

A licence to operate

new approaches to tackle exploitation of
temporary workers in UK agriculture

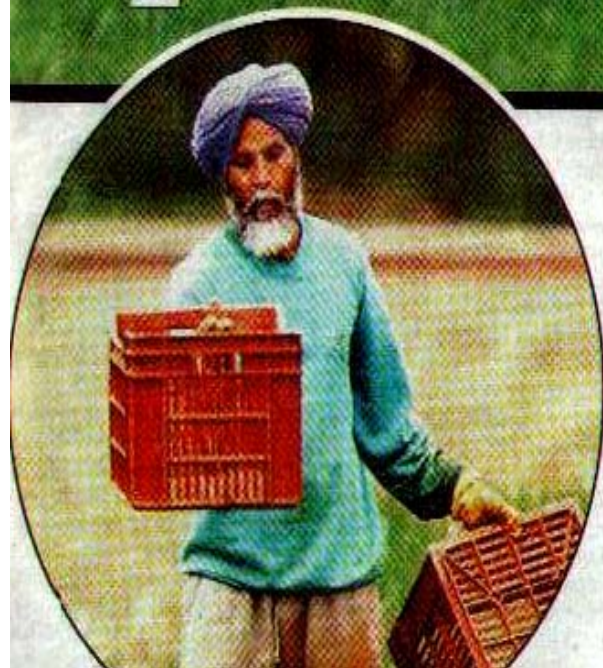
Dan Rees, Director ETI
ETI Conference: Workshop E1 May 12 2005



Aims of the workshop

- Inform about the problems associated with UK “gangmasters”
- Share experience of developing a broad alliance to tackle problem on an industry level
- Share new approaches (voluntary code and regulation)
- Discuss the lessons from this experience - and their applicability elsewhere

Ruthless gangmasters and £14 a day – how an army of immigrant workers puts food on your plate



Two miles outside Evesham, above a hand-painted sign touting cider and home-made jam, a cat sleeps on a stone gatepost. It doesn't even open an eye as a wren flits just inches past its head. The countryside buzzes. It's England in summer.

Suddenly, from behind a high hawthorn hedge, the guttural bark of Iraqi Kurds tears the tranquillity of the Worcestershire day.

Around the corner of the quiet road lies a sun-baked field packed with Sikhs, Kurds and Poles. Robes and turbans and bared eastern European torsos move along the rows.

Thirty or so pickers are stripping a

the edge of the field, two battered white minibuses stand empty. It looks like a tea plantation on the other side of the world.

The man in charge is leaning on the side of the truck. Cool in the shade, he's smoking and appears to be the only idle person in a field of industry. He beckons us to come over. Immaculate in a pressed cream silk shirt, his dark curls slicked back, he's more nightclub owner than

can speak, a harassed-looking young white man has arrived from the middle of the field. He's holding a clipboard, frowning and sweating. He is Alex and describes himself as 'Bomfords' assistant legume manager'.

Bomfords is the biggest producer in these parts. Big on peas, broad beans – in fact, they grow everything.

And how can he help? He is, he says.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

by Olivia Stewart-Liberty
and Sarah Oliver

What is the problem?

- Widespread and severe exploitation of temporary workers in the food chain
- Growing influence of organised crime
- Lack of effective controls on gangmasters
- Bad businesses drives out the good
- Identifying the good employers - subcontracting
- The situation is bad and its getting worse

Who is responsible?

- **Gangmasters**
- **Growers**
- **Packers, Wholesalers, Importers**
- **Food manufactures**
- **Retailers - Supermarkets**
- **Government** (DEFRA, DWP, HSE, Home Office. DTI)
- **Trade Unions** (TUC and TGWU)

TLWG's twin-track strategy to protect workers

- 1. Seek new statutory measures** that (i) oblige employers to demonstrate that they are respecting workers rights and (ii) make existing law enforcement more effective.
- 2. Develop voluntary multi-stakeholder code** that (i) generates more commercial pressure for gangmasters and their customers to respect workers rights and improve conditions (ii) identifies best approaches prior to regulation.

Achievements: New Regulation

“Gangmasters (licensing) Act” July 2004

- Employer must have a licence to operate
- A public register of licensed operators
- New regulatory body - Gangmasters Licensing Authority
- Supported by new offences and sanctions
- Co-ordination of previously disparate enforcement agencies

Achievements: Code of practice

- Code of practice for gangmasters (agreed industry-wide)
- Team of trained auditors to assess gangmasters (include confidential worker interviews).
- Corrective action plans for gangmaster (and clients!)
- Oversight by tri-partite alliance (employer, trade union & government)
- Public register of business on website, tracks their progress through audit and improvement process
- Association of Labour Providers
- Good practice tools

Observations and lessons to date

- A public interest case can be built to tackle abuse of workers
- Broad based alliance was the only way to tackle this problem.
- Voluntary measures most effective when employers are willing to change but not sufficient to protect the most vulnerable workers?
- Limitation of a single industry focus?
- Can trade unions organise temporary and migrant workers in numbers?



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