

Ali Capper Speech at BAPL Orchard Event 16th September 2026

It is wonderful to see so many retailers, growers, government colleagues and industry partners together again. A huge thanks to the Mansfields / greosn team for hosting us all today and helping British Apples and Pears Ltd bring the harvest to life through our annual Orchard Event.

Days like today remind us that the British apple and pear industry succeeds because it is built on partnerships. No single part of the supply chain delivers success on its own. Our role isn't simply to represent growers. It's to bring the whole industry together around the opportunities and challenges we all share.

And this year we have a great deal to reflect on - another particularly tough growing year with challenges of frost, hail, sunscorch and drought making this an expensive crop to grow and harvest. But we are coping, growers have invested and mitigated many of the risks. But we will need to continue to invest in water and protection which will mean that profitable returns remain key.

We also have a reason to celebrate. The 2025 season delivered the highest combined sales of British apples and pears since our records began. In fact, we have sold 180,506 tonnes, a 10.4% increase on the previous year. That is a tribute to the excellent eating quality of British fruit, the professionalism of our growers and packers, and the commitment shown by retailer buying teams.

But today isn't only about looking back. It's about asking how we build on that momentum together — and that's what I want to talk to you about this afternoon: sustainability, knowledge, removing barriers to growth, and the next chapter for British Apples & Pears, before we turn to retailer performance and this year's awards.

On working together on sustainability

One of the most encouraging pieces of work we've undertaken this year has been our Carbon, Water and Nature project.

Firstly, I'd like to thank everyone who has engaged with us. We know sustainability teams are under increasing pressure, so we genuinely appreciate the time commitments made — and we've had positive engagement from almost every retailer.

What has been particularly encouraging is how much common ground exists across the sector. Different businesses use different systems and have different priorities, but the conversations keep returning to the same themes: understanding carbon, managing water responsibly, protecting biodiversity, improving soil health and building resilience through regenerative practices for the future.

Our ambition isn't to create another reporting requirement. Quite the opposite. We want to help develop a trusted approach where retailers can rely on BAPL for the reporting. An approach that reduces duplication, provides meaningful information and works for both growers and retailers. Retailers haven't simply engaged with this project — they've helped shape it. We are nearing the end of the scoping phase and look forward to being able to deliver this with you next year.

Regenerative agriculture is widely discussed, but not always clearly defined, particularly for perennial crops. Growing apple and pear trees is, by nature, regenerative. Trees remain in the ground for more than 20 years, with permanent grass or mixed sward alleyways.

We recently launched a statement about what regenerative practices mean in apple and pear orchards. This is now available on our website for you to share with your sustainability teams. Our new definition should give growers, retailers and the wider supply chain a shared and practical understanding of what regenerative apple and pear growing means in a perennial orchard system.

On sharing knowledge and raising standards

Alongside that work, we've continued investing in one of this industry's greatest strengths – our willingness to learn from one another in each other's orchards.

Our recent Smart Orchard grower workshops have been exceptionally well supported, covering everything from pruning, spraying, crop nutrition, size profile and orchard management through to harvest optimisation and productivity. These events help good ideas spread more quickly, encourage continuous improvement and raise standards across the industry. Every improvement has the potential to raise standards and fruit quality across the industry – and better consistency in orchards means better consistency on supermarket shelves, which is something we all benefit from.

If there are areas where you think growers would benefit from greater knowledge sharing, or where greater consistency would strengthen the category, please tell us. We want our workshop programme to respond to the priorities of the whole supply chain. Our next grower workshop in 2027 will focus on the use of AI in businesses from the orchards to the office.

This sector is ambitious to grow

We are actively working with Defra as part of the Horticulture Expert Growers Group to develop the Horticulture Sector Growth Plan and British apple and pear growers are ambitious for growth. We envisage that this plan will encompass:

Commercial:

- Growth from 40% market share of all apples sold in the UK to 60% by 2035
- Supply chain fairness
- Reducing audit burden and duplication
- Developing new export markets

Political – to make British growers better able to compete with EU growers, they need access to:

- crop protection
- affordable seasonal labour
- water
- agile planning regulation that enables expansion
- affordable energy
- funding for a new Research and Innovation function for UK horticulture
- improved investment tax reliefs
- improved public nutrition messaging

BAPL is leading the work on audit burden, access to labour, export, R&D, tax reliefs and health/nutrition messaging.

Many of these priorities are about removing barriers that prevent growers from investing and growing with confidence. One of the clearest examples is audit duplication. We absolutely support robust assurance on food safety and high standards — British growers are rightly proud of what they achieve. But where growers are already independently audited against

recognised standards, we believe there is an opportunity to reduce duplication and unnecessary cost. We found a 91% overlap between one retailer audit and existing assurance requirements and an 88% overlap with another.

We are also concerned about the over-reach and cost burden being created by private-equity invested audit bodies creating ever-higher audit costs for the sector.

We have asked the BRC to convene all our retail partners to create an action plan on the reduction of duplication and costs in audits. Every audit standard duplication we remove is time and money that can instead be invested in producing even better quality British topfruit.

We're also making good progress in another area with real potential to benefit growers, retailers, consumers and public health alike. We've had some very constructive discussions with colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Care and Defra about how we better communicate the health benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables. British apples and pears have an exceptional nutritional story to tell, yet current regulations make it far easier to communicate the health credentials of many UPFs than fresh produce.

Our ultimate goal is to see the health credentials of apples and pears printed on the packaging and on instore POS. We are working with government on how to achieve this.

On our next chapter

As we continue this work, I'm delighted that Claire Donovan has joined British Apples & Pears as our next Executive Chair. Claire brings a wealth of commercial and strategic experience, and she will be leading the next phase of our engagement with retailers, government and growers. Many of you will have met Claire in the past or worked with her, and I know she'll continue building the strong relationships we've developed across the industry. Please do introduce yourselves to Claire if you haven't already — she wants to hear your priorities for the future. Claire will be undertaking an induction throughout September and October before taking the reins after our early November board meeting.

All of these initiatives — growth for the sector, sustainability reporting, growers sharing best practice, reducing unnecessary audits, improving how we communicate the health benefits of fresh produce — have one common purpose: to help more British apples and pears reach more consumers. And this year the sales results show what's possible when growers and retailers work together. We've achieved the highest ever sales of British apples and pears since our records began. That is something everyone in this room can be proud of! So, let's take a moment to celebrate that now with a look at retailer performance and the associated awards ...

Retailer performance and awards

The encouraging news is many of our retail partners have demonstrated what's possible. Just to repeat the 2025 crop was record-breaking: our growers have sold 180,506 tonnes of apples and pears, a 10.4% increase on the previous year.

This is a great time of year to delve into the long-term trend data. We have looked at the volumes sold over the last five years and what this shows us is that across those five years Aldi and Tesco are neck and neck, having both sold just over 20% of the British crop each. Aldi are just in front for the full five years by 3,500 tonnes. This is stellar support for the sector.

Across the five years, if we consider which retailers have over indexed on selling British apples and pears (versus their overall grocery market share) the top retailers are: Aldi, Lidl, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and M&S.

And when we look at what has changed across the last 12 months compared to 24/25, there is standout growth in the year from Co-op (32%), Lidl (23%), Morrisons (20%), Asda (17%) and Aldi (15%).

Morrisons delivered a welcome increase this season – though there is still some way to go to reach the peaks of around 15,000 tonnes achieved in the mid-2010s. We hope this is a sign of momentum returning. And thank you to Asda for maintaining and exceeding the performance BAPL recognised last year.

The opportunity now is for every retailer to build on this record-breaking season and match the commitment shown by the strongest performers.

To all of the retailers I've mentioned so far today – a very big thank you!

Now for our awards. We are delighted to announce this year's winners as follows:

For the highest sales overall of British apple, the award goes to Tesco who have sold 34,436 tonnes, just 190 tonnes more than Aldi. Congratulations to Paul and the team at Tesco.

For the highest sales of British pear, the award goes to Sainsbury's who have sold 6,012 tonnes, well ahead of their closest rival. Congratulations to Andrew and Ralph and the team at Sainsbury's.

For the best early season sales (September and October 2025) of British apples, the award goes to Lidl who sold 4,313 tonnes in just two months. That is 23% of all British apples in those two months against their grocery market share of just 8.2% at that time. Outstanding! Congratulations to Darren and the team at Lidl.

For the best early season sales (September and October 2025) of British pears, the award goes to Sainsbury's who sold 847 tonnes, or 30% of all British pears in those two months against a grocery market share of 15.5%. Congratulations to Andrew and Ralph and the team at Sainsbury's.

And finally for the market outperformance awards where we consider each retailer's sales of British apples and pears in the context of their overall grocery market share to make the BAPL award for those retailers who have over-indexed the most.

For apple, congratulations to Emily and Sam and the team at Aldi for selling 21% of all British apples against an average grocery market share of just 10.5%

For pear, congratulations go to Darren and the team at Lidl for selling 19% of all British pears against an average grocery market share of just 8.3%.

For 2026 the Best Season launch award is now live and you can enter from December 2026, and we will announce the award next April. Please enter and good luck!

Growers have delivered an excellent crop. Retailers have shown that British fruit sells. Consumers have demonstrated strong demand for it. This sector is ambitious to grow, invest and innovate. This will need long-term agreements, profitable returns and the confidence to invest.

If there's one message I'd like you to take away today, it's this: we've shown what's possible when growers, retailers and government work together. This is a highly collegiate sector. Let's not lose that momentum. Keep talking to us, keep challenging us, keep working with us – because the opportunities ahead are too important for any of us to tackle alone.

Thank you everyone.