# Food and Trade: case studies research and evidence on the environmental impact of UK food standards

**Commissioned by:** WWF UK, Living Planet Centre, Brewery Road, Woking, GU21 4LL

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**Output:** Research piece for internal use, format to be decided upon with successful bidder

**Research Need**

WWF is newly working on a trade policy, at the top level, to ensure that the UK Government’s emerging trade policy does not undermine the achievement of climate and nature goals at home or via our wider footprint. There are ongoing public and political campaigns to maintain and build on the UK’s current food and farming standards. The campaigns are high profile and specifically focused on not weakening food import standards in negotiations with US, Aus , NZ, or Canada. The environmental justification for the overall work on trade is clear, but the direct impact of current food standards on the environment is less well understood and a gap that WWF needs to urgently address.

**Objectives**

WWF’s immediate need, over the next 4-6 weeks, is for a consultant to:

i) review and present to WWF, evidence from secondary analysis to show whether the UK current food standards, that are a barrier to a lot of US, Aus, NZ and Canadian farming products, are worth keeping from an environmental point of view. This is the most significant element of the work and where most attention should be focused.

ii) Although current food standards do not provide sufficient environmental protection, the selected consultant should provide an expert view on whether maintaining them provides the UK a useful place from which to start developing environmental standards for the food it imports. If WWF is satisfied there is good evidence of i) and/or ii) the intention would be to share short and accessible case studies externally in advocacy and campaign materials.

To support more work in this area, over the next 12-16 weeks, WWF then requires:

iii) A scoping study to set out how WWF could start to develop environmental criteria for new standards for agricultural commodities. We would start with standards which the UK would have a good case to apply as import standards because there is evidence of good rules in place domestically that are enforced and therefore effective. Ideally the new standards would be relevant to the exports of developed and developing country agricultural exporters, by focusing on the imperative to restore soils, forests and river quality in and around farm settings, rather than just on conservation which is primarily relevant to developed countries. This environmental criteria would complement WWF work on eliminating deforestation in supply chains by introducing a measure that would act on bad farming practice in developed countries that are long since deforested but have other environmental problems in their farming system that have to be addressed.

**Background**

The UK current import standards for food, which it transferred over from the EU, are intended to ensure food safety and to enforce animal welfare, there are few/no food standards set in respect of the environmental impact in the country of production or globally but this is a developing area of policy interest.

UK’s current import standards – on hormone and antibiotics in meat, somatic cells in milk, pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables, for example – make many of the products from major agricultural exporters like the US, Aus and NZ illegal, and those nations are keen to change the UK rules in order to open up our market to more of their products.

In a formal legal assessment the UK food import standards can only be evaluated by human health or animal welfare considerations they are based on. However, a fuller assessment of the environmental benefits import standards may also provide is relevant to the wider debate about standards, both in the public and amongst politicians. These fuller assessments are also helpful in illustrating the absence of any environmental standards for food imports and building the case that they should be established in the future.

The UK should be moving towards a more agroecological farming system, that is good in and of itself, but also because it puts the UK in a position of being able to advocate for a food and farming system that works for climate and nature globally. This requires the UK to show what is wrong with the conventional farming system, particularly in countries that operate without strong environmental policy framework so the farming sector is optimised for yield and commercial return and not to also lower its impact on climate and nature. Whilst only being on the start of its journey, and not necessarily that much better than other conventional farmers at the moment, the UK needs to make the case for why its import standards are worth keeping so it can distinguish itself from the proponents of the worst farming systems and start to make the case for agroecology and how it should be preferenced in domestic and international trade policy.

**So, is keeping food import standards good from a climate and nature perspective?**  Is that true overall and can it be illustrated with reference to particular standards? This research requires insight and understanding of the limits of data and current research to give the best available answer or an alternative way of addressing the problem. As a starting point, since the question could be answered in a number of ways, we would invite the researchers to propose how they would address the questions below or others that they think would best make the case[[1]](#footnote-2):

* Do US/Aus/NZ agricultural products, not importable under a current standard, have a worse environmental impact than UK products? Would consuming more meat, dairy or fruit and vegetables from these countries increase the UK’s global climate or nature impact? (Accepting the difficulty of comparing nature impacts in different countries)
* Are US/Aus/NZ farming behind or ahead of dealing with the environmental consequences of farming than the UK in policy terms? Would more closely aligning with US/Aus/NZ policy on food standards take the UK towards policy needed for a more agroecological farming system?
* Are US/Aus/NZ behind or ahead in terms of the environmental impacts of farming? This question is of particular interest in respect of pollinators, soil depletion and health, the effects of nitrogen and phosphorous run off in water and ammonia on air quality and of the impact of feed production for livestock?
* If an industrial farming system is the opposite of an agroecological one, do US/Aus/NZ have more industrial farming system than the UK? Industrial farming is to be defined by the research, but could include monocropping, less pasture fed livestock, more pesticide and fertiliser use and run off, more degraded farmland, and more water extraction. Or a systems approach could be taken, with agroecology more closely approaching a circular system catalysed by ecosystem services, while industrial agriculture would be defined by inputs, outputs and waste.
* To what extent are industrial systems for meat, dairy and fruit and vegetables dependent on animal welfare practices, pesticides that currently make them illegal to import? It is not expected that UK food safety or animal welfare standards would make an industrial farming system impossible, but it would be useful to understand how absence of these rules support farming practices that are also bad for the environment.[[2]](#footnote-3)

If it were necessary for the initial phase of the analysis to be completed in 4-6 weeks, the analysis with respect to the US is most important and Aus and NZ could be completed separately.

**This research**

WWF is seeking a consultant with existing deep expertise on food and farming standards. Existing expertise in trade policy would also be desirable.

The consultant will work independently, reporting back to WWF on a fortnightly basis. The consultant should use existing expertise, and existing literature to complete a secondary analysis. The project outputs are intended for internal use (though findings may be adapted at a later date for external use).

**Outputs**

i) and ii) secondary analysis on environmental impact of UK food standards

* Short report on evidence for internal audience including, if supported by the evidence, 5-6 illustrative case studies of where an existing UK food import standard is associated with restricting farming practices that are bad for the environment (One report for all of US, Aus, NZ or, if recommended by the researchers, short separate reports with 2-3 case studies per country)
* Included in the above, if environmental evidence for maintaining current standards are weak, expert view on prospects for UK developing new environmental based food standards if it weakens food standards as a result of trade negotiations in early deals.

iii) Scoping report on development of a UK environmental food standard

* Short report on state of current policy development and research on environmental standards with a suggested approach for further research that highlights criteria and factors in a most fruitful prospects in the near term for the UK

# **Budget, funding and payment terms**

The available budget for this work is a maximum of £10,000 paid on approval of final project.

**Project timeline and application requirements**

Date for project to start: asap inOctober 2020

Date for project to end: 19th December 2020

Bid for the work should include:

* Approach for completion of the project
* Relevant experience (and case studies of similar previous work if applicable)
* CVs of consultants who will participate in the project
* A precise budget broken down by key tasks, including consultant daily rates
* The estimated number of person-days required
* A detailed timeline for delivery

The application should be no longer than 4 sides, plus CVs of participating consultants attached in an appendix.

Proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

* Fit to brief
* Existing expertise of food and farming standards
* Existing expertise of trade policy and food policy
* Robustness of proposed approach

**Please email proposals to Piers Hart (**[**phart@wwf.org.uk**](mailto:phart@wwf.org.uk) **), with Mollie Gupta (**[**mgupta@wwf.org.uk**](mailto:mgupta@wwf.org.uk)**), Tim Low (**[**tlowe@wwf.org.uk**](mailto:tlowe@wwf.org.uk)**) and Sara Muller (**[**smuller@wwf.org.uk**](mailto:smuller@wwf.org.uk)**) in cc, before 12 noon on 12/10/2020.**

WWF will aim to contact the successful bidder on 14/10/2020.

1. It is understood that, a change in the UK’s import standards would apply to all countries, not just the party to the trade deal that negotiated it, and the agricultural commodities that entered the UK as a result of any change would be determined by a number of factors like cost of the product, other tariffs or quotas they faced. However, the purpose of this study is not to forecast imports and the change in environmental impact, but to understand, in principle, what type of production that change in standards would be supporting. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. To be substantiated in the study but, for example, can we show that monocropping would encourage pests and weeds without heavy pesticides use, or cattle would suffer liver abscesses from a grain fed diet without systematic use of antibiotics. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)