# British farmers face loss of sovereignty with EU’s new unannounced inspections under Starmer deal



British farmers are confronting a drastic shift in regulatory oversight due to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer’s recent agreement with the European Union. This deal grants EU officials the unsettling power to conduct unannounced inspections on UK farms, abattoirs, and food production facilities, imposing an EU-dictated regime of stringent food safety and hygiene standards. This so-called "dynamic alignment" with EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) rules raises serious questions about sovereignty and sets a concerning precedent for British agriculture.

The backlash against this move has been swift and fierce. Critics, including farming groups and Eurosceptics, assert that this new wave of inspections directly undermines the hard-earned autonomy that was a fundamental pillar of the Brexit campaign. Victoria Atkins, the shadow environment secretary, has deemed this arrangement a “bad deal for British farming and fishing,” underscoring the alarming loss of control over our own food regulations and the extent of EU interference in UK waters. The fishing industry, now staring down the barrel of a guaranteed 12 years of EU access to our waters, is justifiably outraged at this capitulation to EU demands.

While some might point to similar frameworks in international arrangements with countries like Canada and New Zealand, the imposition of such oversight in the UK ignites a firestorm of political tensions. One agricultural source may be quick to label these routine checks as "normal," but for British farmers, it feels like an unwelcome relinquishment of control, particularly in a post-Brexit landscape.

Further complicating matters, the UK government continues to face criticism for its handling of import checks on EU goods since Brexit. The long-awaited implementation of post-Brexit inspections has been marred by delays, with the latest pushback postponing physical checks until January 2024. These delays, while touted as a means to curb inflation during an unprecedented economic crisis, only serve to underscore the government's failure to prioritize British interests. As new border controls loom on the horizon, there is a real concern that they could worsen food prices, adding to the hardships of hard-pressed consumers.

Moreover, the glaring discrepancy between stringent checks on UK food exports, which have been in place since January 2021, and the lack of equivalent standards for EU imports puts British producers at a significant disadvantage. Lizzie Wilson, CEO of the National Pig Association, has aptly characterized the government’s dereliction of duty in enforcing proper checks as “hugely frustrating” for UK farmers, not to mention detrimental to the integrity of our food system.

Reporting from the Associated Press underscores these growing concerns, highlighting that nearly 90% of the border control posts essential for food inspections remain unprepared. The vocal criticism from vets and farm leaders points to a chaotic and precarious situation that threatens to undermine food safety and put consumers at risk.

As British agriculture reaches this critical juncture—caught between compliance with external regulations and the need for national sovereignty—the implications for farmers are dire. Ongoing negotiations and the fallout from these inadequate policies leave farmers in a precarious position, uncertain about the future of their livelihoods in a post-Brexit Britain. The repercussions of these agreements and regulatory checks will indelibly influence the discussions surrounding trade, national sovereignty, and food safety in the years ahead.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2058870/british-farmers-eu-spot-checks-brexit> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/b23081be-1808-4936-9727-3fd0ff56f98b> - Businesses and customs agents have criticized the UK government for implementing post-Brexit inspection charges on food and plant imports from the EU that often do not involve actual inspections. During a meeting with officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), agents highlighted various flaws in the system, including unnecessary charges for unperformed inspections and inefficient processes at border control facilities. The introduction of the 'Common User Charge' from April has significantly impacted smaller businesses, causing increased costs and operational burdens. Trade groups are calling for a veterinary agreement with Brussels to mitigate these costs. Defra maintains the charges are necessary to recoup the costs of border control posts and protect biosecurity, despite widespread industry dissatisfaction and the negative financial impact on businesses.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/aug/29/uk-brexit-checks-on-food-eu-delayed> - The introduction of post-Brexit checks on food, plant, and animal produce arriving in Britain has been delayed for the fifth time, the government has confirmed, meaning they will not begin until the end of January next year. The decision to once again push back the beginning of new controls on imports, which was widely anticipated, means the phased introduction has been delayed by a further three months from late October. The government said it was giving businesses more time to prepare after engagement with industry. Traders said they had limited time to adapt to the new rules. The move has also been interpreted as a response to concerns that the start of checks would further fuel food price inflation during the cost of living crisis, although the government has estimated that the impact of the new border strategy on headline inflation would amount to 'less than 0.2% across three years'.
4. <https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/eu-referendum/government-u-turn-on-border-checks-astounding-says-nfu> - A government U-turn on post-Brexit health and safety checks for live animal and agricultural product imports has been slammed by vets and farm leaders. Since Brexit on 31 January 2020, the government has pledged to impose checks on EU imports to match the rigorous inspections of UK goods entering Europe. Despite the inspections causing delays and crippling costs for UK farming, import checks on European goods were delayed, initially for six months, until 1 July 2020. This was due to concerns that checks here would disrupt food supplies, leading to shortages and a hike in food costs. Furthermore, the border control posts (BCPs) needed to process import checks were not constructed or approved in time. The government’s continuing fears over empty supermarket shelves and construction woes at ports meant inspections were put off twice more in 2021. A revised deadline of 1 July 2022 was set, but last month Farmers Weekly obtained a government spreadsheet showing almost 90% of the BCPs were still not ready. Some remained at the planning permission stage, others lacked funding or were awaiting approval checks before completion.
5. <https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/eu-referendum/import-checks-on-eu-food-start-jan-2024-after-repeated-delays> - Post-Brexit border checks on imports of European food and fresh produce are due to commence on 31 January 2024, the cabinet office has confirmed, some three years after the UK formally left the EU. Following four previous delays, it had been expected that the new checks on paperwork would finally come into effect on 31 October 2023, with physical checks three months after that. But the new timetable, set out in the government’s Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) means new export health certificates will only be need for medium and high risk food products from 31 January 2024. Physical inspections will start on 30 April 2024. This is despite the fact the UK has faced full sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) checks on its food exports to the EU since January 2021. The new framework, drawn up in collaboration with the Welsh and Scottish governments and which details how post-Brexit import controls will work, aims to make it easier to move goods internationally without compromising security. “Wet” signatures on documents will be replaced by digital signatures that will carry equal legal weight, to speed up the process at checkpoints. Businesses that regularly transport goods into the UK can also apply for “trusted trader” status and be subject to fewer checks.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jan/31/delays-to-post-brexit-border-checks-diseased-chicken-uk> - UK health bosses privately admitted that a lack of border inspections in the wake of Brexit had left British consumers exposed to diseased meat, an investigation has found. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has previously uncovered a host of failings in the government’s handling of outbreaks of drug-resistant salmonella, particularly that linked to supermarket chicken from Poland. Illnesses connected to the outbreaks – which also affected eggs – peaked at different points between 2020 and 2024, while border checks that were supposed to be in place post-Brexit were being repeatedly delayed. A set of documents seen by TBIJ now reveal that in a series of high-level meetings in late 2023, food safety and health bosses admitted that the UK’s borders could have been allowing infected meat to enter the country unchecked. Minutes from the meetings attended by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and its devolved partners acknowledge there were “no current border controls in place”, and that paperwork and physical checks on imported goods were not due to start until the following year. “This could change,” officials noted.
7. <https://www.farminguk.com/news/uk-brexit-checks-on-eu-food-imports-to-be-delayed-for-fifth-time_63085.html> - Concerns have been raised by farm leaders as the government is set to delay the introduction of checks on food imports from the EU for a fifth time. New controls on UK meat exports to the bloc came into force following Brexit, but promised equivalent checks in the UK have been repeatedly delayed. The government's decision to suspend plans to enforce the controls is due to be announced imminently, according to media reports. In April last year, the government said it would not be introducing any checks until a new digital system was in place. It announced that the draft Border Target Operating Model would be phased in over the course of a year. This would see the introduction of health certification on imports of medium risk animal and plant products from 31 October, with further checks implemented over the following 12 months. But, according to reports, this is going to be delayed for the fifth time, with the decision due to be announced imminently. It is expected these checks will now be pushed back to the end of January 2024, when physical SPS checks are due to become operational. The delay is intended to give the government and exporters in the EU more time to prepare for the checks, but, as reports state, it sets Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ‘on a collision course with domestic UK food producers’. The food and farming industry have long argued that it gives a free pass to EU rivals while they have to endure checks on all fresh food exports. Government insiders told the media that the driving force behind the move is the need to bear down on inflation, as the checks will impose ‘additional costs at the border’. The National Pig Association (NPA) called the news 'hugely frustrating' for the UK pig sector. Chief executive, Lizzie Wilson said: “While our members have been burdened with the cost and inconvenience of additional checks on EU exports since January 2021, the failure to impose equivalent EU checks is unfair and puts UK food producers at a significant disadvantage.