

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Brexit deal is just the start for food policy



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**A** deal agreed in the eleventh hour, the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement will affect almost every corner of the food industry, ranging from consumers, farmers, and manufacturers to wholesalers and supermarkets. However, the implications for millions of consumers and businesses alike will only become clearer over the coming months.

The deal has received a mixed response from UK industry on matters relating to rules of origin, food safety and standards, transportation and the treatment of pallets.

Since the deal has been agreed, numerous food and drink exporters have already found themselves grappling with the intricacies and fine details of the agreement. UK retailers with stores on the continent and in Ireland have been particularly focused on getting to grips with new EU customs rules, with some larger retailers such as TK Maxx and John

Lewis having had to temporarily suspend deliveries to Northern Ireland until they clarify what steps need to be taken to ensure they are complicit with the new rules.

As businesses get to grips with the deal, it is important to note that this is just the tip of the iceberg, with the UK government due to begin the process of dissecting and examining each individual food policy area in great detail over the coming weeks and months. Now that the UK has left the EU, we also must not forget that EU food policy is evolving too, and UK companies who will want to trade with the EU will need to abide by any new rules ratified by the European institutions.

The Environment Secretary George Eustice MP has already started this process, earlier this month setting out how the government is to begin a consultation on enabling the use of gene-edited crops and livestock in England, in a potentially significant post-Brexit departure from EU policy on agricultural technology.

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly threw a huge spanner into the workings of business, central government and its regulators in 2020. As the government looks to move forward, the next 12 months is therefore likely to be a vital, but also accelerated, period for strategies and

consultations with a lot at stake for those in the food sector.

Within this context, it will still be necessary for the UK government to consider its future trading relationship with other countries. In some instances, where the policy area is controversial – such as genetically modified foods and food hygiene standards – the demands of the EU may not align with the demands of third countries, meaning tough political decisions will need to be made on what is best for the UK's future.

Now, as the government begins the process of examining and consulting on policies in the food sector, there will be a need for consumers and industry to monitor developments and understand the impact any changes might have on them or their business.

No policy is fixed or permanent, so as the UK embraces its autonomy as an agenda setter, sharing views and engaging with government will be more important than ever.

*The Whitehouse Consultancy is a public affairs and communications agency with over 20 years of experience in the specialist food sector, helping clients shape regulations and change public and policy makers' perceptions. Visit [www.whitehouseconsulting.co.uk](http://www.whitehouseconsulting.co.uk).*