

## PRESS RELEASE

4 May 2021

### The Horticultural Quality and Food Loss Network (HortQLNet) launches its 2<sup>nd</sup> Funding Call on 4 May 2021

and invites

**Plant science and technology focussed researchers** with a particular interest in addressing horticultural crop quality (fruit, vegetables and potatoes) and postharvest food loss to apply for research funding.

*Are you a researcher or working within the UK Horticulture industry?*

*Are you interested in UK Horticultural Crop Quality and Food Loss?*

*Do you have interest and innovative ideas or solutions for improving food quality and reducing food loss for Vegetable, Fruit and Potato crops?*

*OR*

*Are you involved in the UK horticulture industry  
and seek an academic partner to help  
resolve a production or quality issue?*

HortQLNet is a 3-year BBSRC funded Network. Now in its second year, **£90K** is available to fund **Pump Priming project** applications in this call; 50% of which is ringfenced for ECRs. We anticipate awarding funds to 4-5 projects of up to £20K each. Each project will have a duration of 3-9 months. Additional funding of **£10K** in total will be available to support academics and industry partners to encourage co-development of project ideas through **Business Interaction Vouchers (BIV) and Networking Visit Funding (NVF)**.

The aim of the Network is to act as the  
**leading collective voice for the UK horticultural and postharvest community.**

By providing funding opportunities, it aims to attract fundamental or applied plant science-based and technology researchers to develop innovative scientific and technological solutions to reduce food loss and improve the quality of UK horticultural crops. By encouraging and facilitating collaborations with other academics or industrialists through available BIV/NVF funding, the Network aims to connect scientists and industry to co-develop ideas that could be developed into pump-priming projects. 50% of pump priming funding is ringfenced for ECRs.

## Why?

Horticultural crops (vegetables, fruit, potatoes) are major components of a healthy diet and the provision and consumption of a diet rich in these offers significant benefits to human health.

It is estimated that one third of food produced globally is wasted before it is consumed. In the UK, this equates to >15 million tonnes of food and drink annually; valued at over £20 billion. More than 50% is wasted in the supply chain before reaching consumer's home because products do not meet quality expectations.

The UK is committed to reducing food losses and waste by half by 2030 (UN [SDG 12.3](#)). BBSRC have identified significant opportunities for science to reduce food losses in horticultural crops through novel and enhanced connections between multi-disciplinary researchers and research end-users including industry and policy makers ([BBSRC Strategic Priorities for AFS](#)).



There is a real need to understand how and where better crop quality and reductions in crop losses can be achieved.

The Network recognises that there is a **gap in the basic plant scientific knowledge** that is required to overcome the challenges of producing sufficient and high-quality UK grown crops with optimal nutritional density, flavour and shelf life for UK consumers.

The UK produces a diversity of horticultural produce which, whilst being something to celebrate, also means that a “one size fits all” approach to understanding the underlying science and addressing these challenges may not be possible.

From a **pure plant science perspective**, the challenges are numerous but exciting. Methods of sustainable production and food system practices need to be better understood and further developed in order to deliver high quality produce to UK consumers.

Pollination biology, regulation of dormancy, manipulation of flowering time and ripening/senescence and increasing resilience to abiotic stress are all key to achieving **an increased harvest window** for UK grown crops. The genetics underpinning plant organ boundaries, plant architecture and cell structure are key to optimising uniformity of size, shape and the capacity of a crop to be processed or stored, thus ensuring consistency and uniformity of **crop quality**. A deeper understanding of pathogens, when and how they enter the plant and the mechanism of when they manifest disease symptoms – often much further down the supply chain – is key to preventing **postharvest crop spoilage**. Understanding, optimising and manipulating the chemistry, genetics and molecular biology that regulates the physiological breakdown and discolouration of tissues that limits **storage time and shelf life** of many of our fruit and vegetable crops is equally important.

Additionally, more applied **technological challenges** need to be addressed such as the demand for less plastic packaging and lowering environmental footprints for more sustainable production.

## How to apply for funding

The funding call is open to all UK based researchers at [UKRI](#) eligible institutions through a single annual selection process.

Applications should be made by completing the relevant application form (pump priming or BIV/NVF).

Application forms and call guidance documents can be found on the HortQFLNet [website](#). The call guidance documents provide full details of the application and evaluation/selection processes including details of the criteria against which project proposals are evaluated.

Application forms should be returned to the Network by email to [info@foodlossnetwork.com](mailto:info@foodlossnetwork.com) by **17:00 on 6 August 2021**. Successful awardees will be notified by early October 2021. Projects will be able to commence once the award funding process has been completed.

### COVID pandemic

It is hoped that travel restrictions currently imposed due to the ongoing pandemic will start to be lifted and enable Networking Visit Funding activities such as travel to other Institutions to proceed. However, Network activities will continue to be subject to any restrictions imposed as part of the Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy.

Further information about the Network and Funding Opportunities can be found at [info@foodlossnetwork.com](mailto:info@foodlossnetwork.com).

Please address any specific questions to Jane Bradbeer, Network Manager via [info@foodlossnetwork.com](mailto:info@foodlossnetwork.com).

