

# Chilled meats, British sausages and a load of baloney...

Never let implementation of your processes become more important than the goals they are meant to help attain!

What a joke!

Whilst we were in the EU we had to endure a continuous stream of mindless regulations.

Some of the highlights were rulings that bananas should be "free of abnormal curvature." Cucumbers it was decreed should be "practically straight" and bent by no more than a gradient of 1/10!

In 2011 the EU passed a law prohibiting claims of water suppliers that drinking water prevented dehydration. The EU said they had no scientific evidence that drinking water did indeed prevent dehydration! I wonder why nobody has researched that... and in other news, it turns out that water is "wet!"

Meddling legislators made it illegal for prunes to be sold as a super food that acts as a laxative. After a thorough investigation, the EU ruled that "The evidence provided is insufficient to establish a cause and effect relationship between the consumption of dried plums of 'prune' cultivars and maintenance of normal bowel function." But anyone who has ever taken part in a late night "who can eat the most prunes" competition knows different!

In 2010 the EU proclaimed that diabetics should be banned from the roads. Up to one million drivers faced losing their driving licenses - because harsh EU experts deemed people with diabetes "unfit" to drive! Fortunately, this edict was never enforced.

Now we are out of the EU you'd think that this kind of indefensibly stupid blizzard of bureaucracy would be a thing of the past. But no! Even now it continues to affect us, and with potentially serious consequences...

The latest debacle involves the potentially catastrophic event that the EU is committed to preventing at all costs, for the good of its citizens. Apparently the current interim arrangements with the UK over an invisible customs border between Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland could see some chilled meats and possibly even some sausages entering Ireland illegally across the Irish border.

To counter that apparently terrifying prospect, the EU is prepared to risk a return to The Troubles and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, spend millions in the International Court of Justice taking the UK to court, implement trade sanctions against the UK which, in terms of net imports/exports, is its second largest trading partner in the world (behind only the USA) and leave the food aisles of Northern Irish shops laid bare. Have they lost the plot!

Of course, the EU are renowned for using processes rather than common sense and an international perspective to drive decisions.

Scottish lobsters, Cornish crabs, Brancaster mussels and Essex oysters have for decades been regarded as some of the

best shellfish in the world and featured heavily on the menus in the finest Michelin star dining venues across Europe. However, now the EU has decided that all must be first washed in pure water (even though, in the case of oysters, this diminishes their flavour) before they can be exported to the EU. But that is madness! The delays caused by fresh water washing and inspection means the shellfish will inevitably spoil and become unfit for consumption. However, the EU make strenuous efforts to ignore this, putting in jeopardy the livelihoods of generations of shellfish producers.

And how ironic that at a time when our waters are to be rinsed from edible crustaceans, for fear of terrible things happening because of the supposedly poor quality of sea water in which they grow, French fishermen are fighting ours for the biggest quotas possible for fishing in UK waters so they can land the biggest catches. So, the water can't be that bad then, can it!

Muppets!

There was a time when there were wide discrepancies in standards across Europe. But that was then... and this is now. It was before the internet and before social media.

People did not realise just how utterly crap British food was because they did not know about or understand any other way of cooking. All meat was cremated. All veg pulped. That was how the British cooked! Stories of adventures to Brittany for a car full of duty free would be peppered with anecdotes about how steaks were served bloody and so inedible. Now most of us prefer steak rare to medium cooked. Trips to Rome revealed that pasta was often served undercooked, but these days everyone eats pasta al dente. And no traveller to Paris could fail to conclude that the French were incredibly rude... and of course, they still are!

But times have changed. Recent events aside, people travel all around Europe frequently and cheaply. Thanks to the internet people have free, regular contact with friends around the world and keep up to date with international daily life. And people know what is good and what is not. Social media trends can make something or someone a global hit in 20 hours instead of 20 years. And similarly the Populus has access to information on what is good and what they might consider avoiding - then economic reality takes care of the rest.

I am not entirely sure that the EU is relevant to a modern day society, where information is freely available, real world local action is key and groups can easily find other groups of people from around the world who have successfully done what they want to do - be that curing charcuterie or adopting a more sustainable lifestyle. 'English wine' for goodness sake! Who'd have seen that ever happening thanks to LVMH. And that got me thinking about parallels in retail.

Why do retailers count their stock? Why do they even

bother? For many the way they go about it is pointless. Most would say that it is a legal requirement to value stock once a year. And of course, that is right. But that is thinking from 50 years ago; from the 1970s when the EEC, as it was then, was formed and we became a founding member.

Is the only value of counting stock today simply to satisfy the accounts department? When you think of the number of transactions and platforms involved in completing those transactions, the ability for stock to drift by 30% in 12 weeks is easy to see. I know... because I see it! So, are you really expending all of that effort to get a figure that is useless to anyone except the accountants, that is only going to be materially correct for just a few weeks!

But modern retailers look at it differently. They see that good stock control allows them to avoid public shaming by disgruntled customers on social media and make good on the marketing promises made to thousands of customers by the marketing department about delivery, quality and availability. We all know how price sensitive retail is. But

have you looked at Amazon recently? They are seldom the cheapest I find, but increasingly seen as the most dependable. And when an inability to deliver can be avenged by a customer with the merest click of a mouse - placing an order on a competitor's website - don't you need to do everything you can to make sure your stock is right?

Expert stock take companies for accuracy, multiple count cycles to improve availability and stop shrink, progressive analytics to discover problem hotspots and do something about them, new technology to eliminate friendly fraud and greater sales through smarter profiling with AI driven systems leading to fewer disappointments and substitutions - these should all be on the radar of every retailer right now.

The problem is that when you just go through the motions, ticking the box to say you did what you were told to do, you end up becoming disconnected from reality, making poor decisions and jeopardising your very existence. And if it can happen to the EU it can happen to even the biggest retailer too...

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