

**Date:** Wednesday 28 February 2001  
**Time:** 2.00pm to 4.35pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room, National Assembly Building

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS**

### **Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak**

1. The National Assembly's Agriculture Department is working closely with MAFF, the State Veterinary Service and the farming unions. I met the leaders of the farming unions on Friday 23 February and held a press conference. I will make an oral statement in the plenary on Tuesday 27 February.

### **EU Agriculture Council**

2. I am attending the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers' meeting on Monday 26 February with UK Agriculture Minister Nick Brown. The main agenda item is the European Commission's seven point action plan to tackle the EU wide crisis in the beef industry. Certain aspects of the proposals could impact adversely on beef production in Wales and I am therefore attending to press the case for Welsh farmers. I will provide an oral report to the Committee on the outcome of the Council meeting.

### **Rural Partnership for Wales**

3. I chaired a positive meeting of the Wales Rural Partnership on 14 February at Gwbert on Sea, Cardigan. It discussed a number of key issues relevant to rural Wales including the National Economic Development Strategy. The Partnership will meet again in June.

### **Cydcoed**

4. Cydcoed is a social forestry grant scheme funded through Objective 1, and match funded from the National Assembly (subject to a resolution of the Forestry Commission financial situation) and through the Woodland Grant Scheme. The Wales European Funding Office approved the scheme on 22 February 2001. Total programme spend is approximately £4.5 million and the programme completion date is 2003. The scheme is aimed at those communities in Wales who are shown on the National Assembly's Index of Deprivation as 'most deprived' together with those communities who have no access to community woodlands. The funds can be used for a wide range of activities and developments.

### **Environmental Compact with the Voluntary Sector**

5. Forestry Commission Wales, in partnership with the Environment Agency, Countryside Council for Wales and members of the voluntary sector in Wales, have entered into a joint compact, the aim of which is to deliver joined up working and to recognise the role that the voluntary sector plays in environmental outputs in Wales. They have started the process with a national workshop where people discussed the issues and looked at ways of solving problems. The process will continue with regional focus groups and further consultation on the outputs and future role of the compact later this year. This is a National Assembly initiative and will assist the Forestry Commission in delivering its social aims in Wales and maximising the efforts being put into conservation management.