Knowledge and skills are essential for resilient agri-food systems.

What skills challenges do growers face?

Research into UK horticulture found:

- Production of fruit and vegetables at any scale requires complex knowledge and skills.
- Horticultural workers are highly skilled – this includes seasonal labourers.
- Essential learning happens ‘on the job’ and through peer knowledge exchange.
- Fresh produce and seasonality present specific skills and workforce challenges.
- ‘Back breaking’ work is unavoidable but harms individuals and deters recruits.
- Technological solutions are not ready to replace a majority of workers.
- Expansion is limited by uncertainty around labour supply, and barriers to new entrants.
- Growers need to be able to afford to reward workers well and offer jobs people want to do.

Conclusions

- Ensuring availability of skills required to keep growing food in the UK depends on a vibrant horticultural industry generating healthy incomes for diverse producers.
- Horticultural knowledge and skills are essential to society and should be valued as such.
- Resilience will be improved by treating knowledge as a commons through sharing responsibility, benefits and ownership.

This research is supported by the Sêr Cymru II programme which is part-funded by Cardiff University and the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government.

For more information:
Dr Hannah Pitt plth2@cardiff.ac.uk