



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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Air-freight has a place in sustainable development

Horticultural exports are important contributors to fighting poverty in developing countries and air-freight has a place in sustainable development, according to a recent report on sustainable development in a changing climate.

The House of Commons' International Development Committee has published recommendations to the UK Government in its report on 'Sustainable Development in a Changing Climate'. FPC contributed evidence, which is quoted significantly in the final document, regarding the value of imports of air-freighted fresh produce and putting their environmental impact in perspective.

The Chairman of the International Development Committee, Malcolm Bruce MP, commented: ""There is a danger that steps taken by consumers in the UK to reduce their contribution to carbon emissions may lead them to avoid buying produce from developing countries in the belief that air-freighted food and flowers necessarily have a higher carbon footprint. This is not true. We saw for ourselves the sophisticated and efficient techniques used to grow flowers in Kenya. The CO² emissions from Kenyan flowers flown to the UK are nearly six times lower than those from Dutch flowers grown in heated greenhouses. Consumers need accurate information about the way products have been grown as well as transported so that they can make informed choices."

Around 60% of fruit and vegetables are imported into the UK, providing us with produce outside of the UK season as well as varieties which simply cannot be grown in the UK.

Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium said: "We need to tackle the impact of climate change, but it's important that the Committee has recognised the need to keep air freight in perspective and to consider the carbon footprint of the whole supply chain. Total air freighted imports of fruit and vegetables account for a mere 0.2 per cent of total UK greenhouse gas emissions.

"There is no evidence that fewer aircraft would fly if consumption of imported fruit and vegetables was reduced. At least 60 per cent of air freighted fresh produce is brought to the UK in the bellyhold of passenger aircraft.

"There are massive variations between the carbon footprint of Africa (1-2 tonnes of carbon per head) and that of the UK (11-14 tonnes per head) and the US (22 tonnes per head). We must put ill-founded concerns about the impact of transportation of fresh produce from developing countries in their proper perspective, and balance them against the need to address rising obesity levels and poor diets across Europe, as well as assisting the development of local economies in Africa. To encourage the UK consumer to eat 5-day we need a wide variety of fresh produce regardless of origin or means of transport," added Nigel Jenney.

FPC will be pressing the UK Government to consider the Committee's recommendation that the UK Government consider paying to offset the air freight emissions of horticultural products from developing countries.

The report is timely as the UK Government is setting out its proposals for debate on reaching a global agreement on how to tackle climate change ('The Road to Copenhagen') in the lead up to the United Nations' conference in December.

Among the recommendations by the International Development Committee to the UK Government are: provision to consumers of accurate information about the way products have been grown as well as transported; research on how such a scheme might be introduced and an assessment of the potential benefits to producers in developing countries.

Notes for editors:

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.
3. For more information about the International Development Committee and a copy of the report visit: www.parliament.uk/indcom
4. In Kenya horticulture accounts for up to 20% of agriculture output and contributes 5% of GDP, in which the overall contribution of agriculture is 25%. Small scale farmers are significant players in export and domestic production, with an overall share of 80%. About 2.5 million people are employed in the sector; 85% of the population is engaged in agriculture. Annual growth in the horticultural sector has been consistent since 1992 at between 10-22%. Production for export (fruit, vegetables and flowers) in 1992 was 57,000 tons rising in 2008 to 190,000 tons. In value terms the rise has been phenomenal, rising from £19 million in 1992 to £445 million in 2008.

Ends