



Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019

14-01-19NM

No deal Brexit worst of all outcomes for NI beef and lamb

With only days to go before a potential 'no deal' Brexit, the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU), the Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC), and the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA) have issued the following joint statement.

A no deal Brexit is the absolute worst possible outcome for Northern Ireland's beef and lamb industry. Worth £1.3billion to the local economy and representing 25 per cent of total agri-food sector output the ramifications are serious. A no deal will jeopardise our ability to export. It will undermine our domestic market. It is crucial decision makers fully understand the devastating economic and social impact it will have on Northern Ireland and every effort is made to avoid it. This is not project fear. This is project fact.

Vulnerable sectors, like beef and lamb, have been rightly nervous about what a no deal Brexit UK trade policy will mean for their future. Information and facts released in recent weeks have made for stark reading. There will be steep tariff and regulatory barriers and we no longer need to speculate about the disastrous consequences for our farming industry.

In terms of tariffs, global competitors, such as USA and Brazil, will be able to export 230,000 tonnes of beef to the UK, tariff free. While anything above that will be subject to only half the EU's common external tariff. Increasing competition locally from non-EU, cheaper produce. As for lamb, despite the intention to apply maximum tariffs on lamb imports, the forecast is grim. The UK is self-sufficient for lamb and the current market is finely balanced. In a no deal scenario, EU tariffs will freeze the UK out of the European market. While at home, with an allocated quota of 114,000 tonnes for New Zealand lamb, the UK market will be oversupplied and farm gate prices will ultimately suffer.

All this, combined with no tariffs or checks on agricultural goods travelling from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland - effectively creating a legal 'back door' to the UK market - and no reciprocal arrangement on offer, the facts show Northern Ireland's beef and lamb industry is facing a crisis.

Tariffs are not the only problem in a no deal situation. Defra recently published details outlining the regulatory conditions for exports to the EU. As a third country, the UK face much more onerous regulations. Including health certificates for animals and meat. Of particular concern is the requirement for vets to certify meat from cattle to show a clear TB test three months before slaughter. Something that is impossible under the UK's current testing regime.

The no deal export regulations for live cattle and sheep will cause irreparable damage to marts in Northern Ireland. Livestock exports to the EU will no longer be able to transit through a market prior to export. The regulations state animals must remain on the farm of birth or their previous holding for at least 40 days before they are eligible for export. These are just three examples of totally unworkable regulations that will come into play in the event of a no deal.

As Parliament continues to agonisingly deliberate over the UK's exit from the EU, Government is ramping up its 'no deal' contingency preparations. Other devolved regions in the UK have allocated multi-million pound budgets to help businesses cope. Northern Ireland is widely recognised as the region that will suffer the most in the event of a no deal Brexit. It is essential that Government is primed to commit financial support to the beef and lamb sector to help mitigate the significant damage caused.

Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU)

The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC)

Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA)

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Notes to the editor:

- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/exporting-animals-and-animal-products-northern-ireland>
- <https://www.afbini.gov.uk/publications/afbi-report-post-brex-it-trade-agreements-uk-agriculture>

- https://www.lmcni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/LMC-Final-Report_31_Aug_17.pdf
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/temporary-rates-of-customs-duty-on-imports-after-eu-exit/mfn-and-tariff-quota-rates-of-customs-duty-on-imports-if-the-uk-leaves-the-eu-with-no-deal>
- LMC: The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland is a Non-Departmental Public Body established through statute to provide a range of services to assist the development of the Northern Ireland beef and sheep meat industry.
- UFU: The Ulster Farmers Union is the largest democratic voluntary organisation representing farmers and growers in Northern Ireland.
- NIMEA: The Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association represents the major meat processors and exporters in Northern Ireland.