise to issues of specific requirements or restrictions being placed on product by the importing company. One such issue centred around the discovery of a [South American flatworm \(Obama nungara\)](#) recently found in Malmo, Sweden, resulting in a need to closely inspect exported container-grown plants from Danish nurseries.

Crop protection update

Wayne Brough, HTA

Along with the four EAMUs generated in 2023, and the 14 generated in 2024, Horticulture Crop Protection Ltd (HCP) have so far this year generated eight EAMUs for six different products, covering herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides (see the summary table below), with plans for a further 12

EAMUs covering six products through the remainder of 2025 and 2026.

For more detail visit the [HCP website](#), and for the list of all the EAMUs covering ornamental crops generated so far in 2025 visit the [HTA website](#).



Borders and trade update

Sally Cullimore, HTA

With the news back in May that the UK and EU intend to swiftly negotiate an SPS agreement to create a common UK-EU plant health area (or Sanitary Phytosanitary – SPS area), the supply chain is poised to enjoy better trading conditions with the EU. The SPS agreement is expected to return the UK back into the EU’s plant health area, meaning we will return to following EU rules on plant health, plant protection products, and products of animal origin. Bearing in mind that customs controls will remain in place (no return for the UK into the EU’s customs area) this is an opportunity for negotiators to deliver the sector a better position all round. Biosecurity controls will remain, likely in the form of ‘special measures’ such as a better version of the Tree Notification Scheme, enhanced field inspections, and a return to cross-EU plant passporting.

EAMU Number	Product	Active Ingredient(s)	Type
2497/2025	Palio	Florasulam and pyroxsulam	Herbicide
2277/2025	Vintec	<i>Trichoderma atroviride</i> strain SC1	Fungicide
2276/2025	Vintec	<i>Trichoderma atroviride</i> strain SC1	Fungicide
2235/2025	Kanemite SC	Acequinocyl	Acaricide
2234/2025	Kanemite SC	Acequinocyl	Acaricide
2066/2025	Microthiol Special	Sulphur	Fungicide
1318/2025	Goltix Titan	Metamitron and quinmerac	Herbicide
1118/2025	Broadway Star	Metamitron and quinmerac	Herbicide

HTA has made sure we are close to the negotiation teams, informing those who will determine, negotiate and write the new regime.

Plant protection products (PPPs) are also included in the negotiations, and we are members of Defra's PPP Working Group which has met already, meaning we are inputting directly into what a new pesticides regime might look like and informing the UK side what UK businesses want to get out of the negotiations.

We have met Ministers involved in directing negotiations and have done a lot of outreach work with EU sister associations, ensuring that we have a consistent message to deliver to politicians and negotiators on both sides.

However, like they say, nothing is agreed until it's all agreed. With negotiations due to start any day now, it will likely take months to reach agreements in all the areas the two sides need to discuss. While our industry is mainly concerned with plant health, PPPs and a few animal-origin products pertinent to growing and gardening, there are other sectors also involved in the wider EU UK Reset. If you would like to learn more, we have a [Member Briefing on the SPS Agreement](#) available and will regularly hold live webinars to update you on progress.

Seed trade update 2025

Helen Richardson, Forestart Ltd

As usual, crops are variable, both in terms of species and regions of provenance. This year is a mast year for oak throughout the UK (and most of Europe), although some of our usual collection sites don't have a good crop. We will look to store a good quantity to cover any shortages that may occur next year.

Most broadleaf species are looking good, but we're finding less seeds per berry and less berries per bunch than some years. Dogwood and spindle haven't cropped as well as hoped, but hawthorn is ripening well, and crab apple and blackthorn are far better than last year. Birch and rowan are good in some regions so we'll collect there and use stored seed to meet demand for other regions; there is also a crop of beech in the south of the country that we will collect later in the season.

Conifer crops are poor, except for pine, so we'll mainly be relying on stored seed this year. We were pleased to see monkey puzzle cropping this year so we can renew our stocks of this species.

The current worry is that the heat combined with the lack of rain is causing leaves to senesce and fall early which could potentially affect seed development, but we are relieved that we still don't have the extremes of heat that much of mainland Europe experience.



Developing a long-term career in horticulture

Libby Lea, Crowders Nurseries

As a young person growing up, I was always drawn to the natural world and fascinated by how things grow. Working and studying in horticulture felt like a natural path to me. It turned the curiosity into something hands-on and meaningful. I wanted to be part of a field where I could care for the environment, learn practical skills, and contribute to creating greener, more sustainable spaces.

To build on my passion, I'm currently focused on extending and deepening my knowledge through the RHS Level 3 course. I see this qualification as a key step towards a long-term career in horticulture, helping me gain the expertise and confidence to take on more advanced responsibilities in this field. Pursuing this education is an important part of my career as it turns a personal interest into a professional vocation I can be proud of.

News and events round-up

HTA calls for a water strategy to assist business water resilience

Following yet another summer with long periods of little rainfall, Fran Barnes, HTA CEO has called for a coordinated national approach to water resilience, not one that reacts to each crisis, but one that consists of a robust, forward-looking plan. At the heart of which are four key asks:

1. Reframing the conversation: Flipping the focus from 'drought' and 'flood' to water resilience. Resetting the National Drought Group into a National Water Resilience Group and changing the tone of the debate to ensure all stakeholders stay engaged, whatever the weather.

2. Improving public messaging: Working with industries like horticulture to improve water literacy and reducing alarmist messaging. Informing people how to reduce water use and support sustainable gardening, without turning off the tap on plant sales.

3. Breaking down barriers to on-site water storage: Removing unnecessary red tape that blocks businesses from investing in reservoirs and rainwater harvesting systems. These solutions are not luxuries — they are necessities.

4. Partnering with the sector: Engaging with horticulture experts. HTA members know what plants are best suited to local conditions and how to use water efficiently, their expertise is a resource which must be better utilised.

For more information on this story visit the [HTA website](#) and for a technical summary covering water use on nurseries visit the [HTA library page](#).

Strong Roots report

The Strong Roots report is a collaborative project involving the Woodland Trust, Horticultural Trades Association, National Trust, and Royal Horticultural Society. The Strong Roots group explored the key barriers to domestic tree production and identified solutions to increase the availability of homegrown trees, producing evidence-based recommendations for improved governmental support for the sector.

Tree and Hedging Group members took part in several interviews as part of the project. The launch date for the report is 14 October, to which the Tree and Hedging Group Steering Committee will be invited, and HTA have scheduled a webinar for 27 October at 2.00pm with all the Strong Roots partners attending, look out for registration details in forthcoming HTA Member Updates.

Remaining HTA Grower Technical Workshops and Masterclasses

The last two remaining technical events for 2025 will cover optimising nutrition and nutrient delivery in peat-free crops, to be delivered at Chapel Cottage Plants on 21 October, and plant protection product management and best practice to be staged at Darby Nursery Stock on 18 November. For more detailed information and to book a place visit the [HTA website](#).


Regional Events

The next relevant [Regional Member Event](#) entitled 'Building resilient treescapes: it starts with tree selection', will be hosted by Majestic Trees on 13 October.

HTA Nursery Production Advice Line

Just a regular reminder that HTA members have free access to the Nursery Production Advice Line managed by Zest - Sustainable ICM.

To access the service with technical queries:

 0333 005 0167

 nurseryproduction@hta.org.uk