

Farm management and more food

The agricultural lobbyists are worried that leaving the EU will mean they can no longer recruit plenty of low wage labour from the continent to carry out tasks like fruit picking and vegetable harvesting by hand. The government will continue seasonal workers schemes and will make available a sensible number of labour permits. It should also promote productivity enhancing investment in technology.

There are now various systems to allow mechanised harvesting of everything from vegetables to fruit. Intelligent tractors and farm drones are able to plough, sow, spray and perform many other chores. The farmer will increasingly become the controller of complex systems of AI. He or she from the office will have detailed reports on the state of the crop, the diary for tending and harvesting and details of any problems. He or she will instruct the tractors, drones and other equipment to carry out the work needed at each stage of the development of the crop.

Some of the equipment will be large and expensive. A further move to larger farms would expedite this, but smaller farms can come together with rental agreements or with co-operative approaches, sharing the equipment needed to service their fields. UK farming is often more advanced and better capitalised than many continental farms, where small units lacking in capital characterise big areas. Here in the UK the very high cost of farmland means many farmers are tenants or employee managers. We need to find more ways of incentivising owners of land to work with farmers to put in the capital required.

As an ageing population of tenant farmers retires there is more scope to look at farm amalgamation and at new contract arrangements for younger farmers who cannot afford to buy land. Technology will be a great driver of new ways of farming, and will boost agricultural productivity. Leasing, hiring, and co-operating all offer options for new farmers to earn a good living alongside farm owners who want to make a decent return.

The UK is a large net importer of food from the rest of the EU as we have lost substantial market share in temperate foods since joining the EEC. and losing tariff protection. If on exit the EU imposes their high external tariffs on UK food we should impose selective tariffs on products where we can switch to more home consumption of our own product. We are likely to eat more home produced lamb and less imported beef if the EU opts for the tariff route. We should remove all tariffs on things we cannot produce for ourselves.

Let's transform UK agriculture

All the time we have been in the EU the Common Agriculture Policy has kept the UK under controls which have not suited us. Market share has fallen. We have seen more and more temperate food brought in from the continent, reducing our home market share. Food miles have increased, our roads have been clogged with more foreign trucks travelling longer distances with food imports.

Much of our salad needs and flowers now come in from the Netherlands. Many of our vegetables come in from Spain. Large amounts of dairy produce come from France. Beef comes in from several countries, and pork arrives especially from Denmark. Many of these items are things we could grow or rear for ourselves. The Netherlands has no climate advantage over us. Low value vegetables should not be cheaper when hauled hundreds of miles from Spain.

Once we are free to set our own tariffs we can remove all tariffs on food we cannot produce for ourselves. There should be no further need for taxes on citrus fruits, for example. We may also well decide to have lower average tariffs on temperate food than the EU makes us impose, as we will be levying them on the EU as well as on the rest of the world.

We will also decide on our own levels of farm subsidy and how it should be allocated. The new UK system should place a premium on increasing our market shares. There should be tax and subsidy inducements to increase output and to mechanise farms. The UK should harness AI and robotics to the cause of farm improvement, building two industries at the same time. Intelligent use of newly targeted subsidies and sensible tariffs could give us a big boost with more home grown food and more domestic development of the technology a new farm should deploy.

We need more investment in extending the growing seasons for vegetables, fruit and flowers and other market gardening activities. We could grow more with the right glasshouses and polytunnels, just as the Dutch do with similar weather.

What legislation should we change once we are free to make our own laws?

One of the attempted trick questions in the referendum campaign from Remain to Leave was about deregulation. Which regulations would you repeal, they asked of the Leave campaign. Presumably they hoped either that the Leave campaigner would be lost for a specific example, or would offer up a popular regulation which the public would not wish to see removed. They

underestimated their opponents in this as in other matters.

The truth is there are many laws and regulations that the EU has imposed on us that are either suitable for repeal or for substantial improvement. The UK could start by repealing the damaging fishing regulations which have allowed considerable environmental damage to our fishing grounds whilst also undermining some of our fishing businesses. We could move on to removing items from VAT or choosing lower rates for others. There is no great support for 5% and 20% VAT rates on a whole range of green products, nor for the 5% VAT levy on domestic heating fuel. The interventions in our corporate tax code that have lowered our revenues could be reversed. We could do a better job on animal welfare with our own rules.

It is a strange phenomenon that many people will stand for election to the UK Parliament with a wish to become lawmakers, only to decide once they arrive that want many of our laws to be settled in Brussels so they can claim they have no ability to amend or repeal them. The UK Parliament over our years in the EU has been craven in meekly accepting every EU law and regulation, and in avoiding proper debate about it. This has damaged our democracy and widened the gulf between Parliament and people.

The continuing EC court case over VAT on commodity derivatives is a reminder of how the EU wishes to rewrite our rules against the interests of our businesses. The UK Parliament should decide our VAT law and it should not be subject to reversal by a European court.

Managing our borders

Mr Cameron and Mrs May both kept telling us the UK needed to cut the numbers of migrants coming to the UK. They chose to highlight a net figure, subtracting those who moved abroad from those who arrived. They wanted to get this new figure down to under 100,000. They got nowhere achieving this target.

Some objected to the idea of a net target. Every new migrant arriving needs a home and other support from public services. They often need benefit top up of their incomes. This needs to be done well and generously, and becomes difficult to do to a decent standard when the numbers become very large. The country did not have a sufficient supply of affordable housing, and was short of health and education capacity in the fast growing parts of the UK where many migrants arrived. An elderly couple with their own means moving to Spain for a few years did not compensate for the costs of the new migrant arriving and needing social housing and other support. Indeed, the absence of the richer UK resident reduced the tax take.

Some said that Mr Cameron and Mrs May were unable to hit their target owing to a sudden surge in inward migration to the UK from the rest of the EU. It

is true there were big movements of people during this period. Many EU citizens were attracted to the UK by the jobs and relatively high wages compared to their home countries. It was also true that the government did not even hit the target for non EU migration which also continued at high levels.

Once out of the EU the government will lose the argument that it cannot hit its target owing to EU membership and freedom of movement. The government will need to set a fair migration policy for the whole world, removing preference for people coming from the continent. The system should mainly be based around an assessment of how many people with what skills levels we need to grant work permits. If people want to come and live here and have the means to support themselves that is no problem. We should also have a humane and proportionate policy towards asylum seekers. Current levels of gross and net migration are too high, damaging our ability to provide good homes and public services for all.

How should the UK change its foreign policy once out of the EU?

Once we are out of the EU the UK regains its vote and voice in world bodies. The UK is ready to take a global perspective and will be able to pursue our national interests and our global values more successfully once we no longer have to broker an agreed line with 27 other EU states.

Some fear the UK will be isolated or is in some way too small to survive in the turbulent waters of world diplomacy once independent. This is an absurd notion. The UK will proceed with shifting coalitions of interests issue by issue, based on long term alliances and community of interests with various friendly countries. The US/Canada/New Zealand/UK/Australia Intelligence group will remain important to our intelligence and security. NATO will continue to be our central defence alliance. In the WTO we will emerge as one of the leaders of the free trade group pushing for fewer barriers and lower tariffs worldwide. We can form our own view on environmental issues and form alliances as needed. There will be times when we do wish to make a common front with France and Germany as we do today.

One of the dangers of being in the EU is the way the UK is drawn into rows and conflicts in Eastern Europe where EU intervention may not be helpful and where UK interests may diverge from apparent EU interests. The UK increasingly has split loyalties with the divergence in approach to the Middle East and elsewhere between the USA and the EU. Where these two fall out the UK needs to be able to make its own judgement about which side to belong to, or to offer a third way which could reconstruct a wider alliance between the democracies on the two sides of the Atlantic. The EU has not been

helpful to the UK over Gibraltar, and has also been negative over aspects of the Channel islands independence.

The pull of the world is towards the east with the rise of China and India. The UK will need to look increasingly to Asia for growth in trade. Japan is keen to encourage stronger links with the UK, two island nations that value their independence, both offshore from large power blocs. The USA is increasingly pulled towards China as it seeks to manage a complex relationship with an emerging super power. The UK needs its independence and flexibility to handle its own interests as this development advances. The UK is rightly seen as a crucial financial marketplace and services innovator. China wishes to develop more joint working in these areas, where EU regulation and approaches might impede progress.