

Monday, 22nd June 2020

UK retailers must decide whether they will protect consumers from a host of potential threats to UK food standards in trade deals with the USA, warn civil society organisations and academics

Leading civil society organisations and academics are urging the UK's major food retailers Tesco, Waitrose, Marks and Spencer, Asda, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Aldi UK, Lidl UK and Co-op UK, not to sell food imported under a trade agreement with the USA or other nations that have been produced to lower standards than those that apply here in the UK. Shockingly, areas where the USA has lower standards than the UK include: food safety, animal welfare, antibiotics stewardship and environmental standards.

In a letter sent to the CEOs of nine major supermarkets, the 26 signatories warn that a trade deal with the USA could open the floodgates for the import of foods – particularly meat, egg and dairy products – produced to standards lower than those of the UK. This will set the pattern for other trade deals.

Concerns raised in the letter include:

- The import of hormone-treated beef, raised in US cattle feedlots to low animal welfare and environmental standards, which would undercut UK pasture-based beef farmers on price.
- The use of ractopamine, to promote growth in pigs, which is permitted in the USA but prohibited in the UK due to human health concerns. Pork imported from the US is also likely to come from herds where sows are confined in narrow stalls during pregnancy – a practice which has been illegal in the UK since 1999.
- The use of BST (bovine somatotropin), a genetically engineered lactation-promoting hormone, in US dairy cattle to increase milk yields, which is prohibited in the UK on animal welfare grounds. Imported US dairy products from BST-treated cows would undercut UK farmers on price.

- The import of chicken washed in chlorine, or other chemical disinfectants, used to mask dirty conditions in production, slaughter and processing which are banned in the UK because they support intensive methods of farming with lower hygiene and welfare standards.
- Egg powder coming into the UK from hens kept in battery cages in the USA.
- High levels of farm antibiotic use in the US compared with the UK, raising serious concerns about fuelling dangerous anti-microbial resistance.

“These ‘cheap’ US imports may seem like a good deal, but they come at a high cost – to animal welfare, human health and the environment.” says Peter Stevenson, Chief Policy Advisor at Compassion in World Farming. “There is a real danger that these imports would undermine the livelihoods of UK farmers and lower the quality of some foods available to UK consumers.”

“We encourage retailers to commit to retaining current food standards here in the UK as a minimum and not to sell low quality food imported under trade deals.”

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at the Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London, who helped co-ordinate the letter said: *“With Government set on making deals with countries which have lower standards, the retailers now have a choice. Will they retain current standards as a minimum or be pushed by Government into creating a two tier market? Many academics from diverse disciplines are acutely aware that not just health, environment and animal welfare are at stake, but public trust in retailers themselves. This is a test case for Food Brexit Britain.”*

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Notes to editors:

1. Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer who became horrified at the development of intensive factory farming. Today Compassion is the leading farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to ending factory farming and achieving humane and sustainable food. With headquarters in the UK, we have offices across Europe, in the US, China and South Africa.

2. Tim Lang is Professor of Food Policy at City, University of London's Centre for Food Policy, which is an interdisciplinary research and teaching centre dedicated to improving food policy worldwide.
3. City, University of London is a global higher education institution committed to academic excellence, with a focus on business and the professions and an enviable central London location.

City's academic range is broadly-based with world-leading strengths in business; law; health sciences; mathematics; computer science; engineering; social sciences; and the arts including journalism and music.

City has around 20,000 students (46% at postgraduate level) from more than 160 countries and staff from over 75 countries.

In the last REF, City doubled the proportion of its total academic staff producing world-leading or internationally excellent research.

More than 140,000 former students from over 180 countries are members of the City Alumni Network.

The University's history dates from 1894, with the foundation of the Northampton Institute on what is now the main part of City's campus. In 1966, City was granted University status by Royal Charter and the Lord Mayor of London became its Chancellor. In September 2016, City joined the University of London and HRH the Princess Royal became City's Chancellor.

Led by President, Professor Sir Paul Curran since 2010, City has made significant investments in its academic staff, its estate and its infrastructure and continues to work towards realising its vision of being a leading global university: it has recently agreed a new *Vision & Strategy 2026*.