



British Egg Industry Council

Briefing

Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill 2019-21

The BEIC maintains that the Immigration Bill is not a fair deal for the nation's ultimate food champions – British farmers. This Bill currently undermines the nation's food security by categorising the majority of 'key workers' that are employed within the British egg industry as 'low skilled'.

Without the extraordinary efforts of these workers the industry would have found it almost impossible to supply retailers with Lion eggs during the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, and as a result consumers would have been deprived of a nutritious and affordable food product.

A positive outcome of the pandemic has been widespread recognition among the public of those who work within the food industry as key workers, and an appreciation of British farmers and their ability to feed the nation.

What impact would a points-based immigration system have on the British egg industry?

- Over 10,000 people are directly employed in egg production and packing, and a further 13,000 are indirectly employed, by the many ancillary businesses that are economically dependent on the British egg industry.
- Of those employed in egg production on farms, industry data shows 30% are EU migrants, and of those employed in packing centres 50% are EU migrants and can be as high as 60% in certain areas.
- Most working in our industry have been employed for many years, and as such migrant labour is essential to the operation of the egg industry.

What impact has the Seasonal Workers pilot scheme had on the British egg industry?

- Our industry operates all-year-round, and there are no 'peak-production' months, seasonal labour is not as important to us as in other agricultural sectors.
- We would like to see the UK Government devise an immigration policy that offers the egg industry flexible solutions for recruiting permanent and long-term overseas workers, not just seasonal.

Can investment in staff retention, technology and innovation compensate if there is a lack of an immigration route for those workers classed as 'low skilled'?

- There is already a significant amount of automation in our industry, and we continue to strive to upskill much of the workforce through our Lion Training Passport, which we are continually updating to adapt and suit to the needs of a world leading agricultural/food sector.
- We are also involved in a pilot scheme to develop a Laying Hen Academy, to help encourage and train more young people of school-leaving age to begin a career in the egg and poultry sectors.
- Due to the nature of our industry however, automation can only achieve so much and cannot compensate for certain essential aspects and considerations in the production of eggs,

particularly on farm where the eyes, ears and nose of trained stock men and women remains essential to ensure animal welfare standards are maintained.

Issues with recruitment

Our members have given us feedback on the issues they face with recruitment and staff retention, that we have summarised below:

- Which age groups do your members find the most difficult to recruit from?
Our members have said they find it hardest to recruit from the under 30s age group.
- What factors turn prospective employees off?
It is intensive work in our industry, the younger generation, particularly British workers struggle with this, along with the hours and weekend working on farms and in packing centres.
- What other burdens do your members face?
Our members spend time and resources training employees, and often after a very short period of time – days to weeks – decide to end their employment within the industry. This takes time and incurs considerable costs in terms of recruitment and induction.
- What are the levels of staff retention like?
This depends on the area of work within the industry – the more physically challenging the work, the more difficult it can be to retain staff. The EU/EEA employees tend to return to their countries of origin, with COVID-19 and Brexit, this has been more acute. British workers tend to leave sooner and more often than EU/EEA employees

The British Egg Industry Council (BEIC)

The BEIC was set up in 1986 to represent the UK egg industry. The principal function of the BEIC is to represent the interests of its members (the UK egg industry) in discussions with Government, MPs, devolved institutions, and other bodies. The BEIC is recognised as the representative voice of the UK egg industry.

Our members are the 11 major organisations concerned with the egg industry, these are: the British Egg Association; British Egg Products Association; British Free Range Egg Producers Association; National Egg Marketing Association; Northern Ireland Poultry Federation; Pullet Hatcheries and Breeders Association; Pullet Rearers' Association; Scottish Egg Producers Retailers Association; Ulster Farmers Union; National Farmers Union; National Farmers Union (Scotland).

The BEIC is funded by voluntary subscriptions from egg packers and producers. The BEIC owns the Lion Quality Trademark and runs the Lion Quality Scheme for egg production, which accounts for over 90% of UK production.

The British egg industry and the UK economy

The British egg industry is worth £1bn per annum to the UK economy, and is 89% self-sufficient. Sales of Lion eggs achieved 13 consecutive years of growth by the end of 2019. During that period, we have seen the number of eggs consumed grow by 3bn, an average growth of 260m eggs per year. This has meant that per capita consumption has grown from around 171 eggs per person per year to around 200 eggs per person per year during that time.

Consumer recognition of the Lion mark is on the rise, 76%, compared to just 52% for Red Tractor and 34% for RSPCA Assured. The recognition of British Lion eggs as safer than other eggs is also increasing – up from 63% to 70%. This increase follows Food Standards Agency advice that runny eggs are safe to eat for everyone, including vulnerable groups.