Supermarket shelves could be empty at Christmas due to food retailers grappling with severe Brexit-related supply chain issues, the chief of one of the UK's largest supermarkets has warned today.

John Allen, chairman of Tesco, told the BBC's World at One programme that supermarkets are struggling to source stock ahead of the busy festive period as a result of immigration rule changes caused by Brexit reducing the supply of lorry drivers.

"We are very short of drivers, it's a combination of many EU drivers having decided to go home and also the ageing age profile," he was quoted as saying by local website City AM.

Allen noted that supermarkets would normally be increasing stock in preparation for the Christmas period when demand for food and drink products is typically higher than the rest of the year. However, a scarcity of HGV drivers has stopped them doing this.

"We've got Christmas around the corner, and in retail we start to stockbuild really from September onwards for what is a hugely important time of year," Allen added.

"We've got a lot of goods to transport between now and Christmas, and a strong supply chain is vital for everyone. The reason for sounding the alarm now is that we've already had one Christmas cancelled at the last minute. I'd hate this one to be problematic as well."

Road haulage chiefs have calculated there is a shortfall of nearly 100,000 drivers, partly triggered by thousands of EU drivers leaving the UK during the pandemic.

The boss of fellow supermarket, Co-op, reiterated Allen's concerns today. Steve Murrells said current food shortages are the worst he has ever seen.

Data published this week by the Confederation for British Industry shows retailers recorded their lowest levels of stock since records began.

Meanwhile, high street fast food chains have stopped selling products as a result of suffering from shortages of key components. McDonald's has removed milkshakes from its menus in England, Scotland and Wales, while Gregg's announced its chicken bakes are in short supply.