



Executive Summary of

British Berry Growers Sustainability Report 2025



Authors



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Introduction

In 2025, British Berry Growers, the industry body representing 95% of all the UK’s commercial soft fruit growers, commissioned Collison and Associates Ltd to assess sustainability practices in the British berry industry.

This is an executive summary of the full report published in 2025 which can be downloaded from : www.britishberrygrowers.org.uk.

Ethical and sustainable farming practices are at the heart of strawberry, raspberry, blueberry and blackberry production in the UK. This report provides the evidence – from a comprehensive grower survey and in-depth interviews – of how British farms are growing berries responsibly and sustainably.



Executive summary



The British berry sector is a large progressive sector. It has grown in the last 25 years and has led the transition to more sustainable production, from water management and carbon reduction to the use of biological controls and waste minimisation.

The berry sector supports 16,317 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs and contributes £624m of Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy¹.

Since 2012 the sector has grown by 78%, but the speed of growth has slowed significantly since 2019², as a wave of crises and cost inflation have dented growers’ confidence to invest. Despite this, the sustainability survey commissioned by British Berry Growers for this report shows a sector which is continuing to invest in sustainability measures, with growers working closely with technology suppliers and researchers to deliver world leading innovations.

The continued growth of the sector is important. Healthy and nutritious berries are fundamental to the nation’s health and home-grown production is more sustainable than imported berries. As the UK tackles issues of poor nutrition and climate change, it has never been more important to support the British berry sector.

This report covers the four main UK berry crops³ and 10 sustainability themes⁴ being addressed by berry growers. In every one of these sustainability themes the sector is combining innovation with investment in technology and the acquisition of new skills, to make proactive changes to deliver for the UK and its environment.

The survey conducted for this report covered 56% of total British berry production⁵, from growers who only produce one berry crop, to those who produce all four main berry crops. The 23 berry growers who responded range in size from one who produces 0.05% of total UK berry production up to one grower with 10.3% of the total production. The survey included growers from England, Wales and Scotland, with the English growers based in 13 different counties. It also includes growers using all the main commercial production systems⁶. The survey therefore gives good insight into how berry growers of all types across the UK are approaching sustainability.

Berry production methods have evolved substantially in the 21st Century, with most production now in protected environments to address weather related risks; in non-permanent summer tunnels, permanent polytunnels and glasshouses. Production is also now almost universally in coir media and closed drip watering and nutrition systems, which means soil-based production is the exception in all crops.

Whilst the changes in berry crop production systems were initially driven primarily by the desire to increase productivity and reduce weather related risks, they also allow much better control of the crop growing environment which is leading to sustainability improvements in multiple areas of crop production.

Modern protected production systems also allow season extension in the UK which is important for sustainability because UK production is more sustainable than imported berries.

⁵ 56% of strawberries and raspberries, 70% of blueberries and 51% of blackberries
⁶ Glasshouses, polytunnels, non-permanent summer tunnels and open field production

¹ [The-British-berry-industry-in-focus.pdf](#)
² [The-British-berry-industry-in-focus.pdf](#)
³ Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries
⁴ Sustainable water management, carbon reduction and embracing renewable energy, fertiliser efficiency and sustainability, crop protection and biological pest control, growing media sustainability, food waste and plastics, cool chain and transport efficiency, delivering biodiversity gain and supporting pollinators, plant breeding to deliver enhanced crop performance, digital technologies to enhance efficiency

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UK berry production is the sustainable choice for water efficiency because the UK is more water secure than many overseas regions which export berries to the UK and has higher water efficiency⁷ i.e. the volume of water used per marketed kilo of fruit. Given growing pressures on water supplies globally, the most sustainable choice is to source more berries produced in the UK with world leading water efficiency.

Growers are investing in water stewardship, including taking pressure off public water supplies by capturing and storing rainwater, investing in precision irrigation to increase water use efficiency and by reducing their impact on the environment in multiple ways:

Water efficiency



- 100% measure water quality and have water efficiency plans.
- Only 13% of berry growers are in water stressed catchments.
- The typical grower uses 2.4 different water sources to help manage their water supplies sustainably.
- 61% have reservoirs or rainwater stores, with three growers using their reservoirs or water stores to meet 100% of their water needs.
- 100% use drip or trickle irrigation on their production and 87% use precision irrigation equipment and sensors.
- In the last three years 65% of growers have reduced their overall water usage, by an average of almost 16%.

Berry growers are investing in renewable energy as a key part of wide-ranging actions to measure and reduce carbon footprints. Key actions being taken on carbon reduction and renewable energy transition by berry growers include:

Carbon reduction and energy



- 96% record data which could be used to measure their carbon footprint.
- 70% have implemented actions to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 61% have plans to reduce their carbon footprint.

Fertilisers are expensive and a major source of carbon emissions. Berry growers are taking a wide range of actions to improve management of crop nutrition, so fertiliser use is matched precisely to crop needs, and diffuse pollution is reduced or eliminated. Key actions being taken on precision crop nutrition by berry growers include:

Precision crop nutrition



- 91% of growers implemented actions in the last three years to reduce use of and run-off from nitrogen, phosphate and potassium (NPK) based fertilisers.
- 87% of growers practice precision fertiliser application.
- In the last three years, 65% of growers have changed the fertiliser quantities they use so that they target use precisely to crop needs.



⁷ Water footprints [Life cycle environmental impacts of fruits consumption in the UK - ScienceDirect](#)

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The berry sector routinely uses integrated pest management (IPM) to protect their crops, recognising the need to adopt natural pest and disease control wherever possible.

Key IPM actions being taken include:

In berry crops



- 100% of raspberry, blackberry and blueberry growers use Integrated Pest Management (IPM), covering 100% of crop area.
- In strawberries 96% of growers use IPM, on 90% of the crop area.
- Between 2021 and 2024 spending increased on:
 - Biopesticides for strawberry production, rising by 109%
 - Biological control agents for raspberries by 292% and on biopesticides by 161%
 - Biological control agents for blackberries by 63% and on biopesticides by 102%

Nearly two-thirds of all spending on plant protection products for berry production is now spent on biologicals and biopesticides.

All berry growers employ qualified agronomists and monitor for pests and diseases, so crops are only treated when necessary.

British berry growers have been proactive in supporting biodiversity and healthy pollinator populations, taking a wide range of actions which either directly seek to support insect and plant biodiversity or focus on habitat creation.

Key actions being taken on biodiversity, nature and pollinators include:

Action on biodiversity, pollinators and nature



- 100% of berry growers are supporting biodiversity or enhancing their farm environment e.g. by planting new trees and hedges.
- 96% of berry growers have planted wildflower strips on field margins, around polytunnels or in one case, inside polytunnels.
- 91% of growers have planted grass buffer strips to help manage diffuse.
- 61% of growers have created wetlands, ponds, or environmentally enhanced areas around their reservoirs.



No strawberry, raspberry or blackberry crops now use peat. The sector has embraced the use of coir to grow crops, with only the blueberry crop still having some peat use. This makes the sector almost entirely compliant with the proposed Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill; a private member's bill which is awaiting a second reading.

Key actions being taken by growers on growing media include:

Growing media used



- 92% of strawberries, 96% of raspberries and 86% of blackberries are grown in containerised systems using coir.
- The berry sector has eliminated the use of peat in strawberries, raspberries and blackberries.
- Blueberries are traditionally grown in peat⁸, but the use of peat is falling with only 30% of the crop area still using peat or peat mix.

⁸ Blueberry production traditionally used peat as this crop needs acid soil conditions

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The berry sector is taking actions to reduce waste and embrace the circular economy. Key areas include reducing waste at source and ensuring all fruit has a market. The berry sector is also closely aligned with the UK Plastics Pact which co-ordinates industry, NGOs and government action to address plastic waste.

Key actions being taken on waste and recycling include:

Waste and recycling

- 100% of berry growers are using two or more ways to estimate future berry harvest to help plan sales and reduce waste.
- 96% of growers are undertaking at least one action to reduce plastic use, with almost seven different actions used on average.
- 78% of berry growers are recycling plastic tunnel films.
- 74% of growers have reduced the weight of plastic in punnets and the sector is beginning to adopt plastic free punnets.

The berry sector is investing in improved efficiency in the cool chain and transport to help deliver efficient UK supply chains with lower emissions than those typically associated with imports⁹.

Key actions on the delivery of efficient cool chains include:

Efficient cool chains



- 57% of berry growers have taken action to reduce the emissions and energy use of their cold stores.
- 43% of growers have taken actions to reduce transport emissions.

Plant breeding can be used to create new varieties with improved performance. This can include higher yields, improved taste or enhanced sustainability, e.g. by reducing risks from pests or disease or by making berry crops more resilient in changing climatic conditions. A new five-year soft fruit Genetic Improvement Network (the Soft Fruit GIN) was announced in 2024 to breed more sustainable and resilient varieties of UK soft fruit crops.

Investing in plant breeding



- 65% of berry growers are involved in plant breeding programmes either directly or as part of collaborative supply chain groups.
- A third of those involved in plant breeding are working with programmes using precision breeding technologies¹⁰.

Sustainability gains can also be delivered by increasing crop production efficiency, so that the same resources can produce more fruit with less impact.

In the last five years the use of digitally enabled agricultural technologies, including crop monitoring, the use of decision support tools and automation to increase efficiency, have all been trialled and adopted by the berry sector.

91% of berry growers have already adopted some digital technologies, but the sector recognises that it is still just at the start of the digital transition and expects substantial further gains in efficiency as technologies, such as AI and robotics, allow more precision and efficient production systems to be developed.

Key actions being taken on digital technologies and robotics include:

Adoption of digital systems



- 43% of growers have adopted UVC light treatment for strawberries to control powdery mildew.
- 13% use AI detection of disease in strawberries.
- Two growers are trialling the use of fruit harvesting robots.

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The British berry sector is an innovation led sector which is proactively adopting new technologies to drive sustainable production.

The sector is being asked to increase UK berry supply, while at the same time impacting less and keeping berries affordable. This can only be achieved with constant innovation.

To ensure innovation continues, it is important for government, the public sector and research centres to continue to work with the British berry sector on collaborative R&D and technology that focuses on sustainable production.

Key themes for future innovation include:

- Water management to secure supplies in a changing climate at the same time as reducing water pollution.
- Carbon and energy efficiency to deliver net zero targets and reduce costs.
- Further developing the UK berry sector's leadership on the adoption of sustainable pest and disease management using integrated pest management (IPM).
- Labour cost management and efficiency gains so the sector is internationally competitive.
- Precision farming, enabled by the use of AI analysis of sensor data, to inform management decisions to improve efficiency and productivity.



⁹ Global food-miles account for nearly 20% of total food-systems emissions | Nature Food

¹⁰ Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament



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and commissioned by British Berry Growers.

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www.britishberrygrowers.org.uk