



Brexit: the impact on animal welfare

TOGETHER WE CAN... IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE

Key facts...

- ★ 80% of the UK's current body of animal welfare legislation derives from the EU.
- ★ The RSPCA believes that the current body of EU animal welfare law must be incorporated into British law in its entirety as part of the Withdrawal Bill and, importantly, not subsequently watered down.
- ★ The RSPCA also believes that Brexit presents the UK Government with many opportunities to go further than existing EU standards and improve animal welfare, especially for farm animals.
- ★ Replacing the Common Agricultural Policy with a new system of farm support payments that incentivise farmers to protect and improve animal welfare presents a huge opportunity.
- ★ There are also, however, risks that UK animal welfare standards could be reduced in the process of the UK exiting the EU, particularly in the drafting of new Free Trade Agreements.

The Withdrawal Bill

Currently, 80% of the UK's animal welfare law comes from the EU. This includes 18 specific pieces of law and, crucially, all of the UK's existing law on farm animal welfare. If animal welfare is not to decline post-Brexit then it is vital that, at the very least, this body of legislation is maintained in its totality. Ministers have indicated that this will be the case in the short term as it will bring all of the relevant legislation into UK law as part of the Withdrawal Bill. This is a welcome step, but it is equally important that this new domestic legislation is not subsequently 'unpicked' and standards reduced as a result.

Free Trade Agreements

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) present one of the biggest threats to animal welfare post-Brexit. Unless there is specific language in any new FTA on animal welfare there is a danger that decreasing tariffs will mean that an increased amount of imported animal products will arrive in the UK market, produced to lower welfare standards than domestic produce and possibly cheaper than domestic produce as well. The effects on animal welfare and on UK farmers could be substantial were this to happen. The UK should therefore include language on animal welfare in any FTA to ensure our own higher standards are protected (though products from animals reared to higher standards than those in the UK should be encouraged). There is a successful precedent for this in the EU's FTAs with Chile in 2002 and South Korea in 2011. For example, the EU-Chile FTA successfully improved slaughterhouse conditions in Chile, leading to an improvement in animal welfare as a result.

WTO rules

The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) rules dictate what a country can and cannot do when it comes to international trade and restricts what the UK Government will be able to do, and how it will be able to do it, when it comes to our post-Brexit agricultural standards and systems. There are currently no grounds for using animal welfare as a restriction to trade under WTO rules, though there is some precedent on using moral objections as a result of the EU's seal product ban. Many of the potential improvements that Brexit allows the UK to consider and measures that may be taken to protect our existing domestic standards could be challenged by other countries at the WTO. Political will is required to ensure that this doesn't become an excuse for inaction. There are examples of WTO rules and FTAs being used to protect animal welfare standards without WTO disputes arising, however. For example, the deal that the EU has struck with the USA in regards to beef imports, where the USA has accepted a ban on imports of hormone treated beef in exchange for an increased Tariff Rate Quota (ie the the amount of a product that is allowed into the EU market without tariffs) for non-hormone treated beef.

Replacing the CAP

The UK will now have the freedom, subject to WTO rules, to choose how to allocate payments (or subsidies) to the farming sector by nationalising the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The RSPCA would like to see complete reform, introducing a tiered system that incentivises animal welfare:

- Anyone receiving any payment should comply with existing baseline legislation, the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (England) 2007 and the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (England) 2006, covering standards for calves, pigs and general farm animal welfare.
- A new intermediate level should be developed to support the delivery of specific welfare-related requirements. Examples could include a farm-specific veterinary health and welfare plan in place for the farm, funding for welfare training and capital costs related to farm modernisation.
- The highest level would be reserved for funding for producers who are within widely recognised higher welfare assurance schemes and deliver standards higher than the intermediate level.

Improving the welfare of farm animals

As farm animals represent the species with the most relevant EU law, they also represent the species who could benefit from the most improvements after Brexit. There are a number of specific improvements that the RSPCA would like to see, including:

- An **end to the live export of farm animals** for slaughter and/or further fattening. Brexit presents the UK with an opportunity to introduce its own rules on animal transport to achieve this, providing they are WTO compliant. Whilst the trade continues, we would like to see the certain improvements including species specific rules on journey times and conditions.
- The introduction of **mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses**, which has wide support from, amongst others, the Food Standards Agency and the Farm Animal Welfare Committee, and has been shown to be effective and commercially viable. We welcome the Government's commitment to deliver this in slaughterhouses in England.
- The introduction of **mandatory method of production labelling** on all animal products. Method of production labelling identifies the farming system used to produce food and helps consumers make an informed choice about which production methods to support through their purchases. This form of labelling has existed for eggs since 2004 and is generally considered to have contributed to the significant shift away from eggs from caged hens.
- A **prohibition on slaughter without pre-stunning** and improvements to the welfare of affected animals whilst the practice continues, such as post-cut stunning, as well as the introduction of method of slaughter labelling to allow consumers to make an informed decision about whether they wish to buy produce from non-stunned animals.

Improving the welfare of other species

There are also opportunities to improve the welfare of non-farm species. For example, health checks (including for ticks) for dogs travelling between the UK and mainland Europe could be reintroduced, the UK could introduce tougher standards for animals used in research than the EU or bans on certain types of products derived from wild animals, such as fur. Of course, all of these measures would also be subject to WTO rules.

Find out more

The RSPCA has produced a range of detailed briefings on aspects of Brexit including our vision for CAP replacement, the impact of WTO rules on agriculture and potential trade bans, and the opportunities for improving the welfare of farm and pet animals. These are available on our website: www.politicalanimal.org/England. If you would like to meet with one of our Public Affairs team to discuss any of these issues in more detail please email politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk or call 0300 123 0371.