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Mar 24, 2020

With No EU Workers Coming, The U.K. Agriculture Sector Is In Trouble



A seasonal worker from Romania on a farm in south east England on June 29, 2018.
AFP via Getty Images

The U.K. organization for farmers, landowners and businesses in rural England and Wales has said labor shortages caused by coronavirus could be devastating for this years' harvest. They are calling for a 'land army' of local labor to be recruited to assist the sector, which expects to see its labor supply cut by 75% as EU workers who normally come to the U.K. to work for the harvest season are prevented from coming.

The U.K. agriculture sector was already in trouble, heavily reliant on EU workers as it is. Since the Brexit referendum in 2016, when the U.K. voted to leave the European Union, labor supply from the mainland has been dwindling¹, and the government's recent immigration stance emphasizing high-skilled migration has provided little comfort.

Now, thanks to coronavirus, we are seeing what happens when borders are totally closed to foreign workers, at least for one sector. According to the CLA, the agriculture sector usually uses around 60,000 seasonal laborers per year to complete the harvest, and they expect only around 25% of that amount this year. Factor in a 20% coronavirus infection rate the CLA is reckoning with, and they estimate some 80,000 people will need to be mobilized to protect Britain's harvest.

¹ To dwindle = diminuer

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