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**Brexit vote will have “momentous significance” for UK food, according to a new report**

* Implications of Brexit explored in new paper from **Food Research Collaboration** (FRC)
* UK must wake up to the “enormity” of policy restructuring required
* Co-authors **Professor Tim Lang** and **Dr Victoria Schoen** stress consumers and food businesses will feel effect.

The referendum on the UK’s European Union membership will have “momentous significance” for the country’s food system, according to a new briefing paper published by the **Food Research Collaboration** (FRC).

The report – called ***Food, the UK and the EU: Brexit or Bremain?***  – argues the country must “wake up to the enormity of unravelling 43 years of co-negotiated food legislation”.

According to the authors – **Professor Tim Lang**, of **City University London**, and **Dr Victoria Schoen,** of the FRC – both consumers and businesses will be affected by a vote to leave the EU. This is a deviation from what the authors describe as the real task of getting the UK food system, from production to consumption, to be more sustainable.

If the country decided to leave, food imports are predicted to become more expensive, prices would increase and there could be major disruptions to the finely tuned just-in-time supply chains on which the UK food system now depends.

With such prices increases for imported goods, it is suggested there could be consequences for the consumption of foods that the UK relies on EU nations to produce. For example, nearly 40 per cent of the UK’s total food supply of fruit and vegetables comes from the EU, and nearly 55 per cent of its supply of pigmeat.

The authors express concern about the health implications of Brexit, as diet now accounts for 10.8 per cent of the nation’s total disease burden (compared with 10.7 per cent for tobacco).

According to the report, the UK is about 60 per cent food self-sufficient so should be wary of instant independence from the EU.

The authors also warn of a potential “food service and food factory crisis” if EU labour currently working in those industries lost their freedom of movement to be in the UK – figures show EU employees make up more than a quarter of the food manufacturing workforce (26.9%) and a tenth of workers in food and beverage services (11.3%). This compares with 6.1 per cent across the UK economy as a whole.

**The briefing paper includes:**

* A history of EU food policy and why food matters in the Brexit debate
* Facts on where UK food comes from and why there is a £21bn food trade gap
* A list of 11 UK ministries which could contribute to the referendum food debate
* Key milestones in the 43-year UK involvement in EU food policy (positive and negative)
* An account of how complex the modern UK food system has become and how open it is to disruption (27 per cent of the value of all food consumed in the UK comes from the EU)
* Details on the legislative changes required in the event of Brexit
* An outline of five strategic options for food Brexit – all of which the authors argue are problematic.

**Professor Tim Lang, Director of the Centre for Food Policy at City University London, and Chair of the FRC, said:**

*“The referendum will be a defining moment in UK food policy, with hugely important implications for both consumers and businesses. Our report outlines the real impact the EU has on UK food. The Brits need to stop joking about wine lakes, bent bananas and myths from the EU past, which have been sorted, and get real about security of food supply today and tomorrow.*

*“It is not simply a choice about farming – the decision will affect the entire UK food system and all of our daily lives. Food prices will almost certainly go up, affected by a weakened sterling.*

*“The UK is in a vulnerable position already with a food trade gap of £21billion in the red – we import far more food than we export. This is particularly important for health, with a heavy reliance on EU fruit and vegetables now exposed.*

*“If the people vote for Brexit, there’ll need to be a ‘dig for victory’ on an unprecedented scale. And this won’t be using the EU labour that currently grows, picks and processes so much British food.*

*“The public has been woefully ill-informed on this subject by politicians, for instance DEFRA has seven times more civil servants, despite massive cuts, than has DG Agri in Brussels. Yet food is perhaps the most immediate link between the EU and ordinary British people.*

*“This briefing paper argues that the UK should wake up to the enormity of unravelling 43 years of co-negotiated food legislation. If the country is to break away from four decades of hard-fought policy, we argue they should be provided with the facts.*

*“Our paper acknowledges the, at times, frustrations of EU food membership but asks the public: which is better – to use British muscle to keep working on shifting the food system in a more sustainable direction, or to waste years negotiating an isolationist position?”*

**Dr Victoria Schoen, Research Fellow for the FRC, said:**

*“Attention should remain on what matters most: how to shift a high carbon, wasteful and unhealthy food system at both EU and UK levels in a more sustainable direction. Brexit would not alter that challenge.*

*“A vast array of EU agreements, policies and standards now underpin UK food policy and a decision to leave would require us to re-inject these processes back into UK law.*

*“We know that progress has required a long and highly complex set of negotiations over the past four decades and a Brexit would mean beginning many of these again. However, the EU is not perfect and there are many criticisms of its food policies, which we highlight in this paper. It needs to move more quickly and more smartly – the EU’s new Circular Economy Package begins this.*

*“We argue that, with the level of food that we import from the EU – particularly fruit and vegetables – it deserves a prominent place in the national debate about the implications of Brexit. The UK currently has only 164,000 hectares in horticulture, out of 4.7 million hectares available for crops.”*

The briefing paper follows from debates and concerns expressed at the City Food Symposium on UK food and Brexit, held on 14th December, 2015. Academics were joined by leading figures from the food industry and NGO representatives.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

For a copy of the paper, ***Food, the UK and EU: Brexit or Bremain?****,* contact Ed Grover at City University London: [ed.grover@city.ac.uk](mailto:ed.grover@city.ac.uk); 0207 040 3062; 07972 113 628 (out of hours).

The paper will be published on the FRC website on Tuesday 8th March 2016.

Journalists can also download the paper here. [will add link when uploaded].

**The Food Research Collaboration (FRC)** is a project to facilitate joint working by academics and civil society organisations (CSOs) to improve the UK food system. It is overseen by a steering group of academics (Dundee, Cardiff, Sussex) and civil society representatives (Sustain, UK Health Forum, IEEP), guided by an advisory panel of specialists and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It is physically serviced from the Centre for Food Policy at City University London.

<http://foodresearch.org.uk/>

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