Businesses urged to take simple steps for smoother trade with the EU

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Businesses are being urged to take simple steps to prepare for the landmark EU agri-food deal, that will cut costs, slash red tape and open up opportunities for exporters and importers.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds set out today (Monday 9 March) how UK exporters and importers are expected to benefit from the new Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement as the government negotiates to make trade with the UK's biggest market and closest neighbour easier, cheaper and quicker.

This will free British food and farming businesses from the mountains of paperwork, unnecessary delays and spiralling costs of current arrangements, cutting red tape, opening opportunities for growth for large and small importers and exporters across the country, and helping put British produce back on European tables.

Since 2018, the value of exports of food and agricultural products to the EU have fallen by 22%, a drop of almost £4 billion in real terms. That's meant lost profits, shrinking markets and, in the worst cases, businesses closing their doors.

Trade will flow faster, meaning imports of fresh produce will reach supermarket shelves more quickly and supply chains will become more resilient, strengthening food security here and in Europe. This creates opportunities to increase choice for consumers and ease pressures on food price inflation.

Businesses will benefit from a simpler, cheaper process for moving most agrifood goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, protecting consumer choice in Northern Ireland and strengthening the UK internal market.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

> We are resetting our relationship with the EU, our closest and largest trading partner, to make trade easier and cheaper, and deliver tangible benefits for British businesses.
>
> We are talking about real businesses, real employers: the Somerset cheesemaker with export trade halved, the Welsh shellfish trader turning down orders because their catch isn't fresh by the time the paperwork is done, the Scottish farmer who can no longer sell seed potatoes to customers they've supplied for decades.
>
> By reducing delays and unnecessary paperwork, this deal will help keep shelves stocked, protect jobs and put downward pressure on food price inflation for families across the country.
>
> British businesses deserve better and we will work hand-in-hand with them to ensure this deal is a success.

Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said:

> More great British produce will be on European tables thanks to this agreement which will reduce barriers for exporters and create new opportunities for farmers and businesses across all parts of the UK.
>
> By reducing paperwork for these exports, this deal will ensure our world-leading food and drink can reach customers all around Europe easier than ever before.
>
> To help preparations, the government has today launched a six-week Call for Information to understand how it can best support businesses to make the most of this opportunity.

The government has also published more detail on the scope of the agreement, and which sectors the deal will focus on to help all businesses understand and prepare for what is ahead.

The government is working toward a mid-2027 start date for the new agreement and the government wants businesses in the agri-food sector to start getting ready now. This includes those that do not currently trade with the EU.

Since last May, the government has been engaging with businesses and trade associations to understand how the new deal could affect them. The government knows that some businesses require longer to adjust to the new arrangements and will work with them to ensure a smooth transition.

The costs to businesses expected to be removed by the deal include:

- Export Health Certificates costing up to £200 for agri-food goods
- Phytosanitary Certificates costing approximately £25 alongside inspection fees of at least £127.60
- Organic Certificates of Inspection, required for the export of organic lamb and cheese, costing on average £35
- Identity check fees on meat and dairy exports adding £31 per load on average
- Sampling which can add approximately £1,200 to a cheese load, £1,400 to a salmon shipment, £440 to a load of apples, and £1,200 to a beef load

The government is aiming to finalise negotiations on smoother trade and secure the best deal for UK businesses later this year, so they can begin to reap the benefits from mid-2027. While negotiations remain ongoing, businesses are being encouraged to take early steps to prepare for the changes ahead.

Under the deal, the government has committed UK businesses involved in the production or processing of plants, food, animals and animal products to aligning with EU rules. This applies to domestic producers and those trading with the rest of the world, meaning businesses that do not currently export may also need to adapt their practices.

Businesses should continue to follow the current trading requirements until any new agreement takes effect. This includes continued compliance with the Windsor Framework until such time the agreement removes the need.

Alex Freudmann, Managing Director of M&S Food said:

> It’s good to see that the Government’s EU reset is moving forward, with a renewed commitment to implementation in mid-2027.
>
> The sooner this deal is done the better - it will remove unnecessary bureaucracy between the EU and the UK, easing cost pressures on serving our customers across Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It will also give much needed relief to British farmers in exporting meat, fruit and veg into Europe.
>
> It’s now time for all businesses to prepare for this shift so we can make the most of the opportunity - we’ll be getting to work with our suppliers right away.”

Bas Padberg, UK Managing Director, Arla Foods said:

> The progress being made on reducing friction in the UK-EU trading relationship will be good news for Arla and our farmer owners, as well as for consumers, for food security, and for growing exports into Europe.
>
> Making sure these changes deliver the maximum benefit for everyone is vitally important, which is why we strongly welcome government’s commitment to work with businesses and other stakeholders on getting the practical details right.

Sean Ramsden, CEO of Ramsden International said:

> We’re extremely excited by the forthcoming UK-EU SPS Agreement, which we firmly believe will re-open the European market to the amazing assortment of British food and drink we export.
>
> The system since Brexit has made exporting to the EU complicated and expensive, so eradicating this friction should allow us to make significant gains and recover much of the revenues lost as a result of Brexit. Truly a win for both British suppliers, and European consumers.

What businesses can do now

While negotiations continue, businesses can take practical steps to get ready:

- **Engage with their relevant trade body or industry association**: They will be key partners in providing sector-specific guidance and many are already working with government to help members prepare.

- **Engage with your supply chain**: To understand any changes that may apply to them.

- **Sign up to Defra email alerts for regular updates**: To receive the latest information on negotiations, implementation timelines, and details of guidance and support available.

- **Respond to the Call for Information**: And share views on what support their business needs to prepare.

Detailed guidance will be published as negotiations progress to ensure businesses – from farmers and processors to retailers and hauliers – are ready to benefit from day one.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The SPS agreement covers regulations on food safety, animal health, plant health and animal welfare products traded between the UK and EU. It will streamline health and safety standards, reducing checks and paperwork at the border.

- Approximately 500,000 businesses are expected to be affected. This includes businesses operating entirely within Great Britain who do not currently trade directly with the EU, as well as exporters and importers.

- The government is working toward a mid-2027 start date for the new agreement. Detailed, sector-specific guidance will be published once negotiations conclude, expected later in 2026.

- The government is launching a Call for Information on SPS Implementation to gather sector-specific intelligence on business readiness needs and help shape detailed business guidance and support measures.

Costs expected to be removed:

- Export Health Certificates cost up to £200 for agri-food goods

- Phytosanitary Certificates cost approximately £25 alongside inspection fees of at least £127.60

- Organic Certificates of Inspection, required for the export of organic lamb and cheese, cost on average £35

- Identity check fees on meat and dairy exports adds £31 per load on average

- Sampling can add approximately £1,200 to a cheese load, £1,400 to a salmon shipment, £440 to a load of apples, and £1,200 to a beef load

Costs expected to be reduced

- For beef and salmon, queueing times for checks can add costs of up to £149 per load

- Additional driver charges, paid to hauliers for border-related friction, typically £200 per shipment

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/businesses-urged-to-take-simple-steps-for-smoother-trade-with-the-eu