

Where should we buy our food?

The one area of trade which will be affected by moving to WTO trade arrangements in the event of no trade deal with the EU is the trade in food. This is the only area where high tariffs can be levied, and are currently levied by the EU on imports from outside the zone. Were we to adopt the EU schedule of food tariffs on leaving the EU, they would represent a barrier to continental exporters of food to us.

Our trade in food is in massive deficit with the EU. They sell us the bulk of the £6bn of meat we import, and much of the £10bn of fruit and vegetables. Since we joined the EEC/EU our home producers have lost substantial market share to the rest of the EU, and have found it very difficult to export to the continent. Our beef industry was banned from exporting for a long period, and our milk industry did not have enough quota to produce more. Since 1990 our meat output is well down, our milk output has flatlined and our potato output is down.

The Netherlands have been successful at taking market share for salad stuffs and vegetables. The Danes dominate the ham and bacon market, continental cheese producers do well, and the French and German dairy industries also export large quantities to us.

If the EU decides against a free trade agreement with the UK then UK farms will have a great opportunity to produce far more fruit, vegetables and meat for the UK market. We could return from the 74% self sufficiency in temperate food to the 95% level we were at prior to the full impact of the Common Agricultural policy. We will also be able to remove tariffs from tropical food products which the UK cannot grow for itself, giving the consumer a better deal.