



THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
Agroecology for Sustainable
Food and Farming

*****Embargoed for Thursday 4 January at 00:01 UK GMT*****

Poorly handled trade deals ‘biggest peacetime threat’ to UK food security

Trade deals post-Brexit with the EU and further afield could pose the biggest peacetime threat to the UK’s food security, if current environmental and public health standards and existing farmers’ needs are not prioritised in the terms of the negotiations, warns the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Agroecology for Food and Farming, a cross-party group of MPs and peers.

The APPG on Agroecology conducted an inquiry into the ways Brexit trade negotiations could impact UK agriculture and food production, with special emphasis on areas of practice and legislation most likely to impact producers working to sustainable, agroecological standards.¹

The inquiry’s overriding concern was that issues such as food security, environmental protection and welfare standards may be significantly weakened by the UK’s exit from the EU.

Group Chair Kerry McCarthy MP for Bristol said: “There are serious concerns that if negotiators don’t value farmers enough and build poorly managed trade deals that reflect this – particularly a US-UK deal – it could trigger a race to the bottom in terms of standards and ability of our own farmers to compete. The APPG is determined that this sector should not become a bargaining chip or something that can easily be traded.”

Despite the assurances that we have a world of trade options opening up to us, the most important trade arrangement for the UK to resolve is with the EU. According to a Defra report,² in 2016 the UK food, feed and drink exports were distributed as follows:

- 60% to the EU
- 16% to Asia
- 14% to the US

The APPG on Agroecology believes Defra must work with DIT to make sure that in all new trade agreements British farmers are protected and not undermined by lower welfare imports, such as the US with the concerns over chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-filled beef, because those countries will oppose any improvements and want standards reduced. These concerns would apply to environmental standards, which again would harm agroecological producers more than any other sector. The recent news that the DIT is pushing to carry out secret negotiations with the US only serves to underscore publicly held fears.

It is understood that free-trade agreements smooth the way for foreign direct investment, including by transnational agribusinesses. There is a very real risk that this could encourage farmers to adopt input-heavy, intensive systems, or systems which are not suited to local environmental or cultural conditions. All of this may have a detrimental impact on soil health, local biodiversity and broader ecosystem health, and move the UK ever further away from sustainable ways of producing food and managing land.

Kerry said: “If discussions are not handled by a negotiating team ready to support our agriculture industry in its entirety – not just the largest businesses, or those with capacity to lobby loudest – then the government is severely hampering its own ability to make good on its election manifesto promises to farmers, and will run the very real risk of permanently damaging our leading role in setting and improving food standards for current and future generations.”

The APPG on Agroecology has released the results of its inquiry into the impact of Brexit on food and farming trade to coincide with the opening of the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC).

Kerry added: “The hundreds of farmers that attend the ORFC are among some of the most vulnerable groups in the UK’s agricultural sector and often the least heard. They will be the most affected by a botched Brexit trade deal, and yet they



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are the ones best positioned to preserve the UK's food security for decades into the future. The APPG on Agroecology calls on Defra, DExEU and DIT to work together to not only maintain, but to improve our production, public health and environmental standards as we navigate trade deals, for the good of the country.”

Agroecology is increasingly being seen as the answer to many of the concerns facing modern land management concerns. Examples include: soil health management techniques that focus on crops, grasses and grazing rather than fertiliser, which has been a key driver of the FAO announcement³ that the world only has 60 harvests left, or agroforestry techniques to combat climate-change related flooding and encourage biodiversity and natural pest control.

/ENDS

For more information and a copy of the report, please contact:

agroecology.appg@gmail.com

Kerry McCarthy MP will be attending both days of the Oxford Real Farming Conference and available for interviews. Please contact ORFC Comms Manager Katharine Mansell to arrange:

07814 455639 / khmansell@gmail.com

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. You can access the report after the embargo has lifted here: <https://agroecology-appg.org/>
2. According to Defra's 2016 report *Agriculture in the United Kingdom*, in 2016 60% of UK food, feed and drink exports were to countries in the European Union (EU). In comparison, exports to Asia and North America were 16% and 14% respectively, and 70% of UK imports of food, feed and drink during the same period were from the EU. After the EU came Asia and North America - but their imports accounted for only 8% and 6% respectively.
3. <http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/events/detail/en/c/338738/>

Inquiry policy recommendations cover the following areas and themes:

- Agriculture within the wider Brexit negotiations
- Free trade under WTO rules should no agreements be in place once we have left the EU
- Animal welfare and environmental standards, labelling and consumer demand
- UK-EU existing standards
- Homogenisation of agricultural standards in bilateral trade deals
- A Brexit agricultural consultation reflective of the position of agroecology
- Farmers in the role of countryside stewardship: public money for public good
- Capacity-building Defra for post-Brexit and beyond
- The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill – legislative areas of focus

Inquiry key findings for the sector:

- The livestock sector will certainly be one of the most vulnerable, as countries like Ireland and the US look for opportunities to export much more to the UK.
- Most farming in the UK outside of the East of England, would struggle to compete at world market prices with upland farmers being particularly vulnerable. Beef and lamb sectors will be exposed for a combination of reasons. Their core export markets are on the European continent and if tariffs are incurred, the price of their produce will go up, making them less competitive.
- The horticultural sector is also vulnerable, as it is highly dependent on migrant, seasonal labour from other EU countries, and failure to secure this labour-source could add substantially to the cost of producing.

About the inquiry process:



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The APPG on Agroecology for Sustainable Food and Farming conducted an inquiry in March 2017 into the ways Brexit trade negotiations could impact UK agriculture and food production, with special emphasis on areas of practice and legislation most likely to impact producers working to sustainable, agroecological standards. The summary is based on evidence heard during the inquiry as well as additional information provided to the panel, with additional context provided by the rapidly changing events surrounding Brexit up until and including events in December 2017. The APPG on Agroecology wishes to note that the final briefing reflects a collective opinion and not necessarily the views of any one organisation. This inquiry was held as part of the APPG on Agroecology's ongoing Brexit work programme, and follows its October 2016 report *Farming Post Brexit* and *Farmers in Parliament* event.

List of organisations and individuals who submitted evidence to the inquiry:

- Professor Michael Cardwell, Agricultural Law, Leeds University
- Professor David Barling, Director of the Centre for Agriculture, Food and Environmental Management, University of Hertfordshire
- Peter Stevenson, Chief Policy Advisor, CIWF
- Catherine Fookes, Campaign Manager for the Organic Trade Board
- Dr Steve Webster, Pasture-Fed Livestock Association (PFLA)
- Vicki Hird, Sustainable Farm Campaign Coordinator, Sustain
- David Bowles, Assistant Director, Public Affairs, RSPCA
- Steven Jacobs, Business Development Manager, Organic Farmers & Growers
- Samuel Lowe, Trade Campaigner, Friends of the Earth
- Claire Peeters, Head of Operations and Development, Sustainable Food Trust
- Jyoti Fernandes, policy team, Land Workers Alliance
- Georgina Downs, UK Pesticides Campaign
- Laura MacKenzie, Head of Policy (farming and land use), Soil Association

About the APPG on Agroecology:

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Agroecology is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers led by five co-Chairs: Kerry McCarthy MP, Jeremy Lefroy MP, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer, Baroness Jenkin of Kennington and Countess of Mar, and Baroness Young of Old Scone. The Group works to encourage the adoption of agroecological principles and policies within all relevant departments of government. For more information go to: <http://agroecology-appg.org/>