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EMBARGO: Immediate

Back Lords' amendments and protect our food standards, say farmers



Devon cattle under threat from a US trade deal

Devon-produced beef, lamb, and chicken are under threat from new laws which would undercut British producers by allowing food imports from countries with lower standards of animal welfare, say local farmers.

The warning came as the Government's controversial Agriculture Bill returns to the House of Commons this week with amendments from the Lords which Government Ministers say they will vote down. But the Government's stance faces mounting criticism from farming, environmental, and animal welfare organisations as well as from members of the public and MPs of all parties.

North Devon farmer and butcher, Ray Auvray, called on local MPs Geoffrey Cox and Selaine Saxby to vote for the amendments, which are designed to ensure that foreign producers cannot sell food that would be illegal for British farmers to produce. He said:

'These amendments have been introduced to protect the quality and safety of our food. If our MPs vote to overturn them, they are betraying family farming in the West Country. It would make a mockery of Britain's high animal welfare standards and do further irreparable damage to the environment. Our MPs must stand up and be counted!'

Steve Middleton, Chair of Torrridge and West Devon Lib Dems, himself a farmer, said:

'It's no good the government telling us to buy British if they pack the supermarkets with cheaper, foreign chicken that's been produced in such horrible conditions that it needs to be washed in chlorine before it's safe to eat. They will undermine local farmers and then Great British food will be gone for good.'

Torrridge District Councillor and farmer Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin said:

'Our MPs must do the right thing for farmers and the right thing for consumers. Sustainability in food production affects us all. If they push through these changes at a time when our economy is reeling from Covid-19, voters will never forgive them.'

Farmers point out that the Conservative Manifesto 2019 stated: 'In all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards'. They are now calling on local MPs Geoffrey Cox and Selaine Saxby to make good their manifesto promises and stand by their claims to be champions for British farming and British food.

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Notes:

1. The National Farmers Union has been lobbying fiercely for a level playing field in future trade negotiations. Its President Minette Batters has said 'We would never lie down and accept a trade policy that will undermine our farmers and growers.'
2. Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver made a number of media appearances last week calling on the government to maintain current food standards. A public petition to this effect has been gained more than a million signatories.
3. According to a survey by YouGov, 80% of the British public say they would not accept chlorinated chicken or hormone-treated beef as the price of a trade deal with the US, with only 8% of respondents saying that such products would be acceptable: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/food/articles-reports/2020/06/16/britain-chlorinated-chicken-US-trade-deal>



Councillor Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin with one of her lambs



Councillor David Chalmers, Mayor of Northam, with Steve Middleton at his farm