

Media Release



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NPA PRESS RELEASE

Brexit could create pig industry labour crisis, survey shows

The UK pig industry faces a labour crisis unless the Government takes steps to preserve access to EU workers after we leave the EU, the National Pig Association (NPA) has warned.

The NPA has today published the results of a survey of members from across the sector, which confirms that businesses are already suffering problems accessing EU labour as a result of the Brexit vote. Two-thirds of businesses employing EU labour said it had become more difficult to find EU labour since the vote, while nearly one in three have already seen workers leave.

On Friday (October 27), the association submitted its response to the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) call for evidence to inform the Government's post-Brexit immigration and labour policy. The key message from the NPA was that the Government must take steps to ensure that so-called 'low-skilled' permanent EU workers remain accessible to the sector.

Survey results

The survey, hosted on the NPA's website, received 138 responses from producers of all sizes and systems, pork processors and members of the allied industries. Key findings included:

- Just over a half of respondents employed at least one non-UK worker, with 24% hiring more than a quarter of their labour from overseas.
- Around 90% of businesses using non-UK labour employed them on a permanent basis, with 94% of non-UK workers coming from the EU.
- 29% of businesses employing EU labour said at least one EU worker had left since the Brexit vote due to changing circumstances (eg, exchange rate and concern over immigration policy).
- 64% of those employing EU labour said it had become harder to find EU labour since the vote. None said it had got easier.
- Nearly half of those employing EU labour said EU workers they employed were considering leaving the UK due to uncertainty over Brexit.

The survey also highlighted the industry's fears for the future as the UK plans its departure from the EU.

- 63% of all respondents are less confident in their ability to source enough labour to meet their requirements than before the Brexit vote, including 40% 'much less' so. 1.5% are more confident.

- 46% said it would be ‘very difficult’ or ‘impossible’ to source all their labour from the UK in future. 11% said it would be ‘very easy’, while 42% said it would be ‘possible but not straightforward’.
- 17% said their businesses would not survive without migrant labour, while 28% would have to alter how they operate.

In its submission to the MAC, the NPA said EU workers have provided a welcome solution to the historic difficulty of attracting domestic labour for the UK pig sector.

The response highlights the misleading nature of the official term ‘low-skilled’ to describe many of the EU workers employed by our pig farms, meat processors and allied businesses.

“They are anything but ‘low-skilled’. Animal husbandry clearly requires a high degree of technical skill but many roles do not require graduate level training,” said NPA chief executive Zoe Davies

“The Government has made it clear it wants to restrict permanent so-called low-skilled workers after we leave the EU. The NPA is making the argument in the strongest possible terms ‘lower skilled’ workers employed in the pig sector should be included on the ‘shortage occupation’ list and prioritised after we leave the EU.

“We are already seeing the effects of Brexit on our ability to secure EU workers and our survey highlights the scale of the crisis this sector faces if we get our immigration policy wrong. Without the workers, we simply can’t produce and process the fabulous British pork enjoyed by millions of consumers. Exporting pork production is in nobody’s interest.”

NPA senior policy advisor Ed Barker said the survey highlighted the difficulties the UK pig sector currently faces in recruiting labour from the UK, with farming often not seen as a desirable career choice.

Four in very five respondents said farming was not being offered as an attractive proposition by UK educational establishments, while more than half said colleges were not providing employees with the necessary skills.

Mr Barker added: “The talent and enthusiasm is out there. It is critical that, as we leave the EU, the agricultural industry works with Government and the educational sector to champion agriculture as a great place to work and to provide the right training and skills to meet the sector’s needs.”

Notes to editors

- 1) The online survey was accessed via the NPA website in late September and early October. Just over 90% of respondents were producers, with the rest from the processing and allied industries. Of all respondents, 62% employed fewer than 10 workers, while 12% employed more than 50.
- 2) The survey invited comments from respondents, a selection of which can be viewed [here](#):

“They (EU workers) are uncertain as to whether they will be able to remain here after Brexit. All want to remain here.”

“UK labour are increasingly unwilling to work with pigs. Even on the arable side of our business future staffing is the biggest risk to our business.”

“We have always struggled to find good quality labour locally but have had no problem sourcing abroad.”

- 3) The NPA carried out a survey into EU labour last year. The results [can be viewed here](#)
- 4) Home Secretary Amber Rudd commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee to seek views from across the UK economy to inform its post-Brexit immigration and labour policy. The NPA submitted its five-page response on October 27.

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