

Brexit: Boris Johnson Moves to Scrap Environment and GMO Safeguards to Get Deal with Trump

By [GMWatch](#)

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When Boris Johnson [used](#) his first three speeches as UK Prime Minister to flag up his desire to “liberate” GMOs as part of Brexit, we warned that this meant his priority was doing a trade deal with Donald Trump at any cost. Johnson, we said, was “simply dancing, puppet-like, to Trump’s tune”.

Now a Cabinet source has [told](#) the Brexit-supporting Sun newspaper that Johnson is scrapping a commitment by his predecessor, Theresa May, to stick to European Union rules on the environment, safety standards (that would include GMO foods and crops, as well as pesticides) and workers’ rights.

“The level-playing-field promise has to go, and Boris is very clear about this,” the ministerial source told the Sun. “It would seriously restrict our ability to deregulate and to do trade deals with other countries.”

The Independent has [reported](#) EU officials as saying,

“British negotiators are particularly keen to jettison EU restrictions on genetically modified foods – a key demand of American trade negotiators.”

One EU official with knowledge of the Brexit talks also [told](#) The Independent that

“US trade officials appeared to have been in contact with British negotiators and told them standards would need to be slashed if there was any chance of a US trade deal.”

This has also been the message from US agribusiness, with the head of the American Farm Bureau recently [making clear](#) that the UK must accept US food standards as part of any future trade deal with Washington.

De-regulation could “irreparably damage public health”

Meanwhile an internal ministerial briefing [leaked](#) from within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has confirmed the concerns about a Brexit trade deal with the US leading to a push to weaken food standards in the UK. The document was drawn up by top Defra advisers who are clearly worried that the Department for

International Trade is willing and ready to remove safeguards on issues like animal welfare and pesticide residue levels. The document warns that weakening current UK standards to “accommodate” the US could “irreparably damage... public health”.

The Minister heading up the Department for International Trade, Liz Truss, is known to have had “off the record” [meetings](#) about weakening UK regulations with some of the right-wing US pressure groups that have driven Trump’s radical programme of deregulation. And [last week](#) at a Conservative party conference fringe event, Truss said that while she is “proud” of Britain’s high environmental standards, she wants to take “a much more free-market approach”. Since then she has [tweeted](#) that scrapping EU protections is “vital for giving us the freedom and flexibility to strike new trade deals and become more competitive”.

Unsurprisingly, the leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, has [branded](#) Johnson’s latest Brexit proposals a “Trump deal Brexit” which would “rip away the standards” that protect workers, “our environment and... our consumers”. He also [said](#) the proposals “would slash food safety standards, exposing us to — among other things — chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-treated beef, currently banned under EU standards.”

Broken promises

What is so striking is the contrast between the current Brexit proposals and the previous claims of leading Brexiteers, like Michael Gove, who in his “Green Brexit” speech last year [said](#),

“We can ensure... in the economic partnership that we plan to forge with the EU... that the highest ethical and environmental standards are upheld.”

Gove, who was in charge of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the time, also [vowed](#) to uphold UK food standards post-Brexit and promised that they would not be sacrificed in order to get a trade deal. He even [went as far as to say](#) that the UK would accept US food standards “over my dead body”.

Now – with Gove in charge of preparing for a No-Deal Brexit as a leading member of Johnson’s cabinet – the only thing that is dead are Gove’s promises. Deregulation to adopt the US’s dire food and environmental standards would be possible either with the latest Johnson Brexit proposals or with the No-Deal Brexit that many believe to be the true goal of Boris Johnson and his supporters.

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