

The coming food crisis and Brexit.

As the country is coming out of its traditional January Blues, so the news of 'Brexit' keeps coming. With a little over a year to 'D-Day', there still does not seem to be a great deal of clarity for what is going to happen of on the day-to-day running of the country post 29th March 2019. However, one thing is certain Britain's food production still very much depends on seasonal migrant labour from the EU. The farmers who have traditionally turned to the Eastern European Countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Romania etc. are now finding both the workers who are currently in the UK are returning home in their droves, and those that remain and tell their families there are almost guaranteed jobs here in the UK, but most simply do not want to come. Their reason, the uncertainty that 'Brexit' has created in the UK migrant workforce. OK, so what happens if we go it alone and gather our own harvest, after all we used to do this for generations, and it is still in living memory?

A recent televised employment experiment in food production shown on the BBC [Inside Out South West, BBC1 South-West region, 19:30, 05/02/2018], where young British workers replaced traditional Eastern European workers. The results determined that the young British workers who tried picking vegetables for a day were ten times less productive than their Eastern European counterparts. Particularly in this industry speed could be considered a critical component measure. Getting food products from the ground quickly and with minimal waste, then to the marketplace, in order to maintain a constant supply as not to bring about destabilisation is vital in feeding a nation. Therefore, the potential for such a drop as ten times in productivity should be a concern for us all, particularly as the farming industry are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit from their traditional sources. Indeed, in Cornwall; the region where this program was filmed; immediately post the Brexit result recruiting increasing became problematic and subsequently farms in this region are currently at sixty five percent of the level required.[https://www.farminguk.com/News/Cornwall-appeals-to-government-for-more-labour-as-_47882.html]. So there are lots of jobs available, for well over a year.

This is nothing new, last year shortly before the general election, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select committee publish a paper "*Feeding the Nation: Labour Constraints*" [<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/feeding-the-nation-labour-constraints/oral/49074.pdf>]. It recognises that over thirty percent working permanently in the agriculture sector are from overseas and this does not account for seasonal workers. The question the UK government were posing was if the free movement of labour stops then what might happen. However, now Brexit is just over a year away things are changing the migrant population appear to be dictating terms, and not the UK, through their decision return home in their droves. If this continues then the British agriculture sector won't just face difficulties, it may just actually stop altogether. This year we may find supermarket shelves empty and/or prices will dramatically increase because of even more imported goods. Unfortunately, nobody in government negotiating Britain's exit from the EU seems to be taking this seriously and making clear promises that this scenario will be averted. Please don't take my word for it, ask the UK agriculture farming community.