

Dogma is now a threat to our food supplies

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Ben Wray edits Source, which is the daily newsletter from the Commonwealth think tank in Scotland. It does not matter, I suggest, whether you are much interested in Scottish affairs or not when considering [subscribing to this free newsletter](#). I would suggest Ben's commentary from a left of centre perspective makes it a daily worthwhile read for his comments alone. This is from today's newsletter:

UK growers are utterly reliant on low-paid, seasonal foreign labour, mainly Eastern European, to pick the fruit and vegetables that is then delivered to market. Suddenly there is talk of special chartered flight for the fruit-pickers, the same low-cost immigrant labour that the right-wing press has derided for years. James Porter, a farmer in Angus, has told the BBC he needs to find hundreds of strawberry pickers within weeks or else his fruit will rot. He said normally 200 workers would travel from Eastern Europe, and it's interesting that he showers them with praise: his "top pickers" are "very skilful", productivity levels which will be next to impossible to find elsewhere. The National Farmers Union are appealing for students and the unemployed to head out to farms and pick, or else they "face ruin".

I am sure if a decent wage is paid for this skilled work then they will find the labour force. Food is just another case of our globalisation model not valuing its workers and not valuing resilience, and those chickens are now coming home to roost. Just one month ago today, a top advisor to the Treasury, Dr Tim Leunig, is reported to have said in high-level meetings that the UK's food sector was "not critically important", and agriculture and fisheries "certainly isn't". The UK could instead follow the Singapore model, of being "rich without having its own agriculture sector". Those comments - made in the context of post-Brexit trade deals - now look foolish to the point of madness. The world of pointing to a sector's share of national GDP to decipher how "important" it is must surely be over.

The dogmas of the neoliberal age are now extremely dangerous, to the point that Britain could quickly become a land of food waste and food shortages, all at the same time.