

Date: Wednesday 22 November 2000
Time: 9.00am to 12.25pm
Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly Building

REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

VISIT TO BRUSSELS

1. On Monday 20 November, I will attend the EU Agriculture Council meeting in Brussels. As part of the visit, I will also attend a major conference on reform of the European sheepmeat regime. All the countries which are beneficiaries of this regime will be represented, together with Commission officials. This is a useful opportunity to lobby the Commission before it produces its proposals, which are not expected until the New Year. The sheep industry is vital to us and it is therefore important to ensure a National Assembly presence to influence thinking amongst key policy makers. I will give the Committee an oral report on 22 November about this visit.

FARMING FUTURES GROUP

2. The Group had a useful first meeting on 13 November. There were no formal papers and the Group received informal presentations from officials and partner organisations on economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability in agriculture. There was general consensus about the need for Welsh agriculture to adapt and a range of views expressed on the type of change needed. The practical realism coming through provides a good platform to develop a coherent strategy for the future of farming. We now enter into an intensive period of work with the next meeting planned for 7 December.

MODULATION

3. The secondary legislation relating to modulation arrangements has gone through the Legislation Committee and is scheduled for Plenary on Thursday, 7 December. I can confirm that match funding from the Treasury was secured as part of the Spending Review settlement in the summer. The combined funds are vital if the National Assembly is to implement measures in the Rural Development Plan for Wales.

TIR MYNYDD

4. Farmers in the Less Favoured Areas of Wales who submitted an IACS 2000 Area Aid Application have now been sent explanatory notes and a supplementary claim form for the new Scheme. In the UK, Welsh farmers were the first to receive the explanatory literature and this demonstrates our commitment

to improve the service we give to farmers. In addition, a series of public meetings has been organised in association with the farming unions so that farmers can learn more about the scheme from officials in the Agriculture Department's Divisional Offices. Numbers attending have been very good and the feedback from these open sessions has also been positive. The closing date for receipt of the Tir Mynydd Supplementary Claim Form is 6 December 2000. Payments will be made in March/April 2001.

GM TRIAL, FLINTSHIRE

5. I was asked at our last meeting about the Flintshire GM farm scale evaluation. I understand that due to flooding in the area the farmer has not been able to get into the field where the crop is being grown. As a consequence he has not been able to dispose of it. Assembly officials are monitoring the position and will let me know of any developments. As you will be aware, I have agreed to write to Tom Middlehurst and Janet Ryder to let them know when the crop has been destroyed. Committee members will be sent a copy of this letter.