

EU's Protected Designation of Origin scheme should not be politicised

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Opinion Plus

Preserving food cultures is beneficial regardless of Brexit, argues Leonardo González Dellán.



Parmesan Cheese in Parma's main square | Photo credit: Adobe Stock

Preserving food cultures is beneficial regardless of Brexit, argues Leonardo González Dellán

In the British Government's latest white paper on leaving the European Union, it made clear that it would not seek to maintain the EU's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) place-name legislation after Brexit.

Specifically, it narrowed its scope to protecting ingredients only in the UK, thereby not protecting anything imported or exported.

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PDO schemes and other place-name legislation preserve traditionally made foods and protect from imitations being sold under the same names.

Removing the UK from this scheme is the wrong approach to the UK's agricultural and ecological future, especially when Brexit absolutely does not require it to leave the PDO scheme too.

Europe's Protected Designation of Origin programme has been successful in protecting regional food producers within and beyond its borders.

Under the scheme, foods such as parmesan from Emilia-Romagna, grass-fed lamb from Wales and stilton from England's East Midlands have had their traditions and method of production preserved in law.

"Countries as far reaching as Colombia and China have PDO agreements with the EU in place, meaning that both within the expansive European market and within their own countries, these products, the way they are made, and the ingredients they can use are protected"

PDOs mean that original producers get more money - 223% more according to the Scottish Government - and that people eat better quality food made by skilled producers with high quality ingredients.

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Speculation is rampant that the UK's disregard for these environmental protections comes from a wish to make quick and frictionless trade agreements with anglophone nations who do not have the same protections, mainly the US.

But this is a short-sighted decision with large ramifications.

It is extremely important to remember that PDO schemes do not just protect those who make the individual products, but rather an entire value chain of responsibly sourced and best in class ingredients which go into making it.

Entire communities benefit from the estimated €111 million the EU puts into the scheme annually.

After production too, the protected products act like brand names, increasing sales and further supporting local industries and workers.

"Maintaining the UK in the PDO scheme or setting up an equivalent that met the same requirements would represent a firm commitment on the part of the British Government to not only preserve regional heritage and tradition, but also to invest in long-term and sustainable community-based methods of production more generally"

Eagerness to do a trade deal with the US is not a justifiable reason for throwing these industries to the wayside and letting inferior imitations into the market.

UK PDO products bring in £4.8 billion in export income each year and this income, built on reliable and traditional brands is sustainable, intertwined with its 'best of British' brand identity.

Maintaining the UK in the PDO scheme or setting up an equivalent that met the same requirements would represent a firm commitment on the part of the British Government to not only preserve regional heritage and tradition, but also to invest in long-term and sustainable community-based methods of production more generally.

It is understandable that the British would want to show immediate progress on trade policies but removing possible points of friction in negotiations which sacrifice local communities and agricultural workers' livelihoods is not the way to do that.

These protected sources of income are worth more than the money they provide. If our economy is borne from our ecology, as every economics text book teaches, then we must concentrate our efforts on surrounding ourselves with the most sustainable solutions to our food needs.

Cheaper and more obscure food chains are not the way to do this, and the British Government must come to this realisation too.

About the author

Leonardo González Dellán is a Venezuelan entrepreneur, financier and philanthropist

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