Brexit food security risks assessed in new report

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Leading food policy specialists have assessed the food security risks of Brexit in a new report.

Feeding Britain: Food Security after Brexit – published by the Food Research Collaboration – takes stock of how [food security](#) and food regulation are being addressed by the UK Government in the Brexit discussions.

The authors say a careless Brexit poses significant risks to food flows into and out of the UK and they urge the Government, industry and public to keep focused on food.

According to the report, the Government recognises the serious consequences that may ensue because it is making contingency plans to suspend food regulations in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Co-author Professor Tim Lang, of City, University of London, said: "One could argue that this is sensible emergency planning but it is also risky. Consumers would rightly wonder who was guaranteeing the safety and quality of the imported food they were buying. Criminals would be alerted to opportunities for food fraud. And the move would send negative signals to the EU, at a delicate time in Brexit negotiations. It could make the UK's third country status more problematic for exports."

The Government's White Paper and food

The report is by Professor Tim Lang, Professor Erik Millstone (University of Sussex), Tony Lewis (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health) and Professor Terry Marsden (Cardiff University). It is the latest in a serious of briefing papers about food and Brexit published by the Food Research Collaboration.

The authors welcome the fact that the Chequers statement of 6th July and subsequent White Paper recognise the importance of agri-food to Brexit. But they argue the documents have major weaknesses.

Feeding Britain: Food Security after Brexit says that the Government makes a fundamental mistake in proposing close alignment with the EU only for farming and manufacturing, but not for retail or food service.

The authors say this injects a fault-line into the UK food system between production and service sectors, yet food service is by far the largest source of employment in the entire UK food chain and delivers more gross value added (29 per cent) than the other sectors (agriculture 7 per cent, wholesaling 11 per cent, manufacturing 26 per cent, retailing 27 per cent).

The report says that the Government also appears to be ambiguous on the question of migrant workers and how essential they are to the current working of the UK food system.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

In addition, the authors argue too little attention is being paid to the special needs of Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, whose economies are highly food-dependent.

Professor Terry Marsden said: "There is a strong need for the joint production of a sustainable food framework which involves the devolved regions of the UK and the regions of England, such that it enhances food security and creates the basis for more healthy food consumption in the UK as a whole."

The report argues that an additional, unnecessary risk is being created by the Food Standards Agency's decision to press ahead with major reform of UK food safety regulation, at a time when a stable regulatory regime should be in place as the basis of trade and Brexit negotiations.

Professor Millstone said: "It is vital, in the context of negotiating and

enacting Brexit, that the Food Standards Agency, and the UK Government more generally, avoid any decisions, proposals or actions, that could adversely affect food safety standards in the UK or the reputation of the UK's food supply."

The paper provides a detailed analysis of the significance of the Regulating Our Future (ROF) reforms being undertaken by the Food Standards Agency.

Tony Lewis, Head of Policy at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), said: "The public needs to know that ROF heralds fundamental changes to the way in which food safety, standards and animal feed are to be regulated."

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