

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2019

Dear Pete Wishart MP

When I gave evidence at the Scottish Affairs Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019 it was noted that I made comments about some workers having a reluctance to work in Scotland.

Concordia will be supplying close to 8,000 workers into the UK this year and has been recruiting a similar number to this from Eastern Europe for the past few decades. In order to best respond to the request for more information, we have interviewed our overseas agents to ensure that I am able to feed back the most up to date information on the evidence of Scotland being considered less attractive than English farms and what is the rationale for some workers in expressing a reluctance to come to Scotland.

Of the seven agents that Concordia works with, all agreed that again this year it was more challenging to recruit for Scottish farms than for farms in England. There was no comparison given with Northern Ireland or Wales as these are predominantly dairy farms or top fruit farms and as such are not a great comparison to Scotland.

**Cost:** flight tickets to Scotland are more expensive than to many English airports. For example, there is only one expensive flight option from Lithuania this summer and there are no direct flights from Iasi in Romania (big north eastern town) only from Bucharest. Workers are used to jumping in a plane and going direct to a close airport. There is very limited bus access from Eastern Europe to Scotland and a relatively high percentage of Romanian and Bulgarian workers come over on a 36-hour bus from their home direct to the farm door.

**Distance:** Many workers ask for a farm in London as their first question and then ask for a farm not too far from London as their next request. Ironically these workers then tend not to visit London or their surrounding area once they are in the UK.

**Weather:** the belief is that Scotland is wetter and colder which has an impact on the crop and thus the hours worked. This is very much a perception rather than a reality however social media helps ensure that this is spread. Some workers who enter our agents office mention straight away that they prefer not to go to Scotland because they heard from their relatives or friends that there is only little work due to the weather (a couple of farms have had lower than expected hours in recent years because of the weather – wet seasons, frozen crops in autumn etc – which is understandable but difficult to take on board when relatives compare end of season earnings).

**Crop:** Most of the farm placements (Concordia offers) in Scotland are large strawberry farms. There is a reasonable level of social media content shared by employees making minor level complaints. This can include narrow rows in a tunnel where it is difficult to pick crop, bemoaning a particular supervisor etc. The high number of strawberry farms in Scotland mean that whilst in % terms this is no different from any other crop, in number terms it is, and social media ensures that word travels fast.

**Accommodation:** our agents fed back that workers believe the accommodation to not be as well kept in Scotland as in the UK. This is surprising as this is not what Concordia has found – there are exceptions in every part of the UK although investment in facilities has been found to make a difference when a worker decides where to go.

Most of the reasons for workers expressing a preference not to go to Scotland are based on erroneous perceptions. Workers who have spent a season in Scotland are content to return, those that haven't yet been are more reluctant to go in the first place. Although both Concordia and our agents are aware that Scottish farms can and do provide very good work and high standard facilities, the "common knowledge" provided by friends and family often overrules the debate.

Ideas that we are considering include:

- an advertising campaign especially for Scotland, highlighting the beauty of country and advantages to work on farms in Scotland including worker testimonies. Farm specific videos with spoken words by workers and supervisors have had a positive impact for certain farms



- a 'communal transport system' to collect workers from airports and bring them to the farms running say 2-3 times a week

Please let me know if I can assist you any further or put you in contact with one or several of our overseas partners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Maurel', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Maurel

Chief Executive