

Date: Wednesday 6 December 2000
Time: 9.00am to 12.30pm
Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly Building

REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

TIR GOFAL FUNDING 2001-02 TO 2003-04

1. I agreed at the last meeting to provide clarification of the funding of Tir Gofal over the next three years. The Partnership Agreement, *Putting Wales First*, indicates very clearly that "we will increase the current investment in the Tir Gofal scheme over the next three years to a cumulative total of almost £40 million". In fact we will do even better than that – the draft budget indicates that our plans are for expenditure of £10.9million, £13.9 million and £16.9 million respective, giving a cumulative total of £41.7 million over the three years. I accept that *Putting Wales First* is ambiguous when it talks of an "additional" investment of more than £10 million a year, but in my view this statement should clearly be read as relating back to the additional investment of £40 million over three years - clearly more than £10 million a year.

HELP FOR SMALL ABATTOIRS

2. The National Assembly's budget for next year includes provision to reduce inspection costs on the smaller abattoirs in Wales. This is an issue we have been pressing the UK Government for several months and I welcome its announcement on 28 November to implement the recommendations of the McLean Report. The Food Standards Agency will now draw up details of the support scheme. Most Welsh abattoirs fall within the McLean definition of small/medium size plants.

FORESTRY

3. On 1 November, I launched the new *Working with Communities* initiative for Forest Enterprise, the agency of the Forestry Commission that manages the National Assembly's woodland holdings. This policy initiative explains how we will encourage people throughout Wales to play a part in decision making in the woodlands close to the communities in which they live. The initiative will be a vital part of the new approach to woodlands, which I hope will be developed through the Woodland Strategy process that the Committee will be discussing on 6 December.

4. The provision of recreation opportunities in the woodlands of Wales is also a vital link with people as well as helping in the development of the rural economy. The recent Network Q Rally would not have come to Wales without the availability of forest roads for their use within the National Assembly's

woodlands. The rally brings huge publicity for Wales and is a major benefit to our economy. The commitment of the Forestry Commission to work with the organisers has helped make this rally such a success and was crucial in the decision to base the rally in Cardiff for the next two years.

YOUNG FARMERS CLUB

5. On 22 November I met representatives of Young Farmers Club Wales to discuss matters of mutual interest. YFC have an important role to play in shaping the future direction for Welsh agriculture and, as with the other main farming organisations, I am keen to involve them in regular dialogue.

WELSH INSTITUTE OF RURAL STUDIES

6. On 24 November, I visited the Institute of Rural Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, where I met Professor Derec Llwyd Morgan, the Vice - Chancellor, Professor Will Haresign, the Director of the Institute and other senior members of staff.

ROYAL SMITHFIELD SHOW

7. On 29 November, I visited the Royal Smithfield Show at Earl's Court in London and also addressed a farmers' forum at the Show.

FARM VISIT, RAGLAN

8. On 30 November, I visited Ty-ddu farm at Raglan, Monmouthshire. The visit was arranged by the Farmer's Union of Wales and included a meeting with local farmers to discuss a range of issues of current interest.

NFU CYMRU ANNUAL LIVESTOCK DINNER

9. On Monday evening, 4 December, I shall be attending the annual livestock dinner organised by NFU Cymru Wales at the Bell Inn, Llanyre. The livestock industry is the mainstay of Welsh agriculture and I am happy to lend them my support when ever I can.

ROYAL WELSH WINTER FAIR

10. On 5 December, I will attend the annual Winter Fair organised by the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society at Llanelwedd. My programme includes meetings with key industry players; visit to the food hall; presenting the Welsh cheese of the year award; and launching Cwysi - Menter a Busnes - video aimed at encouraging enterprise amongst farming families.