

Two questions for farmers to take advantage of Brexit

UK agriculture- and fisheries – has been one of the most heavily managed sectors by the EU and one of the most damaged. We have moved from being a net exporter of fish to be a net importer, despite having the best fishing grounds in the EU. We have lost substantial market share in temperate foodstuffs despite having a good climate and soils to grow our own.

As we move to leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement we need to ask what tariffs we should impose on world exports of food to us, including food from the EU. If we simply impose current EU tariff levels on the EU as well when we leave to meet the obligation for common tariffs on our complete worldwide trade, there would be a substantial tariff barrier against items like Danish bacon, French cheese and Irish beef which would give the UK a huge boost to produce more for ourselves. The tariff revenue we collected as our industry adjusts to its ability to displace imports should of course be given back to consumers as tax cuts so we are not worse off.

Does UK agriculture think we should impose the full EU tariffs against the EU, or should we take advantage of putting new tariffs on EU product to lower the overall tariff on world food generally so some of the benefit is given direct to consumers of non EU food? For example, we could remove all tariffs on food we cannot produce for ourselves. Why not abolish the EU 16% tariff on oranges from outside the EU? Some say we should simply impose the full tariffs. Some say we should impose a lower average tariff on temperate food. Either way there will be a boost to domestic output. I will return to the issue of our tariff schedule in a later post, but would like to know your views.

So my second question to UK farmers is what plans are there to step up your output after March 29 2019? How quickly can we grow extra tomatoes, vegetables and the other items that pour in from Spain and the Netherlands at the moment? How much more cheese and yoghurt can you produce to regain market share from the continent? Are there plans to expand beef and pork production when we get the price advantage any new tariffs will bring?

I will be sending a version of this to the NUFU to hear their comments.