

The search for stability and simplicity – Part 2

Centre for Brexit Studies Academics have contributed to another Bite-Size Brexit book which aims to put an industry which has been somewhat forgotten in the Brexit debate into the frame: Agriculture.

Farmageddon? Brexit and British Agriculture, edited by Caroline Stocks and John Mair, explores both paths that Brexit could mean for Agriculture in the UK. Being an underexplored issue in the 'Great Brexit Debate', the book remedies that and puts the industry, which will impact a huge amount of businesses across Britain, into the spotlight.

Brexit could offer an opportunity for British Agriculture post Brexit, free of the Common Agricultural Policy. It could also be a disaster with export markets lost, subsidies and bankruptcies. But which one will it be?

We are delighted to share Fergus Ewing's chapter in the book on the blog today, enjoy...

The search for stability and simplicity

Fergus Ewing is SNP MSP for Inverness and Nairn, a seat he has held since 1999. During his time as an MSP he has sat on various committees, including finance and transport, and has acted as Minister for Community Safety and Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism. In 2016 he was appointed as the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy.

Scotland's rural communities and farm businesses are critically dependent on support from the European Union, so much so that the country would rather walk away from the United Kingdom than give up its EU membership. Scottish Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing explains why Scottish agriculture isn't prepared to deal with the complications of Brexit.

[Read Part 1 of Fergus Ewing's chapter here.](#)

Scotland: The UK's expendable bargaining chip

We have a raft of statutory instruments passed at Holyrood and Westminster to bring EU law into UK and Scottish law in the event of a no deal. Despite the resource that has gone into producing and passing these, we hope we won't need to use them.

There are two bills on agriculture and fishing in the UK Parliament that were swiftly drafted and pushed through the early legislative processes with unseemly haste, but by spring 2019 had been parked indefinitely.

A withdrawal deal was negotiated which ignores Scotland's interests on key matters like trade and migration. In fact, on rural issues like fishing, it is clear that just as the UK Government did on the way in to the EU, it intends to use Scotland's fishing interests as expendable bargaining chips on the way out.

The extension period to October 31 feels increasingly like an impasse; a hiatus that seems set to result in the same ridiculous brinkmanship from the UK Government that will draw us ever closer to the cliff edge of a no deal Brexit once again.

And while any form of Brexit will damage Scotland's rural economy, all research and analysis suggest that leaving the EU with no deal in place would be disastrous. In food and drink alone, the cost could be £2bn – a sizeable chunk of its near £15bn annual turnover.

That is without factoring in what this long period of uncertainty, of drift and delay is doing to the myriad micro-businesses, often run by families, which make up much of our rural economy. No one can make any decisions about anything because no one knows what or where our future will be.

Since the outcome of the EU referendum, I have been determined that we should get on with making our own future.

In the last three years, we have pulled forward farm payments by using national loan schemes, to give farmers and crofters as much

financial certainty as we can, pumping more than £300m every autumn into the rural economy.

Yet we do not know what funding will be in place to replace all this after 2022.

I have published a plan for stability and simplicity² – the most detailed in the UK – making clear that even if Scotland has to leave the EU, we will stay with the Common Agricultural Policy as it is until 2021, then introduce some streamlining and piloting of new policy and funding approaches until 2024.

We have spent the spring of 2019 discussing with fishing businesses and coastal communities a new framework for fisheries management – many of the measures will be introduced whether we remain in the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy or leave.

And through a National Council of Rural Advisors, we have a blueprint for developing and growing the rural economy sustainably.

Choosing a separate future – outside the EU or the UK

At the same time, the Scottish Government has made clear that we must have the right to choose our own future. We stood on a platform in 2016 that said a second referendum on independence would be considered if there was a material change in our circumstances – such as being made to leave the EU.

In fact, given the potential damage that Brexit will do to Scotland's interests, we would be derelict in our duty to Scotland's people not to give them the opportunity to choose a different future.

That becomes more acute when you consider the impact of leaving the EU on our people. Scotland's rural economy and communities have welcomed tens of thousands of people from all over the EU. As a welcoming and open country benefiting from the freedom of movement provided by EU membership, Scotland's population has begun to grow again. That is good for us all.

Every year, thousands come for seasonal work, helping to plant and harvest fruit and vegetables, including Scottish raspberries and

strawberries. And many others have chosen not just to come and work here, but to make their lives here. They don't just take up jobs in fish processing factories, salmon farms, food manufacturers, distilleries, abattoirs, research institutes, and in rural hotels, shops and restaurants; they choose to stay in Scotland.

They and their families also support the wellbeing of our rural communities, helping to keep petrol stations, post offices and schools open in small villages and towns. And we are clear they are not just welcome to come, to keep coming but to stay here.

This also points to a divergence in values between Scotland and the UK as a whole. One of the UK government's key objectives in its negotiations to leave the EU has been to stem immigration and migration. One of ours is to prevent that from happening — to keep Scotland open for business and to people from all over Europe and the world.

When there is such fundamental ideological difference between neighbouring countries on a core issue which speaks to the heart of the sort of nation each wants to be, then it suggests the time has come to choose separate futures.

I and my colleagues in the Scottish Government believe passionately that Scotland's future lies as part of the family of nations, with our own seat at the EU's table, helping to make decisions which benefit and not harm our people and society.

That was what drove my mother Winnie Ewing in her time as an MEP for Scotland. She might have been the first Madame Ecosse in Europe – I am determined that she will not be the last.

Farmageddon? Is now available on Amazon. [Find out more here.](#)