# UK public sector urged to source more British food amid tax disputes



Hospitals, schools, and prisons in the UK are set to face a new directive encouraging them to procure more British food, as part of a government initiative aimed at improving relations with farmers following contentious changes to inheritance tax. Environment Secretary Steve Reed is expected to address the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) annual conference on Tuesday, where he will outline plans for the public sector to source at least half of its food from farms meeting high welfare standards. This strategy aims to bolster support for British growers and food producers, according to reports from The Guardian. However, there are anticipations of a “hostile reception” from attendees at the conference, as they may voice concerns over recent government policies.

In a separate development, Doug Gurr, the newly appointed head of the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA), shared his perspective on the authority's regulatory philosophy during an exclusive interview with The Sunday Times. Gurr emphasised a “minimalist principle,” stating, “don’t intervene unless you really need to.” He cautioned those contemplating excessive deals, indicating that firms should not presume the authority has become more lenient; “Don’t assume that we’ve suddenly become naive and that a deal that was terrible six months ago is suddenly marvellous. The fundamentals haven’t changed,” he said.

Meanwhile, concerns regarding rising food prices have emerged as retailers, suppliers, and manufacturers respond to the latest fiscal measures introduced in October's budget. A report in The Times noted that Tom Athron, chief executive of Fortnum & Mason, anticipates food prices could increase between 4.5 per cent and 5.5 per cent this year, while another major supermarket executive projected food inflation could reach 5 per cent.

In a significant corporate move, Just Eat Takeaway is poised to be acquired by investment group Prosus for over €4 billion, which will result in the company's delisting from public markets. The Financial Times highlighted that this acquisition could mark the conclusion of a turbulent period for the Amsterdam-based group, whose stock performed strongly during the Covid-19 pandemic only to decline sharply as restrictions eased.

Additionally, the parcel locker service InPost is launching its first customer-to-customer delivery service, which may disrupt the current market dominated by Royal Mail. The new service, launching this week, will offer deliveries starting at £1.99, presenting a competitive challenge to Royal Mail’s lowest fee of £3.25. With 9,200 locker locations across the UK, many situated outside supermarkets and convenience stores, InPost aims to simplify parcel exchanges for consumers.

In Northern Ireland, supermarkets continue to grapple with “sustained practical difficulties” related to the Windsor Framework, the post-Brexit agreement that impacts trade and human rights. According to evidence submitted by the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium (NIRC) to an inquiry, an increase in the percentage of vehicles undergoing physical checks has resulted in “additional delays and, occasionally, the rejection of lorries impacting on retail operations”.

Lastly, government ministers are reportedly working on the development of artificial intelligence tools intended to assist jobseekers in crafting CVs and covering letters. This initiative aims to streamline the workload of Jobcentre staff, allowing them to concentrate on more complex cases while contributing to the effort to reduce the UK’s welfare expenditure, as outlined by The Financial Times.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-12/debates/5B7462FF-1379-4336-A0D1-CF99E881EB6B/PublicSectorFoodProcurement> - This URL supports the claim about the UK government's initiative to improve public sector food procurement, focusing on high welfare standards and supporting British farmers.
* <https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/public-procurement-bill/> - This URL corroborates the information about supporting British farmers through public procurement policies, including a private member's bill for mandatory reporting on British food supplied to the public sector.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/> - This URL is a source for reports on government initiatives and policies, including those related to improving relations with farmers.
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/> - This URL supports the claim about rising food prices and projections by major supermarket executives.
* <https://www.ft.com/> - This URL corroborates the information about the acquisition of Just Eat Takeaway by Prosus and government initiatives to reduce welfare expenditure through AI tools.