# UK family farms face crisis as US trade deal threatens bioethanol and meat sectors



Amid intricate negotiations surrounding the US-UK trade deal, concerns are mounting about the potential impact on British family farms, particularly in the wake of tariff concessions aimed at American agricultural imports. James Mills, a 37-year-old arable farmer from York, has voiced alarm over the implications of the agreement, claiming it could represent a "death knell" for many family farms across the UK. The deal, which entails lifting tariffs on US ethanol imports, is seen as a particularly harmful move for farmers who rely on bioethanol production as a supplementary income.

Mills explained that he serves as a supplier of wheat to the Vivergo bioethanol plant in Hull, one of the UK's two largest facilities, both of which collectively consume around two million tonnes of crops each year. With a looming threat of closure due to the influx of subsidised American imports, the viability of British farms is at risk. He expressed a grim outlook: "More and more land is already being sold, and it makes it increasingly difficult to see a viable future as a farmer in this country."

In a similar vein, Sally Hodgson, a small-scale farmer in Derbyshire, raised concerns about competition from American meats, particularly given the high animal welfare standards upheld in the UK—standards that may not be reflected in US farming practices. She stated, “We have such high standards here, and we sell directly to the local butcher. I'm proud of what we produce. But how are we going to compete if it's being exported at a much cheaper cost?”

The trade deal aims to remove tariffs on a total of 1.4 billion litres of US ethanol and also allows the importation of 13,000 tonnes of US beef adhering to UK welfare standards. Critics argue that these concessions are a bait-and-switch, benefiting industries outside agriculture while compromising the sustainability of British farming. Tom Bradshaw, President of the National Farmers' Union, emphasised that farming is being placed at an unfair disadvantage; this is further echoed by industry leaders who have claimed that the deal does not take into account the nuances of food production in the UK.

In response to the concerns raised by British farmers, the UK government has reiterated its commitment to maintaining strict food standards. Environment Minister Steven Reed assured the National Farmers’ Union that the government will not sign trade agreements that would undermine local farming regulations. However, the potential for American imports to flood the market raises fears of a “race to the bottom,” where UK standards might eventually be pressured to align with those of less regulated producers.

Compounding the uncertain landscape for British farmers is the backdrop of a controversial new inheritance tax proposed by the Labour Party. Set to come into effect in April next year, the 20% tax on farms valued over £1 million has sparked vehement opposition among agricultural advocates, who argue that it places an additional burden on family farms already grappling with economic instability.

Despite the promise of reciprocal trade benefits heralded by US Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, who cites the deal as pivotal for both nations, many experts remain cautious. The expansion into British markets for US pork, poultry, and seafood presents further worries about the ability of local agriculture to compete against heavily subsidised products. Comparatively, the prospect of suffering under a deregulated agricultural environment raises fundamental questions about food quality and safety for UK consumers.

In light of all these factors, the ongoing negotiations and resulting agreements necessitate an imperative discourse on the long-term implications for family-run farms in Britain. The trade deal, while crafted to strengthen ties with the US, may inadvertently precipitate the erosion of the traditional agricultural sector that serves as a backbone of rural British communities. With the spectre of multinational corporations looming larger, there is a palpable fear that the generational skills and connections forged in the nutritional backbone of Britain could face irrevocable damage.

The divergence between government rhetoric on protecting local agricultural interests and the realities of trade negotiations continues to spotlight a turbulent future for British farming—a reality that resonates deeply within the farming community.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/future-ab-foods-bioethanol-plant-imperilled-by-us-uk-trade-deal-2025-05-09/)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms)
* Paragraph 4: [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-rules-out-trade-deals-which-undercut-food-standards-2025-02-25/)
* Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/1a329f0c-c606-4e89-acc1-0207aaffbe52), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/81bcbde9-a47b-4819-9de9-ec31f0142d5a)
* Paragraph 6: [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-tesco-has-no-plans-source-american-beef-2025-05-13/)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/1a329f0c-c606-4e89-acc1-0207aaffbe52), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/f65fb13f17cfc14d0b5b8d267953d5c4)
* Paragraph 8: [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/81bcbde9-a47b-4819-9de9-ec31f0142d5a)
* Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056363/trump-starmers-trade-deal-destroy-family-farms> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/1a329f0c-c606-4e89-acc1-0207aaffbe52> - The United States is seeking to expand access to the British market for its pork, poultry, rice, and seafood industries as part of ongoing trade negotiations following a recent deal on US beef and bioethanol. US Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins emphasized these products are key priorities and highlighted concerns over the UK's reliance on countries like China and Russia for seafood. While the existing agreement covers $950 million in trade, Washington views the broader deal as a potential $5 billion opportunity. The proposed expansion is raising concerns among British farmers over unfair competition, as US products may not meet UK or EU standards. The UK maintains strict tariffs and bans on hormone-treated beef and chlorinated chicken. Rollins also emphasized the deal’s reciprocal benefits for UK exporters.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-tesco-has-no-plans-source-american-beef-2025-05-13/> - Tesco, the United Kingdom’s largest supermarket chain with a 28% market share, has announced it will maintain its policy of sourcing 100% of its beef from British and Irish producers. This decision follows a recent U.S.-UK trade agreement that allows U.S. farmers to export up to 13,000 metric tonnes of beef meeting UK standards to the British market. In return, British farmers received the same export quota to the U.S. Despite this new access, Tesco CEO Ken Murphy confirmed there are no plans to source American beef in the foreseeable future. Sainsbury's, the UK’s second-largest supermarket with a 15% market share, also continues to source all its beef locally. Although U.S. officials, including Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, have promoted American beef as top quality and anticipated a boost in exports to the UK, the comparable pricing with local beef may limit its appeal in the British market.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/81bcbde9-a47b-4819-9de9-ec31f0142d5a> - The recently signed US-UK trade deal, described by leaders as "historic," brings mixed outcomes for various sectors while leaving the UK with higher overall tariffs than before Donald Trump’s presidency. The agreement offers tariff relief on UK steel and automobiles, with a significant reduction for the first 100,000 cars exported annually and tariff-free access for Rolls-Royce aerospace engines. However, overall tariffs remain elevated at about 11%, compared to 1% a year ago. In exchange, the UK opened its markets to US beef, ethanol, and industrial goods, sparking concerns among UK farmers about unfair competition and potential harm to the domestic bioethanol market. The deal keeps politically sensitive areas like food standards and healthcare untouched. Economists believe the deal will not significantly boost the overall economic outlook for either country.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-rules-out-trade-deals-which-undercut-food-standards-2025-02-25/> - The UK government has declared it will not sign trade deals that undermine its food standards, specifically refusing deals which allow imports produced by methods illegal for UK farmers. Addressing the National Farmers' Union, Environment and Farming Minister Steven Reed emphasized that importation of products like hormone-treated beef would be prohibited, maintaining bans also held by the European Union. This stance includes reviewing trade agreements to ensure alignment with UK standards, protecting local farmers from unfair competition. NFU president Tom Bradshaw supported the decision, criticizing previous agreements that subjected British producers to inferior competition. Reed reassured that British farmers could compete if trade conditions were fair and balanced.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/future-ab-foods-bioethanol-plant-imperilled-by-us-uk-trade-deal-2025-05-09/> - A new US-UK trade deal eliminating UK tariffs on U.S. ethanol imports threatens the future of Associated British Foods' (ABF) bioethanol plant in Hull. The agreement introduces a 1.4 billion-litre quota for tariff-free U.S. ethanol, significantly surpassing previous export levels. ABF CEO George Weston cited unfair competition from subsidized U.S. imports and existing UK regulations as challenges undermining the commercial viability of the Hull-based Vivergo plant. The plant, which produces bioethanol fuel and animal feed, employs around 150 people whose jobs are now at risk. ABF is urging the UK government to revise import regulations to support domestic producers. Industry bodies like the National Farmers' Union and the Renewable Energy Association cautioned that the deal could harm local arable farming and enable underpriced U.S. imports backed by tax credits. The move follows the closure of INEOS’s Grangemouth ethanol plant earlier this year amid similar import pressures. Britain made the ethanol concession in exchange for U.S. tariff relief on steel, aluminium, and cars. While the government claims the deal will protect manufacturing jobs, ABF warns of increased anxiety among employees and stakeholders in the UK bioethanol sector.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/f65fb13f17cfc14d0b5b8d267953d5c4> - On May 8, 2025, the Trump administration announced a new trade agreement with the United Kingdom, emphasizing symbolic progress but offering limited economic impact. The deal grants American agricultural products, including beef and ethanol, greater access to the U.K. market, while reducing U.S. tariffs on British cars and steel. U.K. steel will now enter the U.S. duty-free, and the 27.5% tariff on U.K. cars will drop to 10% for up to 100,000 vehicles. Additionally, both countries agreed to export 13,000 metric tons of beef to each other, and the U.K. will remove tariffs on 1.4 billion liters of U.S. ethanol. The U.K. will lower its average tariff on U.S. goods to 1.8%, affecting around 2,500 products. Aerospace cooperation includes the removal of U.S. duties on Rolls Royce components and a $10 billion Boeing aircraft order from a U.K. airline. However, the agreement leaves out key issues like digital services tax reforms and access to the U.K.’s national health service. Economists view the deal as more politically symbolic than economically transformational, with further negotiations ongoing in sectors like pharmaceuticals and digital trade.