

Arla warns driver shortage could hit milk supplies to supermarkets

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UK's biggest dairy supplier has said supermarkets could face a "summer of disruption" to milk deliveries if the Government does not act to address a shortage of lorry drivers.

[Leeds](#)-based Arla, which supplies milk to about 2,400 stores each day in the UK, has said it was unable to deliver to 600 stores last Saturday due to dwindling driver numbers.

The company's UK managing director Ash Amirahmadi said the company has struggled to deliver to 10% of stores on a more regular basis in recent weeks.

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He told BBC Radio's Today programme: "I think when you are not able to supply 10% of the stores which are expecting to get milk every day, I think that's quite worrying for a customer walking into a store and not being able to have milk so we are taking it very seriously.

"We are trying to avoid a summer of disruption.

"We are experiencing the problem getting worse and that's why

our assessment is that we are in a driver shortage crisis and therefore we are asking for the industry and Government to work together to recognise we are in a crisis and address the issue.”

Arla said its third-party hauliers have raised wages to entice drivers while it has also offered a £2,000 signing-on bonus.

Tesco, the UK’s largest grocer, announced a £1,000 golden hello for new drivers who sign up before September to help address its shortages.

However, Mr Amirahmadi said there also needed to be a “structural solution” from Government, including improvements to testing and temporary visa changes, to resolve the shortage in the short-term.

“Going into the summer with lots more holidays coming up there is a short-term crisis that we need to make sure we don’t have food shortages in the summer,” he said.

“There is a backlog of tests for HGV drivers – we predict about 30,000 drivers are waiting to be tested.

“We want Government to work with us to accelerate that and secondly we believe that driving should be recognised as a skilled shortage and therefore they should open up temporary visas for the industry to be able to bring European drivers back into the country.”

Earlier this month, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced a consultation to ease driver qualification requirements as part of a package of measures designed to help the issue.

He also announced a temporary extension of lorry drivers’ working hours from nine to 10 hours a day.

However, the Road Haulage Association, which has said it believes there is a shortage of 100,000 drivers, said the relaxation was a “sticking plaster”.

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