

Post-Brexit trade deal with US could see UK lower food standards

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The Alliance to Save our Antibiotics (ASoA) has voiced warnings over the possibility of the UK importing US livestock raised for food post-Brexit due to their varying food standards. Statistics published by the organisation show US livestock are dosed with around five times as much antibiotic medicine as UK animals, with up to sixteen times the UK rate given per cow in the US. Andrew Hood, senior director and barrister-at-law for Dechert LLP, said the UK will soon have a 'fundamental choice' to make in a number of sectors about whether it keeps or lowers standards.

Higher use of antibiotic medicines on animals has been linked by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to rising resistance to the drugs, as well as the evolution of 'superbugs' which have the potential to cause devastating global illness.

The Alliance voiced concerns around the ongoing Brexit talks, during which the UK will seek trade deals independent of the EU. When discussing changing trade roles the US could put pressure on the UK to allow imports of US-raised food livestock, some of which are currently banned in the UK.

Suzi Shingler, at the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics, told The Guardian newspaper: 'US cattle farmers are massively overusing antibiotics... Trade negotiators who may be tempted to lift the ban on US beef should not only be considering the impact of growth hormones, but also of antibiotic resistance due to rampant antibiotic use.'

'A fundamental choice to make'

Hood said that should the UK diverge from current EU standards, there would be two main effects on trade: 'Firstly, UK farmers and producers will have a choice: adopt similar farming methods to those of their US competitors or face being undercut on costs in the UK market.

'Second, any divergence from EU standards will mean that UK imports into the EU will be affected. Even if farmers continue to adopt EU-standards the EU will almost certainly insist that checks are conducted to ensure that no produce imported from the US (or other places with different standards from the EU) finds its way into the EU market.

'Furthermore, if the UK adopts these different standards to allow UK farmers to compete, then (at the very least) the EU would ramp up checks on UK products coming across the border to ensure they comply with the EU standards.'

He said this would both impact UK farmers' competitiveness and increase the costs of exports to the EU, without addressing the impacts such farming practices have on the environment and health, or on the UK's reputation in the sector.

Hood continues: 'How likely this is depends on the position the government ultimately takes about adopting harmonised rules and standards with the EU but, in the absence of any political decision on this crucial issue, UK farmers and other UK producers remain in limbo.'

Source: [Press release: Warning to post-Brexit deal-makers—Don't lower UK farm standards to match US where antibiotic use is five times higher than in the UK](#)