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UK food prices will rise without EU workers, say trade groups



Food prices will rise unless the government ensures EU citizens can work in the UK after Brexit, according to industry groups representing the major supermarkets and food manufacturers, including the owner of Marmite.

The open letter to the government is signed by 30 food and drink industry bodies, including the Food and Drink Federation, which represents major suppliers, the British Retail Consortium, which counts Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons among its members, and the National Farmers Union.

The letter, published in the Guardian, says: "Workers from the European Union, some of whom are already leaving the UK, play a significant role in delivering affordable and high-quality food and drink." It says they provide "an essential reservoir of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour." [...]

Employment agencies have warned that the UK's food industry is facing the worst labour shortage for at least 12 years.

The Association of Labour Providers (ALP), whose employment agency members supply 70% of the temporary labour used by the food and drink industry, recently said responses to job ads had slumped by up to 70% as workers from the EU – who account for 90% of jobs in the sector – avoid coming to the UK.

Nearly 4 million people are employed in growing, harvesting, producing, packaging, selling and serving food and drink in the UK, a large proportion of whom are EU nationals.

Although food prices continue to fall amid heavy competition between the major supermarket chains and fast-growing discounters Aldi and Lidl, rising costs are expected to drive up inflation in the coming months. [...]

Sarah Butler, The Guardian, Thursday 8 December