

Warnings of higher food prices and empty shelves due to new post-Brexit border fees

Trade groups have warned of higher food prices and empty supermarket shelves because of new post-Brexit border fees being introduced this month.

A maximum charge of £145 will apply on imports of plant and animal products, such as cheese and fish, entering the UK through the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel from 30 April.

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The fees are intended to cover the cost of operating new border control posts required after Brexit, and will not apply to goods brought into the UK for personal use, the government said.

But importers warned the new charges could lead to higher prices for consumers.

The Cold Chain Federation's chief executive, Phil Pluck, said: "Ultimately, this will increase business costs and food prices and potentially lower choices for the shopper."

James Barnes, chairman of the Horticultural Trades Association, said the policy "feels like it is constructed on the back of an envelope at best" and that the charges would "undoubtedly increase costs" and increase the likelihood of empty shelves in supermarkets.

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Marco Forgiione, director general of the Institute of Export & International Trade, said while larger businesses may be able to absorb the costs, for small firms, "an additional £145 per consignment might mean entire profit wiped out".

EU businesses trading into UK may decline

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He said as well as higher prices and a more limited variety of products available in UK shops and restaurants, “we now might begin to observe a decline of EU businesses trading into the UK, simply because they have been priced out”.

While the government had last year announced a timeline for the checks to begin on 30 April, the costs associated with those checks were only revealed on Wednesday.

The physical checks follow the introduction of new health certificates which have been required since January, as part of a new border model, which the government has estimated will add £300m a year to the price of trading with Europe.

Labour warned the checks had the potential to cause “chaos” and criticised the government for announcing the costs less than a month before they are introduced.

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The fee will be charged per type of product imported, and will vary from £10 to £29 depending on the risk products present. It will be capped at £145 for mixed consignments.

A government spokesperson said this was “within and at the bottom end of the range which we consulted with industry on”.

They added: “The charge is designed to recover the costs of operating our world-class border facilities where essential biosecurity checks will protect our food supply, farmers and environment against costly disease outbreaks entering the UK through the short straits.”

Legal requirement

About a quarter of the UK's food imports pass through Dover and the Channel Tunnel.

The checks on EU imports are legally required under the terms of the [Brexit](#) trade deal with the EU.

Prior to Brexit, trade between the EU and the UK was frictionless.

The introduction of the checks has been delayed five times, partly over cost fears and also to give businesses more time to prepare.

Food inflation has fallen over the past year, reaching 5% in February after hitting 19.6% in March 2023, its highest recorded level for 45 years.