

## **Written evidence submitted by the Ulster Farmers' Union (FRE0090)**

In the first instance, I would wish to apologise in advance that, due to the lack of clarity and detail even at this late stage around these UK/EU negotiations, including the operational detail of the NI Protocol if this has to be implemented, and also because of the limited capacity which we have to deal with all of the very many current relevant issues and challenges, we are unable at this time to properly address all of the questions which you have raised. I would however, like to take this opportunity to respond more generally.

From the outset of this Brexit process over four years ago, the priority position taken by the Ulster Farmers' Union was to ensure the continuation of free and frictionless trade with the EU for the whole of the UK. The subsequent and relatively recent agreement between the UK and the EU on the possible differential treatment between NI and Great Britain if the NI Protocol had to be implemented has further complicated the possible outcomes.

We welcome the publication of 'The UK's Approach to the NI Protocol' command paper as it provides commitments which allow for the first steps of progress in grappling with some of the core challenges arising from the Protocol. There is still a very clear need to move to more technical detail very quickly in terms of customs and SPS controls for both NI – GB and GB – NI trade and coverage of any related additional costs associated with such trade. It is essential that this is done in a way which reflects the needs of businesses and consumers in NI.

Unfettered access for NI to the GB market must be secured and we welcome the Government's commitment to legislate for this. It must however be done in a way which also protects the integrity of our agri-food industry and allows for the indirect (via RoI) as well as the direct transportation of products from NI to the GB market.

In particular, definitions of 'at risk' products and 'qualifying' status are critically important. A subsequent education initiative needs to be undertaken by Government about what the implementation of the Protocol means in practice. The future operation of the UK's Internal Market must also take account of the possible introduction of the NI Protocol.

It must also be remembered that this Command Paper is representative of the views of only one side of these UK/EU negotiations and are therefore still not agreed as definite.

We are also unclear about the acceptance of NI agri-food products and labelling requirements for both UK and EU trade agreements with third countries.

Ultimately none of this might be relevant or necessary if the UK were to agree a future trading relationship with the EU which largely mirrors that which presently exists.

The UFU would be happy to provide more related information as and when the situation becomes clearer on these negotiations.

***July 2020***



# Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Email: [freucom@parliament.uk](mailto:freucom@parliament.uk) Website: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/366/committee-on-the-future-relationship-with-the-european-union/>

16 July 2020

Mr Ivor Ferguson  
President  
Ulster Farmers Union

Dear Mr Ferguson,

The House of Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union is inquiring into the progress of the negotiations between the UK and the EU. Under normal circumstances, the Committee holds regular oral evidence sessions in Westminster. However, measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus make this difficult.

The Committee is keen to gather as much evidence as possible to inform its deliberations so I am writing to you to ask whether you would be willing to help us with our work by making a written submission. We welcome general responses to our [call for evidence](#), which was published on 4 March. We also hope that you would be willing to answer some of the more specific questions set out below on issues that fall within your area of expertise. Submissions need not address every bullet point and can include other matters that you think are relevant to the negotiations and should be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

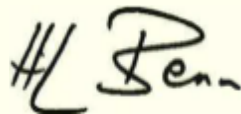
- What are the key priorities of the agri-food sector in the negotiations?
- To what extent did the UK Government consult the agri-food sector before publishing its negotiating aims and draft texts? How well does what the Government has proposed meet their needs? What further provisions would you have advised the Government to seek?
- How do the UK and the EU's positions in the negotiations on the future relationship compare regarding agricultural products and food? What is your assessment of the level of technical detail the negotiators have grappled with on this topic to date? How might they impact on the agri-food sector? Could you sketch out a possible compromise in this area?
- How do the UK and the EU's positions in the negotiations on the future relationship compare regarding geographical indications and plant varieties? How do they compare to the provisions already in the Withdrawal Agreement? How might they impact on the agri-food sector? Could you sketch out a possible compromise in this area?
- How do the UK and EU's positions in the negotiations on the future relationship compare regarding the transportation of goods? To what extent are they linked with the wider discussions on the level-playing field? How might they impact on the agri-food sector? Could you sketch out a possible compromise in this area?
- How do the UK and EU's positions in the negotiations on the future relationship compare regarding Rules of Origin? How might they impact on the agri-food sector? Could you sketch out a possible compromise in this area?
- How do the UK and EU's positions in the negotiations on the future relationship compare regarding labour mobility? How might they impact on the agri-food sector? How might any concerns from the agri-food sector be addressed by the new immigration regime?
- How would the Northern Ireland Protocol interact with any free trade agreement covering agricultural products and food? What are the risks and opportunities to GB and

NI agri-food producers and retailers of the potential difference in the agri-food regime across the Irish Sea?

- Based on the parameters set out by the UK and EU draft legal texts, could reaching an agreement with the EU restrict the UK's ability to pursue a free trade agreement covering agricultural products and food with third countries? If so, how? Do you anticipate the Trade and Agriculture Commission examining this topic?
- What would happen if agreement was not reached between the UK and the EU on agricultural products and food? What would be the impact on UK farmers of having to pay tariffs?
- If there was no agreement, what would be the international legal baseline they would fall back on?
- How might the Border Operating Model assist the agri-food sector in adjusting to a scenario whereby the Transition Period ends without a trade agreement in place?
- Is it clear what the agri-food sector must do to prepare for the end of the Transition Period? How much progress have been made on preparations so far? Do SMEs face any additional challenges?
- What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the agri-food sector? What lessons can be learned from this that could assist in preparations for a new regime after the Transition Period ends?

The Committee staff will be happy to discuss the inquiry, any issues raised, or the process for submitting written evidence. You can contact them at [freucom@parliament.uk](mailto:freucom@parliament.uk).

Yours,



**Hilary Benn**  
**Chair of the Committee**