

More home grown and reared food please

Yesterday in the Commons I raised again the issue of more home grown produce. The fresh food in supermarkets packaged with the UK flag is popular and usually of excellent quality. Many of us want to keep the food miles down, keep the standards up, and support UK agriculture.

I saw a film recently which said that tomatoes grown in modern greenhouses in carefully controlled environments can yield up to forty times the weight of product that a typical outdoors plant can achieve. It can also be much easier to pick. Modern methods of growing strawberries under polythene or glass can prolong the UK growing season, produce great fruit and simplify picking.

The same film reminded viewer of the how many orchards had to be grubbed up in the 1970s as a tidal wave of tariff free continental imports came into our market and offered cheaper product than the domestic fruit. Under the Common Agricultural Policy and the tariff free EU food regime we have seen a decline of around one fifth in domestically produced temperate food, whilst we have had at the same time to protect the EU growers from cheaper competition from outside the EU with tariffs against the most efficient world producers.

If the EU persists in denying the UK a Free Trade Agreement with no tariffs by insisting on there being a high price for such an obvious thing to grant, then there will be tariffs against EU food imports. We will presumably choose to lower our food tariffs compared to the high EU ones. As these tariffs come to apply to the EU it will give our own farmers a huge incentive to increase their capacity to supply us with much more home grown food, and to cut the food miles as they do so. It would be good to get back to the market share we had in 1970, and to think about restoring those orchards that were ripped out.