

Lesley Griffiths MS

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

22 May 2020

Dear Minister

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 7 May. You will be aware that the Committee held an evidence session with farming unions and representatives of the food sector on 19 May. The Committee has agreed that I should write to you in relation to several matters raised during both meetings. I would be grateful if you provide a response to the questions that follow in writing in advance of the Committee's next meeting on 11 June, which you have agreed to attend.

Markets

- 1.** How much progress has been made in developing funding schemes to support the beef and lamb sectors?
- 2.** To what extent will farmers be eligible for the renewed Economic Resilience Scheme?
- 3.** Farming unions told the Committee that the Northern Ireland Executive has put in place a £25 million support package for the dairy, beef, and ornamental sectors. Can you share with the Committee your latest position on the support you will make available for these sectors in Wales? What is your latest position on the introduction of private storage aid for agri-food products, including beef and lamb?



Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN

 SeneddNHAMG@senedd.cymru

 0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

 SeneddCCERA@senedd.wales

 0300 200 6565

4. What is being done by the Welsh Government to ensure that Welsh and local produce is being used to supply the most vulnerable in society, including those who are shielding at home because of the pandemic?

Farm payments

5. Farming unions have estimated that there have been considerable levels of outstanding payments to farmers from pillar 2 schemes. Can you confirm your latest understanding of the levels of payment that are yet to be received by farmers and outline how you can ensure that the payments reach farmers as soon as possible?

6. You said you would consider an extension of the Single Grants Scheme beyond the 19 May deadline and committed to discussing this issue with farming unions. Can you provide the Committee with an update on this matter and your views on the likelihood that deadlines for other payment schemes may need to shift?

7. Farming unions were disappointed by the lack of “transparency” concerning discussions about redirecting rural development payments. Can you explain why they have not been involved in discussions on this matter?

8. In reference to the additional funding arising from the Bew review, you said that the money had yet to be provided by the UK Government. Can you tell the Committee when you last discussed this matter with a UK Minister? What is your latest position on how this funding will be allocated?

9. What is your latest position in relation to the use of modulated payments to support direct payments for farmers?

Support for the dairy industry

10. When do you expect that evidence will become available of the effectiveness of the AHDB milk promotion scheme that is aimed at consumers? Will you report back to the Committee on the findings at the earliest opportunity?

11. When you attended the Committee’s meeting on 7 May, you estimated that around 100 farmers would be able to benefit from the dairy support scheme. Farming unions have told the Committee the number could be closer to 180. What is your latest understanding of the number of farmers that could benefit from the scheme? Given that the funding for the scheme will need to come from existing budgets, does this difference in estimates give you any cause for concern?



12. In the meeting on 7 May, you told the Committee that funding under the scheme would be paid within 7-10 days after the launch of the scheme. Can you tell the Committee how many applicants received funding within the timescale you set?

13. You also told the Committee that there would be a five- to six- week window for applications for the scheme. Given that the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown may last some time, can you confirm whether that window for applications will be extended?

Bovine TB testing

14. Farming unions told the Committee that there was potentially some confusion arising from the TB hub and, in particular, a lack of clarity about whether certain rules apply in Wales or England. Do you share these concerns and, if so, how will they be addressed?

Horticulture

15. What opportunities are there to increase horticultural production in Wales in light of the Covid-19 pandemic? What plans does the Welsh Government have to realise those opportunities once the pandemic is over?

Agricultural pollution

16. Farming unions said they had been surprised, disappointed, and disillusioned by the Welsh Government's proposed regulations in relation to agricultural pollution. The proposals were described as "far-reaching" and "draconian" and they asked for a full regulatory impact assessment to be prepared. Will you give a commitment that you will publish any such assessment of your proposals?

17. We were told you had given a commitment to farming unions that you would not introduce regulations until the Covid-19 pandemic had ended. This was explained as being the green light in the Welsh Government's traffic light system for the pandemic. Can you confirm this is your intention?

Sustainable Farming and Our Land

18. Can you explain the latest position on the Sustainable Farming and Our Land proposals, including whether the timescales for introducing the proposals have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?



Food

- 19.** What assessment have you made on the cost of the lockdown on the food production and manufacturing sector?
- 20.** The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown arising from it has had a devastating impact on the hospitality and food and drink service sectors. What support is the Welsh Government planning to provide these sectors as they prepare to reopen when lockdown restrictions are loosened in Wales?
- 21.** The Welsh Government and other governments in the UK have taken certain actions to mitigate problems in getting food into supermarkets, including the relaxation of planning rules around delivery and open times and the relaxation of drivers' hours rules. How is the Welsh Government ensuring that measures such as these are kept under review to ensure that they are effective and are not in place for longer than is necessary or was intended?

Food processing

- 22.** The Committee has heard that processing capacity continues to be a problem in Wales. In our report Rethinking Food in Wales: Food branding and processing (June 2019), we concluded that:

“The Welsh Government must do more to strengthen and develop infrastructure in the food system. The Welsh Government should undertake a mapping exercise to assess current processing capacity in Wales with a view to identifying gaps. The outcome of this work should inform the strategic development of processing facilities across Wales, with a focus on value-added activities. Support should be prioritised to address gaps in capacity.”

Can you provide an update on the work that you have done in the last year to increase Wales' processing capacity?

Food supply chains

- 23.** Are you satisfied that food security and the importance of local supply chains are sufficiently reflected in Sustainable Farming and Our Land and the Welsh Government's food policies?
- 24.** What work is the Welsh Government doing around supply chains to attempt to minimise carbon impact? What opportunities have come to light during the Covid-19 pandemic?



Brexit

25. How has Covid-19 affected your planning in relation to the end of the transition period?

Existing Welsh Government commitments that relate to the Committee's remit

26. The Committee would be grateful for updates on the timescales for the following Welsh Government :

- The publication of the consultation on the Welsh Government's new Fuel Poverty strategy;
- The introduction of the draft National Development Framework in the Senedd (the Committee appreciates the Minister for Housing and Local Government, but would be grateful if you would share the Welsh Government's latest understanding of the timetable); and
- The publication of Welsh regulations to give effect to Lucy's law.

Pigeon racing

27. The Committee recently received correspondence from the Royal Pigeon Racing Association and Welsh Homing Pigeon Union. They are keen to discuss steps that can be taken to allow pigeon racing in light of restrictions being relaxed in relation to other outdoor sports. They suggest that a starting point would be to provide their members with authority to start training their pigeons in preparation for later races. The Committee would be grateful if you would raise this with your Cabinet colleagues, including the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Hedges MS

Chair of Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

