



## DEBATE PACK

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# British meat and dairy products

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## Summary

A debate on British meat and dairy products will be held in Westminster Hall on Wednesday 28 April 2021 from 2.30-4pm. The debate will be opened by Selaine Saxby MP.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

There have long been efforts to promote UK meat and dairy products, and encourage consumers to “buy British”. This debate pack provides a brief introduction to the UK meat and dairy sector, its contribution to the economy, the role of international trade, the marketing of British produce, and commentary from stakeholders in the industry.

This debate is being held against the backdrop of the UK’s exit from the European Union, which has had wide-ranging implications for the agri-food sector. This includes the UK Government’s plans to phase out direct farm support in England, replacing it with a system of “public money for public goods”. For an introduction to this policy, see the Library’s briefing paper on [The Agriculture Act 2020](#) (CBP 8702, 3 December 2020).

At the same time, as the UK has left the EU Single Market and Customs Union, the Government is pursuing new trading relationships around the world. Stakeholders have identified both opportunities and challenges for the UK agri-food sector in potential new trade agreements. For an introduction to some of these issues, see the Library’s paper on [Brexit: trade issues for food and agriculture](#) (CBP 7974, 5 November 2019).

The Government has also commissioned an independent review of England’s food system, “from field to fork”, which is being led by restaurateur and Defra non-executive board member Henry Dimbleby. Part One of this [National Food Strategy](#) was published in July 2020, dealing with “the most urgent questions raised by both Covid-19 and EU exit”.<sup>1</sup> Part Two, to be published in 2021, is expected to include “a comprehensive plan for transforming the food system”.<sup>2</sup> The Government has committed to responding with a White Paper six months after Part Two.<sup>3</sup>

Agriculture and food policy are substantially devolved, although some relevant matters such as international trade are reserved to the UK Parliament.

## 1.2 Overview of the UK meat and dairy sector

### Economic output

In terms of Gross Value Added (GVA, a measure similar to GDP), the economic output of the meat industry (comprising the processing and

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<sup>1</sup> [National Food Strategy: Part One](#), July 2020, p. 16

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

preserving of meat and production of meat products) amounted to £5.0 billion in 2020, while the dairy industry amounted to £2.9 billion.<sup>4</sup>

Combined, the two sectors accounted for 0.4% of the UK's total GVA.

### Trade

In 2020, the UK exported £2.1 billion of meat and meat preparations and imported £6.3 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of -£4.2 billion.

In the same year, exports of dairy products were worth £1.7 billion, while imports were worth £3.1 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of -£1.4 billion.

Combined, meat and dairy products accounted for 2.2% of UK goods exports and 3.1% of UK goods imports in 2020.

### UK trade in meat & dairy products, 2020 (£ bn)

	Exports	Imports	Balance
<b>Meat</b>	2.1	6.3	-4.2
<i>of which</i>			
Beef	0.4	0.9	-0.5
Pork	0.4	0.8	-0.4
Mutton/lamb	0.4	0.3	0.1
Poultry	0.3	0.9	-0.6
<b>Dairy</b>	1.7	3.1	-1.4
<i>of which</i>			
Cheese & curd	0.6	1.7	-1.0
Other dairy	1.1	1.5	-0.4

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

The UK recorded a trade deficit in all categories of meat and dairy products, except for mutton and lamb, where the UK recorded a trade surplus of £0.1 billion.

UK trade in meat and dairy is heavily concentrated on the EU. EU countries accounted for 70% of meat exports and 77% of dairy exports, as well as 83% of meat imports and 99% of dairy imports.

Some sectors' reliance on the EU as an export market is particularly pronounced; 93% of UK lamb and mutton exports were exported to the EU in 2020.

The EU is also a major source of meat and dairy imports; 99.7% of UK pork imports were from EU countries in 2020, as were 99.1% of UK imports of cheese and curd and 98.9% of imports of other dairy products (such as milk, butter, cream).

<sup>4</sup> ONS, [GDP output approach – low-level aggregates](#), 31 March 2021. GVA measures the value of goods and services produced by an industry and is a measure of economic output that is closely related to gross domestic product (GDP) - GVA = GDP plus subsidies on products minus taxes on products (e.g. VAT).

Two exceptions are pork exports and lamb imports: 60% of UK pork exports were to non-EU countries in 2020, while 87% of UK lamb imports came from outside the EU in 2020.

UK trade in meat & dairy products, 2020				
	Exports		Imports	
	EU	Non-EU	EU	Non-EU
<b>Meat</b>	70.1%	29.9%	83.3%	16.7%
<i>of which</i>				
Beef	81.7%	18.3%	96.8%	3.2%
Pork	40.2%	59.8%	99.7%	0.3%
Mutton/lamb	92.5%	7.5%	13.5%	86.5%
Poultry	66.9%	33.1%	97.7%	2.3%
<b>Dairy</b>	76.9%	23.1%	99.0%	1.0%
<i>of which</i>				
Cheese & curd	76.9%	23.1%	99.1%	0.9%
Other dairy	76.9%	23.1%	98.9%	1.1%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

### 1.3 Marketing of UK produce

There are a number of initiatives and schemes which seek to promote and/or add value to UK agri-food produce, for both the domestic and export markets.

#### Levy boards

The [Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board](#) (AHDB) is a statutory body funded by a levy on agri-food sectors. Its work includes market intelligence, promotional activities and facilitating knowledge exchange among farmers and growers.<sup>5</sup>

In the devolved nations, as well as work by the AHDB, market development for the meat sector is also carried out by the following levy bodies:

- [Quality Meat Scotland](#), the public body responsible for helping the Scottish red meat sector improve its efficiency and profitability; and maximise its contribution to Scotland's economy.
- [Hybu Cig Cymru](#) (Meat Promotion Wales), the industry-led organisation responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of lamb, beef and pork from Wales.
- [Livestock & Meat Commission](#), whose mission statement is to support, examine and inform the marketing and development of the Northern Ireland beef and sheep meat industry.

#### Assurance schemes

There are a number of voluntary assurance schemes in which food businesses can participate. These are generally accredited by the [United](#)

<sup>5</sup> AHDB, [What we do](#) [accessed 22 April 2021]

[Kingdom Accreditation Service \(UKAS\)](#). Examples of UK assurance schemes include:

- [Red Tractor](#), whose website states that its approach to standards is based on the four key principles of animal welfare, environmental protection, food safety and traceability.
- [Farm Assured Welsh Livestock](#), owned by Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers, an agricultural cooperative society.
- [Quality Meat Scotland](#) operates a number of assurance schemes.
- The Livestock & Meat Commission operates the [Northern Ireland Beef & Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme](#).
- [British Lion eggs](#), including a requirement that hens be vaccinated against salmonella and a “passport” system ensuring that all hens, eggs and feed are fully traceable.
- [RSPCA Assured](#), which according to its website “assesses farms, hauliers and abattoirs to the RSPCA’s strict [animal] welfare standards”.

In addition, businesses marketing food as “organic” in the UK must be registered with a recognised organic control body, such as the [Soil Association](#). A list of approved UK organic control bodies is given on GOV.UK.<sup>6</sup>

### **Geographical indications**

Food, drink and agricultural products with a geographical connection or that are made using traditional methods can be registered and protected as intellectual property. This protection is called a geographical indication (GI) and it protects the product name from misuse or imitation.

Until the end of the transition period, the UK was covered by the EU’s GI schemes. The UK has now set up its own similar GI schemes, to which food producers can apply for protection. All products registered under the EU schemes on 31 December 2020 remain protected under the UK schemes. Registered products sold in Northern Ireland continue to be covered by the EU schemes.<sup>7</sup>

The UK GI schemes protect products sold in Great Britain, whether they originate from the UK or elsewhere. There are 4 UK GI schemes:

- food, agricultural products, beer, cider and perry
- wine
- aromatised wine
- spirit drinks

There are UK GI logos that represent 3 designations of GI product:

- protected designation of origin (PDO) – a UK example is [Stilton Blue Cheese](#).
- protected geographical indication (PGI) – a UK example is [Welsh beef](#).

<sup>6</sup> GOV.UK, [Organic food: UK approved control bodies](#) [accessed 22 April 2021]

<sup>7</sup> GOV.UK, [Protected geographical food and drink names: UK GI schemes](#) [accessed 23 April 2021]

- traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) – a UK example is [Traditional Bramley Apple Pie Filling](#).

For more information on the UK GI schemes, see GOV.UK guidance on [Protected geographical food and drink names: UK GI schemes](#). For information on the EU schemes, see the European Commission web page [Quality schemes explained](#).

Protected geographical indications are distinct from legal requirements to label the country of origin of a food. Not all foods need to be labelled with the country of origin. For information on country of origin labelling requirements applicable to certain foods, see GOV.UK guidance on [Food labelling – what you must show](#).<sup>8</sup>

## 1.4 “Buying British”

A number of initiatives have sought to promote the benefits of supporting the UK agri-food sector. A January 2021 report by the AHDB examined consumer attitudes to farming and the environment. It found that “overall, consumer perceptions of farming in the UK are positive”, with 66% of people feeling “very or somewhat positive about British agriculture”.<sup>9</sup>

The report suggested that British producers could improve their competitiveness by demonstrating environmental credentials:

As other sectors such as transport, manufacturing and energy have forcibly had their carbon emissions reduced as a direct consequence of lockdowns, agriculture’s share of emissions will look worse as a consequence, even temporarily which will apply more scrutiny. In this context, it is vital that British agriculture continues to be on the front foot in confronting the issues around the environment and to continue to demonstrate positive progress. Commitments to net zero are hugely positive, but the industry will need to make good on these commitments if it wants to retain the high trust levels it currently benefits from.

We know that preference for buying British is higher among those who prioritise the environment. Ultimately, prioritising and demonstrating care for the environment has the potential to become a compelling point of difference for the UK, both for exporters and domestically.<sup>10</sup>

The National Farmers Union’s [“Back British Farming”](#) campaign has also sought to promote UK agriculture by highlighting its environmental profile:

As well as growing and producing high quality, healthy food that we all eat and enjoy, British farmers are custodians of our beautiful countryside, leaders in animal welfare and champions of renewable energy. What’s more, the UK food and farming industry makes a fundamental contribution to our economy,

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<sup>8</sup> GOV.UK, [Food labelling and packaging](#) [accessed 23 April 2021]

<sup>9</sup> AHDB, [Trust in Farming and the Environment: The Consumer Perspective](#), January 2021, p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 11

providing millions of jobs and supporting rural and urban communities up and down the country.<sup>11</sup>

Other campaigns to promote British meat and dairy products include:

- The British Meat Processors Association has set up a website and brand, [SustainableBritishMeat.org](https://SustainableBritishMeat.org), making the case that “British meat should be the simple first choice for consumers”.<sup>12</sup>
- The “[Milk Your Moments](#)” campaign was funded by the AHDB, the industry body Dairy UK, and the UK Government and devolved administrations. Its purpose was to “address the fall in milk sales due to the closure of foodservice caused by the coronavirus outbreak”, and “inspir[e] moments of connection as people stay apart” in partnership with mental health charities.<sup>13</sup>
- The AHDB has also run a number of campaigns promoting various British agri-food products, which can be accessed on the “[Marketing](#)” page of its website.

## 1.5 Farming and environmental standards

There are a range of approaches to agriculture, and the way in which land is farmed can have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. A previous Library briefing for a debate on [Interdependence of modern farming and the environment](#) (CDP-2019-0062, March 2019) provides further background information on sustainable agriculture and the environmental impact of farming practices.

In terms of international comparisons, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) publishes data on agricultural emissions and various agri-environmental indicators: see the [FAOSTAT](#) web page.<sup>14</sup> The NGO World Animal Protection also produces an “[Animal Protection Index](#)”, ranking 50 countries around the world according to their animal welfare policy and legislation (which is not limited to agricultural animals).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> NFU Countryside Online website, [Why should I back British farming?](#) [accessed 23 April 2021]

<sup>12</sup> BMPA, [New brand & website to showcase why ‘Origin Matters’ when buying meat](#), 31 August 2020

<sup>13</sup> AHDB, [Milk Your Moments: Share the message](#) [accessed 26 April 2021]

<sup>14</sup> FAO, [FAOSTAT](#) [accessed 27 April 2021]

<sup>15</sup> World Animal Protection, [Animal Protection Index](#) [accessed 27 April 2021]

## 2. Press articles

Farming UK

[Substantial fall in dairy and meat exports to EU](#)

26 April 2021

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board press release

[Teething problems or permanent toothache? Latest UK agri-food trade data](#)

13 April 2021

Grocer

[Food and drink exports to EU fall 65% in post-Brexit slump](#)

12 March 2021

Farming UK

[Public buying more meat and dairy compared to last year](#)

4 March 2021

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board press release

[Shoppers back British farmers says new AHDB report](#)

1 February 2021

Farmers' Weekly

[Excessive vet checks and paperwork hit meat exports to EU](#)

14 January 2021

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs press release

[UK secures 'listed status' to protect £5 billion animal export market](#)

24 December 2020

Farmers' Weekly

[Appetite to support British food is growing, research finds](#)

8 December 2020

Food Manufacture

[Japan trade agreement boosts meat, grain and dairy](#)

11 September 2020

## 3. Parliamentary Questions

### [Food: Exports](#)

#### **Asked by: Jenkyns, Andrea**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to help promote the exports of UK food producers.

#### **Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

As a Government, we have a manifesto commitment that we want people at home and abroad to be lining up to buy British. The UK's growing reputation for high quality food and drink, produced to high standards of food safety, animal welfare and sustainability, is an excellent platform to increase demand for our products still further around the world.

Defra works in tandem with the Department for International Trade to deliver the Food is GREAT campaign, which helps businesses to succeed in overseas markets by ensuring global recognition of UK excellence in food and drink. Food is GREAT is a key element of the joint Defra and DIT agri-food 'bounce back' package of trade support and promotion measures announced last June to help support businesses that have been impacted by coronavirus.

The Food is GREAT campaign is focused on priority markets, including the USA, China, and Japan. In November, the campaign showcased a spectacular display of food and drink products from across the UK at the **China International Import Expo (CIIE) 2020 in Shanghai**. Activity is being planned across all priority markets, where we will work with UK businesses to promote the best of UK food and drink on the international stage.

Defra is strengthening export capability and ambition in the sector through an Export Working Group in collaboration with the Department for International Trade and representatives of the food and drink sector. This group identifies market opportunities and increases awareness of the support and tools available to exporters. A particular focus is helping SMEs build capability to grow their businesses through exports. A new International Action Plan is being developed by this group to set out the export ambition of the sector, priority markets and the full range of government support available from tailored export advice to campaign activity and a programme of expos and trade shows. This includes further enhancing in market support, building on the success of Defra's first Agri-Counsellors in Beijing and Dubai.

**HC Deb 11 February 2021 | PQ 149283**

### [Agriculture: Trade Agreements](#)

**Asked by: Barker, Paula**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what safeguards the Government has put in place to protect high British food and farming standards after new trade deals are agreed with countries outside the EU.

**Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

The Government has a clear manifesto commitment that in all of our trade negotiations we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

Legal protections for our standards are in place. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 retains standards on environmental protection, animal welfare, animal and plant health and food safety. This includes the prohibition on the use of artificial growth hormones in both domestic production and imported meat products and that no products, other than potable water are approved to decontaminate poultry carcasses.

The Government has recently taken additional steps to give Parliament a greater role in scrutinising trade agreements. In the Agriculture Act 2020, we have established a duty for the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the impact of our Free Trade Agreements on the maintenance of UK food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards.

In July we established the Trade and Agriculture Commission, an independent board set up to advise and inform the Government's trade policies on environmental and animal welfare standards in food production. We have since moved to put it on a statutory footing in the Trade Bill and the Commission will directly feed into the Agriculture Act reporting process.

**HC Deb 29 January 2021 | PQ 141629**

### [Food: Coronavirus](#)

**Asked by: Shannon, Jim**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he plans to take to promote the safety and high standards of British food to (a) the public and (b) retailers during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

We are lucky in the UK that we have the climate, the landscape, and entrepreneurial farmers and food producers that equip us to produce world-class food, and our farmers and growers are doing a fantastic job of feeding the nation during this challenging time.

Half of the food that the UK population consumes is home-grown and UK food is renowned for its quality, as well as its high standards of food safety, traceability, animal welfare and sustainability. We will always champion our farmers and producers; supporting them to grow more of our great British food, and to provide a reliable and sustainable food supply to the British public.

Supermarkets are already taking steps to promote and source British products. To support the work of the entire food chain, we are engaging with different initiatives that highlight the qualities of British food products, such as meat, dairy, and vegetables, as well as fish caught in UK waters. We are also working closely with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) as they develop consumer-facing marketing campaigns for the meat and dairy sectors. We will continue to engage with and support similar initiatives that highlight the qualities of British meat, dairy, seafood and fruit and vegetable products.

**HC Deb 09 June 2020 | PQ 51973**

[Meat: Sales](#)

**Asked by: Lockhart, Carla**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with supermarkets in the UK to encourage the promotion and sale of meat produced on UK farms.

**Answering member: Victoria Prentis | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with supermarkets, retailers and other stakeholders in the food and drink industry covering a wide range of issues.

We are fortunate in the UK that we have the climate, the landscape, and entrepreneurial farmers and food producers that equip us to produce world-class food, and our farmers and growers are doing a fantastic job of feeding the nation during this challenging time.

Half of the food that the UK population consumes is home-grown and is renowned for its quality, and high standards of food safety, traceability, animal welfare and sustainability. We will always champion our farmers and producers; supporting them to grow more of our great British food, and to provide a reliable and sustainable food supply to the British public.

Supermarkets are already taking steps to promote and source British meat products. We are also working closely with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) as they develop consumer-facing marketing campaigns for the meat and dairy sectors. We will continue to engage with and support similar initiatives that highlight the qualities of British meat, dairy, and fruit and vegetable products.

**HC Deb 15 May 2020 | PQ 44067**

## 4. Further reading

### House of Commons Library

- Insight, [Food security: what is it and how is it measured?](#), 7 February 2020
- Briefing paper, [Brexit: trade issues for food and agriculture](#), CBP 7974, 5 November 2019
- Debate pack, [Interdependence of modern farming and the environment](#), CDP-2019-0062, 8 March 2019

### Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

- POSTnote 626, [A resilient UK food system](#), 11 June 2020
- POSTnote 600, [Climate change and agriculture](#), 7 May 2019
- POSTnote 589, [Trends in Agriculture](#), 8 November 2018
- POSTnote 557, [Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture](#), 4 July 2017

### Select Committee reports

- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Covid-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, 30 July 2020
  - [Government response](#), HC 841, 10 October 2020
- House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, [Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food](#), HL Paper 85, 6 July 2020
  - [Government response](#), 11 September 2020
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Brand Britain: promoting British food and drink](#), HC 1039, 27 June 2019
  - [Government response](#), HC 2645, 9 September 2019

### Other

- [Trade and Agriculture Commission: Final Report](#), March 2021
- Defra, [The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024](#), 30 November 2020
- [National Food Strategy: Part One](#), July 2020

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