

Workers Face Uncertainty as Final Wheat Shipment Reaches Biofuel Plant

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The UK's largest bioethanol facility has received what may be its last wheat delivery, leaving workers and farmers in limbo as the plant nears closure. Vivergo Fuels, based at Saltend near Hull, is winding down operations following the government's decision to remove tariffs on US ethanol imports under a new trade deal.

The site, which employs around 160 staff and relies on a supply chain involving thousands of British farmers, had previously processed over a million tonnes of wheat annually. With the final scheduled delivery arriving on 1 August, the plant's future now hinges on urgent government support. Associated British Foods (ABF), which owns the facility, has already halted new wheat purchases and is only fulfilling existing contracts during ongoing talks.

Managing Director Ben Hackett confirmed that consultations with staff have begun and that the plant could shut as early as mid-September if a financial rescue package is not confirmed. "We have had no choice but to stop buying wheat and start winding down operations," he said.

The plant's closure would ripple across the wider economy. Farming unions estimate that up to 4,000 agricultural jobs in the Humber region depend on supplying Vivergo. Local grain cooperatives have warned that the sudden drop in demand will cause severe strain on farming incomes and logistics, with few alternative outlets available.

ABF blames the removal of a 19 % tariff on American ethanol imports, arguing that it gives US producers an unfair competitive edge. The company says this has rendered the Saltend facility commercially unviable almost overnight. Despite early warnings, it claims the government has not offered adequate safeguards for domestic biofuel producers.

A government spokesperson acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and said discussions with ABF and another UK bioethanol producer, Ensus, are ongoing. Ministers are reportedly considering both

emergency financial support and longer-term reforms to protect the sector, but no formal commitments have yet been made.

The plant produces low-carbon bioethanol for E10 petrol blends, as well as high-protein animal feed, a key part of the UK's push toward cleaner transport fuels and agricultural sustainability. Without swift action, the loss of this facility could undermine national biofuel ambitions and leave hundreds of workers and farmers facing an uncertain future.