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NEWS

ETI welcomes launch of Gangmasters Licensing Authority

1 April 2005

Commenting on the launch of the new Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) today (1 April 2005), Dan Rees, Director of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Chairman of the Temporary Labour Working Group (TLWG) - an alliance representing the entire food chain, trade unions and labour providers - said: *'This is a critical step towards stamping out the exploitative working practices of some temporary labour providers. To avoid a labour shortage, the entire industry from plough to plate needs to act now to ensure labour providers are prepared when licensing comes into force in 2006'*.

Ethical Trading Initiative
Cromwell House
14 Fulwood Place
London WC1V 6HZ
United Kingdom

t +44 (0) 20 7404 1463
f +44 (0) 20 7831 7852
ethicaltrade@eti.org.uk
www.ethicaltrade.org

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The Gangmasters Licensing Authority was set up to develop and operate a licensing scheme, set licensing conditions and maintain a register of licensed labour providers ('gangmasters') in the agriculture, shellfish and related processing and packaging industries.

The ETI – an alliance of companies, NGOs and trade unions - began looking into the 'gangmaster' problem over three years ago. Says Rees, *'We were shocked and alarmed at the scale and severity of the exploitation suffered by some temporary workers and set up the Temporary Labour Working Group to tackle the problem. The launch of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority is a direct result of the campaigning work of ETI and other organisations in this area.'*

The ETI's biennial conference 'Ethical Trade: Shaping a New Agenda' will show how the TLWG successfully campaigned for new regulation to protect temporary workers, and developed the code of practice and implementation process to drive up business standards in the sector. The conference will be held on 12-13 May at the Novotel Hammersmith, London.

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Notes to editors:

Contacts

ETI Media Relations Manager: Julia Hawkins 020 7404 1463 or julia@eti.org.uk

ETI website: www.ethicaltrade.org

Background

1. The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) was established in 1998 to improve the lives of workers around the world who produce goods for the UK market. We believe that companies producing, supplying and selling these goods should observe national and international labour laws. Our purpose is to identify and promote responsible corporate practice that will help to make this a reality. We are an alliance of international business, trade union and non-governmental organisations.
2. The Temporary Labour Working Group (TLWG) was set up by ETI as an alliance representing the entire food chain, trade unions and labour providers themselves. In 2004, it developed a Code of Conduct for temporary labour providers that is based on an employer's existing legal obligations to workers and aims to improve the business practices of labour providers and labour users before compulsory licensing takes effect.
3. The Gangmasters Licensing Act became law on 8 July 2004. The Gangmasters Bill was put forward by Jim Sheridan MP and strongly supported through parliament by the TLWG.
4. Labour providers can register their intention to comply with the Code of Practice at www.lpcode.co.uk. A total of 332 labour providers have registered so far. Eight have been audited by trained auditors and are now listed on the website as having no 'critical non-compliances'.
5. The first briefing workshop for labour providers wanting to find out more about the new Code of Practice for Temporary Labour Providers was held on 31st March 2005, where GLA Chairman Paul Whitehouse reassured labour providers and labour users about synergies between the TLWG Code and the proposed licensing regime.
6. Further free workshops for labour providers will be hosted by TLWG supermarket members the Co-operative Group (CWS) Ltd, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Somerfield, Tesco and Waitrose in April and May 2005.