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Sussex farmers welcome plans to lift USA's 32- year lamb ban

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Plans to lift a decades-old ban on British lamb imports to the United States has been welcomed by members of the West Sussex farming community.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the news on Thursday while in the USA for talks with President Joe Biden – an official announcement is still awaited.

The ban, which Mr Johnson labelled 'totally unjustified', stretches back to 1989 and was linked to outbreaks of BSE. A ban on British beef imports to the US was lifted last September.

West Sussex farmers welcomed the news this week – but some warned exporting would not be without its challenges.

A National Farmers' Union spokesman said: "It's excellent to hear that the Prime Minister and his government are working with the United States to lift this ban.

"British lamb is a fantastic, sustainable product that is recognised around the world for its quality and we know

there is demand for it in the US.

"This is exactly the sort of export opportunity in a new market that the government should be pursuing and is something we strongly support."

According to the NFU's South East branch, there are more than 100,000 on West Sussex farms, according to the latest Defra figures.

The majority of sheep production in the South East is concentrated in Sussex and Kent, it said.

Tenant farmer Caroline Harriott, of Lychpole Farm, Sompting, said the absence of an official announcement meant details were like a sheep – 'a little bit fluffy'.

But she said: "It is really good news that America wants to do business and it sends out a good message to the world."

West Sussex was once awash with abattoirs, in places including Arundel, Pulborough and Horsham, but now farmers sending lambs to slaughter had to travel further afield, such as to Heathfield and Guildford.

Caroline said 'red tape and bureaucracy' were largely to blame for the infrastructure issue but said farmers could work collaboratively if they

wished to take advantage of export opportunities.

For now though, she said the government's focus should be on helping farmers to feed its citizens and improve the nation's self-sufficiency.

She added: "We want to be feeding this country as it's got to be far better to have less of a carbon footprint and providing food to this country, rather than sending it half way around the world.

"If we have an excess, then fantastic."

Gwyn Jones, Tillington farmer and Gazette columnist, welcomed the news. See his column in full on page 16.

He said: "There is interest in British sheep genetics in the USA as well as high-quality meat, but it's not a big lamb market.

"However the AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) levy body say that it could be worth £37million in the first five years of trade."

Since the ADHB's estimation last year, the price of lamb has further increased to record highs across the United States, the NFU said, making it 'all the more important and valuable to gain access as soon as possible'.

Seal of approval Trio of royal visits to county



The Duke of Kent visited West Sussex on Thursday for two royal engagements. He was the Hanover Band's guest of honour as the orchestra celebrated its 40th season at a garden party in South Stoke. The Duke, who is the band's patron, greeted guests as he arrived at The Old Rectory, near Arundel, for the end-of-season gathering. The Duke also paid a visit to the Northchapel Village Hall on Thursday, where he met south coast veterans and their dogs and learned more about the work they do. And in a third royal visit, last Wednesday saw the Princess Royal visit Burgess Hill's Time 24, an electronics wiring specialist, to present long-service awards to loyal staff. Some 52 members of staff – out of 98 – have collectively put in more than 900 years of service with the firm.

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Labour leader gives backing to our energy crisis campaign

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has given his backing to the Keep Us Warm This Winter campaign.

Launched last week by the Gazette – along with other JPIMedia titles nationally – it aims to ensure readers have the information they need and to offer guidance on how they can cope with the winter ahead.

Concern over rising energy prices has left many fearing this winter could be the toughest in recent memory. A sharp rise in the price of wholesale gas has come just before energy regulator Ofgem's price cap for suppliers is raised.

The price cap was introduced

in January, 2019, and since then most energy firms have based default-tariff prices on the price cap's rate. Pressure on wholesale gas prices has come from last winter being colder than usual in Europe, which meant the amount of stored gas was lower before a more recent increase in demand from Asian countries – which had also endured a cold winter.

Amid the concerns and with winter approaching, nobody should face the choice between eating or heating.

Sir Keir was in Sussex earlier this week for the Labour Party conference. He visited Worthing on Monday and gave his backing

to the campaign.

Sir Keir said: "I support the campaign, I think it is really important this winter that people don't see their energy prices going up. It's going to be very difficult for many, many families as it is.

"Food prices have already gone up, tax is going to go up, lots of families on universal credit are going to struggle with the cuts the government is putting in place, so we mustn't allow fuel bills and energy bills to go up, it's a big chunk of people's income and what they spend out every month. Your campaign is the right campaign and we'll challenge the government on it."

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