

New UK-EU Trade Deal Raises Concerns Over Animal Welfare Protections

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A new post-Brexit trade deal between the UK and the European Union, intended to ease the flow of food and agricultural goods, has raised concerns among animal welfare groups who fear it could weaken the UK's ability to maintain high welfare standards for imports.

The agreement introduces a veterinary arrangement that brings the UK into closer alignment with EU animal welfare and food safety rules. Under the deal, the UK would follow changes in EU law unless it can demonstrate that its own standards are equivalent or higher, and that EU exports would not be adversely affected.

Animal welfare organisations, including the RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming, have raised the alarm. They argue the UK may lose the ability to block imports that fail to meet domestic standards, such as foie gras or eggs from caged hens, even if such practices are banned in the UK. They also stress the importance of clear labelling to ensure consumers can identify how imported food has been produced.

Similar concerns have been raised in the context of other trade talks, particularly with the United States and Gulf states. Campaigners warn of the risk of permitting meat imports from systems banned in the UK, such as pork from sow stalls or chicken reared in overcrowded conditions. Without the power to block such imports or enforce mandatory labelling, they argue UK farmers could be undercut and consumers misled.

The government has opposed proposals to grant ministers direct powers to ban low-welfare imports, arguing it could undermine the UK's negotiating position. While alternative measures such as clearer labelling have been discussed, critics say they fall short of guaranteeing protection for UK standards.

Despite the concerns, the government insists the deal is a positive step. It estimates the agreement could contribute £9 billion to the UK economy by 2040 and reduce food prices for consumers. Officials also maintain

that certain imports, such as hormone-treated beef and chlorine-washed chicken, will remain banned.

Recent legislation has strengthened domestic standards, including a ban on live exports for slaughter and legal recognition of animal sentience. However, campaigners caution that these gains could be undermined unless the UK retains legal mechanisms to reject imports that do not meet its animal welfare standards.