



Farmers and those post-Brexit border checks

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I know it's time for the National Farmers' Union (NFU) conference when farmers start sliding into my DMs to ask for good places to eat Indian food in Birmingham.

For many, the next two days are a very welcome break from the day-to-day grind of farm life.

Instead, it is a chance to swap war stories with others and catch up on the latest information on everything from agricultural robots to farming politics.

There is, as ever, much for farmers to discuss.

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As the impact of Brexit continues to be felt, we are starting to see what new rules on bringing young plants into the country will mean to our farmers and growers.

I've talked to strawberry and garden-plant growers who are really worried about these new import checks.

Previously, they could ship in plant stock from Europe direct to their greenhouses and hold it there while checks for bugs and diseases were carried out as needed, but not for much longer.

Soon, as part of post-Brexit life, those checks will be carried out at the ports where the plants arrive.

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What currently happens at about 7,000 locations across the country will be concentrated down to much bigger operations outside a handful of our ports – and if there's any problems at these new locations then the delays could really impact the health of the plants.

Derek Jarman

As Derek Jarman of Worcestershire-based Hayloft Plants told me, for consumers what this means is "less choice and higher prices" which in turn makes his life harder too.

And as farmers cope with new rules and regulations, plus the threat of cheap imports and environmental worries, there's a much bigger question surrounding farming at the moment – just what do we want our farmers to do?

I never thought I'd see the day where supermarket shelves of everything from eggs to vegetables would be anything less than full to bursting. But it's not unusual now to find gaps and upturned crates filling up the empty shelf space.

But at the same time there's a renewed focus on farmers doing more for the environment, often at the expense of actual food production.

It's this conflict that's likely to be explored at this week's NFU conference especially as, in an election year, we'll be hearing from politicians from the three major parties. It will be very interesting to hear what they have to say.

For the Warwickshire-based NFU this also marks the last conference for their president, Minette Batters, who has certainly had a big impact in the job. She leaves big shoes for the next president to fill.

The next two days, then, will have a big impact on British farming. And are also a chance to sample the delights of a certain Desi pub in West Bromwich which is my Indian food recommendation this year.

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