

Up to 5,500 poultry workers to help deliver Christmas dinners

The number of temporary poultry workers permitted to travel to and work in the UK will increase in time for Christmas, the government has announced today (Sunday 26 September).

Up to 5,500 poultry workers will be able to work in the UK ahead of Christmas 2021. This will be delivered through the Temporary Workers route.

This comes as the Department for Transport announced that up to 5,000 drivers will be able to come to the UK to transport food and fuel in the run-up to Christmas.

The UK has a highly resilient food supply chain which has coped well in responding to unprecedented challenges. The decision will ensure that farmers and food producers have access to the necessary workforce to mitigate any potential risks to Christmas food supply.

Recruitment for additional short-term HGV drivers and poultry workers will begin in October and this route will be valid until 24 December 2021. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), working with the Department for Transport and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will process applications, once made, in a timely manner.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

It is a top priority to ensure that there are enough workers across the country's supply chains to make sure they remain strong and resilient.

We have listened to concerns from the sector and we are acting to alleviate what is a very tight labour market.

The Food and Drink Federation's Chief Executive, Ian Wright CBE, said:

We welcome the Government's pragmatic decision to temporarily add HGV drivers and poultry workers to the existing visa scheme.

This is something UK food and drink manufacturers have asked for over the last few months – including in industry's Grant Thornton report – to alleviate some of the pressure labour shortages have placed on the food supply chain.

This is a start but we need the Government to continue to collaborate with industry and seek additional long term solutions.

British Poultry Council chief executive Richard Griffiths said:

The Government's move to allow temporary workers for the poultry meat sector will be welcomed by seasonal producers.

Temporary workers from outside the UK have long been vital to delivering Christmas for our sector and given the unprecedented challenges of the last year they are needed more than ever. British turkey and goose are the centrepiece of Christmas dinners across the country and we are pleased that Government has listened.

Seasonal labour has played an important role to address the challenges that the agri-food industry has faced in recent months because of the Covid-19 pandemic and labour shortages, and Defra has been working closely with the industry during this time.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has implemented an unprecedented package of measures to support workers and businesses right across the UK, as well as new reforms to ensure businesses have access to talent from across the world, so that we can Build Back Better from the pandemic and support the national economic recovery.

We are moving to a high wage, high skilled economy and the government is encouraging all sectors, including poultry, to adapt and make employment more attractive to UK domestic workers through offering training, careers options and wage increases and, to help with these efforts and long-term resilience, Defra is working with industry and DWP to raise awareness of career opportunities in poultry among UK workers.