

Top 10 risks from a US Trade Deal



The preliminary steps towards a UK/US trade deal have already been taken. US negotiators are pushing hard for [the weakening of UK food and farming standards](#), describing EU farming as the 'Museum of Agriculture'. The UK Government has made repeated commitments to high environmental and animal welfare standards once the UK leaves the EU, but it seems that these could be undermined by a US trade deal, posing a number of threats to public health, and food and farming standards:

Top 10 Risks:

1) Antimicrobial resistance

Experts warn that by 2050, as many as 10 million people could die annually from antimicrobial resistance. The use of antibiotics per animal in US farming is on average 5 times higher than in the UK. Investigations have shown that [antibiotics crucial to human medicine](#) are still being used in "unacceptable" quantities on US livestock farms, despite rules brought in last year to curb their use and combat the spread of deadly superbugs. A US trade deal risks undermining the efforts UK farmers have been making to reduce antibiotic use, fuelling further antimicrobial resistance with potentially grave consequences for public health.

2) A 'race to the bottom'

A number of [farmers' representatives and unions](#) (and a former [UK ambassador to the US](#)) have warned of the threat to the UK farming industry if British farmers are forced to compete against cheap, low-quality food imports. If UK farming is forced to compete on price with countries like the US that operate to different or lower standards, UK farming may become unprofitable. This could create a 'race to the bottom' and the lowering of standards, including standards of food quality, environmental protection, and animal welfare.

3) Loss of EU market access

The UK currently holds a suite of significant and valuable agri-food trade relationships with the EU-27. A weakening of UK food standards, or a future lack of alignment with EU standards, resulting from a US trade deal could result in barriers to UK farmers and food companies wishing to export their products to the EU's Single Market. These barriers would pose significant risks for food businesses and for farmer livelihoods.

4) Chlorine-washed chicken

The American poultry industry is more intensive with lower animal welfare standards than in the UK. Subsequently, chicken produced has high levels of bacteria, so the industry has resorted to acid and chlorine washes at the end of the meat production chain, producing chicken that may not be safe for consumers to eat. Recent comments from a senior representative of the US government have suggested that the US are ['sick and tired'](#) of UK concerns over chlorine washed chicken, but this remains an important issue for UK citizens who have no desire to see welfare standards lowered after the UK leaves the EU.

5) Hormone-treated beef

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows steroid hormone drugs for use in beef production, which has been banned in the EU since 1989. Cattle producers use hormones to induce faster, bigger animal growth but this comes at a cost. In 2003 an EU scientific review

concluded that one of the commonly used hormones is carcinogenic. In the event of a US trade deal, hormone-treated beef could be sold in the UK, posing potential public health risks.

6) Public health and nutrition labelling

Nutritional labelling, such as 'traffic light labelling', has been an important requirement in supporting UK public health. The US is clear that it considers [nutrition labelling a 'barrier to trade'](#), it has an on-going dispute with the European Union over this. Imported US food already enjoys a voluntary concession to the UK labelling requirements, any trade deal is likely to weaken these consumer labelling efforts further. A US trade deal could also result in a flood of low-cost ultra-processed foods flooding the UK market, placing a potential double health burden on UK citizens.

7) Genetically modified foods

In the US, 88% of corn and 93% of soy are genetically modified (GM) and products containing GM ingredients are commonly sold. In the EU, GM is widely rejected due to concerns over its safety and purported benefits. Public opinion in the UK remains firmly against GM crops, with the public's appetite for a GM-free supply chain [rising over the seven years](#) of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Biannual Public Attitudes Tracker. A US trade deal could increase the likelihood that GM products are sold in the UK, contrary to the public's wishes.

8) Pesticide regulation

Outside of the EU, the UK could be left without robust environmental governance, and the scientific capacity and infrastructure needed to regulate pesticide use. During the negotiations on the proposed EU-US trade deal in 2015, the Trans-Atlantic Trade Partnership, [pesticide industry and lobbyists in the US pushed](#) to lower environmental and health standards, undermining democratic processes to promote the use of toxic substances prohibited in the EU. Pesticide use has been linked with a decline in insect populations and biodiversity, and with adverse health outcomes. A US trade deal that results in more pesticide use risks damaging UK wildlife and public health.

9) Food poisoning

Incidences of [food poisoning in the US affect 14% of the population](#) annually. This is 10 times greater than in the UK, where 1% is affected. Maintaining high food standards is a priority for the UK public. In a [recent IPPR poll](#), when asked whether the UK should lower food safety standards to secure a trade deal with the US, 82% of UK citizens said they would prefer to retain food standards as they are.

10) Food colourings

In the United States, products that include food colourings such as Yellow 5 and 6, Red 3 and 40, Blue 1 and 2, Green 3 and Orange B are available for purchase and do not require labelling. The UK banned these food dyes following a [2007 double-blind study](#), which found that eating artificially coloured food appeared to increase children's hyperactivity. A US trade deal could see these banned substances consumed by children, with inadequate labelling leaving parents unsure which products are safe.

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