

10-01-19NM

Future Brexit trade deals must protect NI beef and lamb producers

The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) has aired concerns about future trade deals with third countries in the event of a 'no-deal' Brexit after the United States Ambassador to the UK, Woody Johnson laid out US objectives for a potential trade deal with the UK.

These negotiation objectives, which were published on February 28, include streamlining of regulations, for example on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) and the reduction or elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers for American agri-food products.

Ian Stevenson, LMC Chief Executive warned that Northern Ireland's beef and lamb producers need to be protected when signing future trade deals to ensure industry standards are not undermined.

"It is unthinkable that UK standards of food production could possibly be undermined in the interests of signing new trade deals with third countries after Brexit," he said.

"Northern Ireland's beef and lamb producers and processors are immensely proud of the standards that their industry operates to, not just in terms of EU standards of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection, but also the voluntary assurance programmes that are operated by industry to help to underpin the specifications of customers and meet the quality expectations of their end consumers."

Whilst Mr Stevenson recognises the importance of securing trade deals going forward, he says the UK must not leave itself in a position where the industry could be exposed to unfair competition from lower cost and lower standard products entering the local market.

He continued: "The UK agriculture and food industry is well respected around the world for the safety and quality of its output. It's imperative that the industry is not exposed after Brexit to a trading environment that would set aside current safeguards and allow lower cost and lower standard product to enter the UK market. If this was to happen, it would undermine the many decades of investment that has been made by industry towards quality improvement, health and safety, legislative compliance, worker welfare, food

production systems and supply chain integrity whilst at the same time, producing affordable and safe food for consumers.

“Within Northern Ireland we fully understand the importance of two-way trade as we have to sell over 90 per cent of our beef and lamb output outside the region. We are keen to grow our access to more market opportunities around the world but market access must be fair and based on sound principles. It must not erode the foundations on which our critically important agri-food industry is built.”

ENDS