Businesses in Northern Ireland urged to prepare for smoother GB-NI and EU trade

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Negotiations underway on UK-EU deal to make trade easier, cheaper and quicker, with Northern Ireland at the heart of the talks

Negotiations on changes to trading arrangements with the European Union are focused on ensuring Northern Ireland fully benefits, with businesses in Northern Ireland urged to take simple steps to prepare.

The government is negotiating a deal that will make agrifood trade with the EU easier, cheaper and quicker for British businesses to export and import, cutting red tape, increasing choice for consumers and putting downward pressure on food price inflation.

Since 2018, 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.

The Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement will facilitate the smooth flow of agri-food goods, including plants, from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, protecting the UK Internal Market while maintaining Northern Ireland’s unique access to the EU Single Market.

For most agri-food goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, traders will no longer need regulatory certificates, checks or paperwork. This will remove a broad and wide-ranging set of current requirements, cutting fees, forms and frustrating delays for businesses in Northern Ireland from supermarkets to farms and factories.

The Windsor Framework will remain in place, safeguarding Northern Ireland’s unique dual market access and protecting the Good Friday Agreement. Businesses in Northern Ireland businesses will continue to benefit from the ability to trade goods without additional paperwork and checks within both the UK Internal Market and the EU Single Market.

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.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

> Ensuring Northern Ireland benefits from this agreement has been a guiding principle of our negotiations.
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> This deal will make it easier for businesses to move agri-food goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, cutting unnecessary paperwork and slashing costs.
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> At the same time, Northern Ireland will retain its unique dual market – a position unmatched elsewhere in Europe.

Northern Ireland Secretary, Hilary Benn, said:

> Today marks a significant milestone for Northern Ireland as the UK moves towards an SPS Agreement with the EU. This will make it easier, cheaper and quicker for British businesses to export and import food, animals and plants.
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> By removing complex checks and paperwork for the vast majority of this trade, an agreement will reduce costs and red tape for local businesses while fully protecting the integrity of the UK internal market.
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> This agreement will not only reinforce Northern Ireland's unique dual market access, but also ensure that we continue to uphold our commitments under the Good Friday Agreement while securing a better economic future.

Ulster Farmers' Union President William Irvine said:

> The UFU welcomes progress on the UK-EU SPS agreement negotiations and the opportunities it presents for the agri-food sector. A huge amount of work has gone in at UFU level over many years to get to this point.
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> Many Windsor Framework issues we have been lobbying on can be addressed under a closer UK-EU relationship and it is our hope and desire that this is reflected in any future agreement.
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> An agreement on SPS matters between the UK and EU can bring real, long-term certainty for our members and the wider agri-food industry. If a comprehensive agreement is achieved, it will go a long way in freeing up the movement of agri-food goods from GB to NI and ensuring farmers across the UK are on a level playing field.
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> However, it is essential that any future agreement is implemented as quickly as possible so that Northern Ireland farmers and food businesses can begin to see the benefits.

The government is working toward a mid-2027 start date for the new agreement Acting as a reliable partner and delivering on existing commitments, the government will continue to work closely with businesses to support them in meeting the current requirements of the Windsor Framework.

What businesses in Northern Ireland 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 here 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 across Northern Ireland – from farmers and processors to retailers and hauliers – are ready to benefit from day one.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/businesses-in-northern-ireland-urged-to-prepare-for-smoother-gb-ni-and-eu-trade