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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LG/01260/20

Mike Hedges MS
Chair
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Senedd Cymru

Dear Mike,

8 June 2020

Thank you for your letter of 22 May, regarding my attendance at the Committee meeting on 7 May and asking for the following further information.

Markets

1. How much progress has been made in developing funding schemes to support the beef and lamb sectors?

The Agriculture Resilience Group, the Sheep Focus Group and Beef Focus Groups continue to meet and are key to us understanding the pressures faced by the industry at every level and my officials will continue to share emerging thinking and scenario plans with these groups.

Beef

Current market trends for beef are displaying a gradual recovery and discussions with stakeholders are currently focusing on longer term strategic analysis of the sector. £1.2 million has been allocated through the Ring Fenced Fund to deliver a national consumer campaign encouraging consumers to “Make It” with beef. It is being launched by AHDB, Quality Meat Scotland and Hybu Cig Cymru. It aims to reach 85 per cent of UK households and deliver a three-to-one return on investment. The move is a joint response to balance challenges faced by the beef supply chain in the wake of Covid-19, which has seen a surge in demand for beef mince in supermarkets. Beef will be the main focus of the campaign initially with the focus changing to lamb as the supply increases during early summer. HCC is also running campaigns to boost the sector, using current recipe based content and engaging with high profile chefs and other celebrities to produce more video based content. Initial feedback suggests both promotional campaigns are having a positive impact on consumer buying patterns, along with in-store promotions. This will help alleviate some of the carcass balance issues experienced a few weeks ago.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Lamb

I am aware lamb prices have recently started to fall but this is largely on trend with the seasonal patterns when more supply comes onto the market from June onwards. Industry reports suggest a good 2020 lambing season, and coupled with the good weather, it is anticipated an influx of prime lamb will be brought forward in the next few weeks. The export market is uncertain and “no deal” remains a real possibility. The extensive preparation undertaken for a potential no deal exit in 2019 will provide a foundation to build upon should there be a no deal following this transitional period.

My officials are working closely with HCC to monitor prices and undertaking scenario planning for all eventualities and I met the HCC board on the 4 June to receive a further update on the planning work HCC are undertaking.

The extensive preparation undertaken for a potential no deal exit in 2019 for Sheep will provide a foundation to build upon should there be a need, and also in preparing us for a potential no deal following this transitional period.

2. To what extent will farmers be eligible for the renewed Economic Resilience Scheme?

The Economic Resilience Fund is unique to Wales and has only been made possible by a considerable effort to re-prioritise our budgets. The focus of the Fund is on businesses whose income has been severely compromised by the current crisis. The first phase of the fund was extremely popular and was paused on Monday 27 April after receiving nearly 10,000 applications. Farms which have diversified their business outside primary agricultural production and food processing businesses will be able to apply for phase 2, subject to eligibility, when the fund re-opens at the end of June.

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?

The dairy sector, which plays an important role in feeding the nation, felt the immediate impact of the pandemic with the closure of the food service and hospitality sectors. On 9 May I announced funding for Welsh dairy farmers hardest hit by the recent exceptional market conditions as a result of Covid19. On 3 June I announced details of the Welsh Dairy Support Scheme. Applications for the scheme will open on 18 June, supporting farmers hardest hit by the recent exceptional market conditions due to Covid 19, and will remain open until 14 August 2020. The Welsh Dairy Support Scheme, developed by working with the industry, has been designed to support dairy producers to maintain production capacity during this challenging period. Through the fund, eligible dairy farmers will need to demonstrate they have suffered a reduction of 25% or more in the average price paid for their milk in April and subsequently May, when compared to February 2020. Eligible farmers will be entitled to up to £10,000, to cover around 70% of their lost income to help them to continue to meet fixed costs and sustain production capacity without impacts on animal welfare and the environment.

On 11 May, garden centres re-opened in Wales which will help support the ornamental sector.

Beef prices have shown some improvement lately. Based on data for the week ending 23 May, although still under the year-on-year prices by approximately £42/head deadweight, they are improving.

We will be receiving further analysis from levy bodies in due course including report from Qantar on retail consumer buying patterns.

Private Storage Aid

Private Storage Aid schemes for skimmed milk powder, butter, cheese, beef, sheep and goat meat have been announced by the European Commission and opened on 7 May. The schemes allows the temporary withdrawal of products from the market for a minimum of two to three months, and a maximum period of five to six months.

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?

From the initial discussions with the providers regarding the food box scheme, the inclusion of locally sourced produce was taken very seriously. The food boxes now include a number of Welsh produce such as Puffin Potatoes, Braces Bread, Burtons Biscuits, Radnor Hills juices and Welsh Milk. In addition Ceredigion County Council is piloting the preparation and delivery of its own boxes to residents, with contents sourced from local wholesalers. The Welsh Government, through its Cywain initiative, put care homes across Wales in contact with local wholesalers when they experience difficulties in sourcing food from their usual suppliers. Also through Cywain we have worked to secure support for independent Food Banks, to link them into the local food supply chain including Welsh wholesalers.

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?

Good progress is being made on processing claims for pillar 2 schemes and every effort is being made to make the outstanding payments as soon as possible. Rural Payments Wales (RPW) is making 2019 pillar 2 area payments in accordance with a new European Commission payment window. The payment window runs until 30 June and it is anticipated all except the most complex claims will be processed before this date.

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?

The 19 May Sustainable Production Grant deadline was for the submission of supporting documentation for appraisal; it was not a specific application deadline. The vast majority of farm businesses submitted some of the required documents before the deadline and RPW will accept the remainder at a later date. A small number of beneficiaries failed to submit any documentation and RPW is contacting these to establish if they wish to proceed with their grant application.

The deadline for submission of the 2020 Single Application Form, Transfer of Basic Payment Scheme Entitlements, Glastir Small Grants claims and Glastir Woodland Creation Expressions of Interest have all been extended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. My officials will monitor the situation closely as it develops over the coming weeks and months and will continue to apply European Commission Force Majeure / Exceptional Circumstances provision where appropriate.

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?

Detailed analysis of the challenges to the Welsh Government EU RDP 2014-20 are ongoing, though no final decisions have yet been made. Discussions with all interested parties, including farming unions and other stakeholders, have begun. We have been clear we want to work with the farming unions and others as we consider how to ensure the RDP continues to deliver against our priorities and support Covid-recovery. My officials have met with the farming unions and have a series of ongoing discussions planned over the next few months. In addition, I am currently meeting the unions on an almost weekly basis to discuss the whole range of issues affecting the industry.

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?

I have not held any discussions on the matter with UK Ministers. I have recently consented to The Direct Payments to Farmers (Amendments) Regulations 2020 being made on 9 June, which will increase Wales’ share of the UK BPS 2020 by the full £2.6m provided in 2020/21 under the Lord Bew review. A further £2.6m will follow in 2021/22.

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

Modulated payments were replaced by pillar transfers in 2014, where up to 15% of pillar 1 funding could be targeted at rural development measures each year.

In December 2019, I received assurances funding of £243m would be provided for BPS 2020, maintaining the funding provided for BPS 2019. I decided to continue to transfer 15% (£41m), subject to the UK Government providing full replacement funding. Following the UK departure from the European Union on 31 January 2020, under the terms of the withdrawal agreement the funding will be made available to support the rural economy and environment from financial year 2021/22.

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?

The AHDB #milkyourmoments launched on 6 May. Overall, the campaign numbers are indicating it is going well. AHDB has confirmed the evaluation of total campaign outcomes will be available five weeks after the campaign closure date of 31 July 2020.

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?

I am in regular contact with farming unions to discuss the issues facing the dairy sector and my officials are also in close contact through the Agriculture Resilience Group and the Dairy Focus Group.

I cannot provide you with a confirmed figure at this time. I am encouraging all farmers who believe they are eligible to submit an on-line application form and supporting documentation by the closing date.

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?

Applications for the scheme will open on 18 June, supporting the farmers hardest hit by the recent exceptional market conditions due to Covid 19. The window will remain open until 14 August 2020. This will give sufficient time for producers to provide the relevant supporting documentation.

Processors pay producers in arrears. The mid-June application opening period will enable eligible farmers to gather all of their statements for February, April and May ready to support their application. Online guidance will be available to support this process.

Provided all of the necessary documentation has been submitted and validated, successful applications can expect payment within 10 days.

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?

Officials have participated in numerous meetings with UK administrations to determine an agreed position on the current advice with regard to TB Testing during the COVID19 pandemic. During this time, all guidance and advice on these changes has been published on TB Hub, to ensure consistency in our communication across all administrations. In recent weeks, my officials have received positive feedback from stakeholders on the clear guidance offered on TB Hub for COVID19 related advice.

Going forward, my officials are continuing to work on using the TB Hub so it has a stronger Wales profile. This will include liaising with farming unions, the veterinary profession and other stakeholders in Wales to revise content relevant to Wales and ultimately, to see the translation of all Wales specific guidance.

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?

Although the horticulture sector represents a small part of our agriculture industry in Wales, the sector delivers many benefits which help to service a range of environmental, social and economic needs.

Tyfu Cymru, Horticulture Wales and Tyfu Fyny projects are funded from the Welsh Rural Development Programme.

- Tyfu Cymru offers 100% funding for bespoke and tailored training and supports like-minded businesses to work together on common issues and build opportunities to stimulate growth in Wales' commercial horticulture sector.
- Horticulture Wales provides free support, advice, guidance and signposting to develop Welsh horticultural businesses.
- The Tyfu Fyny project has been created to strengthen the smaller scale community growing sector in Wales.

My officials are working closely with Tyfu Cymru to determine the labour shortage for seasonal harvest picking in Wales. During the COVID-19 pandemic it is vital we ensure key rural and land-based businesses, including farms and businesses are able to access key workers and can continue operating.

Welsh Government has commissioned Lantra Wales to develop an online skills matching service. The service will put businesses and potential employees with relevant skills and experience in touch with each other as well as signposting to the recently launched 'Pick for Britain' campaign.

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?

My officials have attended monthly meetings of the Wales Land Management Forum sub-group on agricultural pollution, alongside farming union representatives, since January 2017. Additional task and finish group meetings with the same stakeholders have been held on the proposed regulations and the development of the Regulatory Impact Assessment. In excess of 40 meetings have now been held, so the scale of agricultural pollution, our statutory and international obligations and the proposed regulatory approach should come as no surprise.

The minutes of the evidence session of 19 May suggest industry representatives remain in denial of the scale of this issue and the detrimental impact poor agricultural practice is having on our environment. The farming unions have called for a voluntary approach to address agricultural pollution to be introduced, with regulations as the backstop if such an approach is not successful.

Voluntary actions have been supported by the Welsh Government for a considerable period. The Code of Good Agricultural Practice has been in place for almost 30 years, River Basin Management Plans focussed on voluntary actions to address agricultural pollution since 2009 and significant funding has been provided to farmers, including through Glastir and the Rural Development Programme. The Welsh Government's Farming Connect programme has also provided advice and guidance to support farmers to address agricultural pollution for many years.

Agricultural pollution incidents continue to occur across Wales at an unacceptable scale. A suite of measures, including voluntary initiatives, financial support and advice and guidance will be necessary to help the industry become more sustainable with regulation being an essential component.

Two drafts of the Regulatory Impact Assessment have been shared with stakeholders, including the farming unions, to date. These documents were shared in confidence as, while the assessment is in development, the release of information contained within them could be misleading. We will continue to work with stakeholders on the development of the Regulatory Impact Assessment, which will be published alongside any regulations when laid before the Senedd in accordance with Welsh Government procedure.

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?

The traffic light system represents the broad phases to illustrate how we can begin lifting lockdown measures. They are not intended to be exhaustive and the specific details are being developed in consultation with relevant sectors. I will not be making a decision on regulations to tackle agricultural pollution until we have a clear understanding of the sector's ability to implement regulatory measures in the context of operational restrictions related to the pandemic.

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?

Covid-19 has put pressure on the resources across the Welsh Government but we remain committed to our intention of publishing a White Paper this year which will lay the foundation for an Agriculture (Wales) Bill in the next Assembly term.

The summary of responses to the Sustainable Farming and our Land consultation was published on 6 May.

Covid-19 has impacted upon our current co-design plans. We have extended the co-design survey and 1-1 registration by a month to the end of June to increase numbers. The timing of arrangements for easing lockdown constraints has meant future face to face workshops are not possible. Mentor a Busnes is currently developing proposals to deliver virtual workshops in July. Co-design is focused on the development of the more practical elements of the scheme and future engagement will be possible when the secondary legislation is being developed.

Food

19. What assessment have you made on the cost of the lockdown on the food production and manufacturing sector?

It is still too early to make an accurate assessment of the impact of lockdown on the food and drink sector, and any assessment will have a degree of uncertainty because of the integration of what is produced and sold in Wales being part of a wider UK system. However, the evidence available appears to suggest the impact to be varied, depending on what businesses produce and the location of their markets.

Businesses involved in the wholesale and service sectors have been impacted as a result of the complete closure of hospitality and tourism, along with greatly reduced public sector catering in schools, colleges and universities. The closure of pubs, coffee shops, restaurants and particularly the national fast food chains have impacted sales of milk and premium red meat cuts. The effects have been compounded in some cases by export markets not being able to take cuts of meat that are not favoured in the domestic market.

Businesses supplying the retail sector have seen increased demand for product. Research commissioned by the Welsh Government shows for the 12 weeks ending 19 April, total grocery sales across the UK were up 9.1%, while in Wales over the last four weeks of this period sales were up over 10.7%. Convenience stores and online deliveries have seen the most significant increase in sales, up 40% and 43% respectively. Manufacturers are reporting anecdotally that demand continues to be over 100% for the time of year.

At the initial stages of the pandemic both manufacturers and retailers were reporting employee absence rates of up to 15%, this appears to have returned to more normal levels. There are also additional business operational costs with new working practices, new staff, a significant uplift in the low margin on-line home delivery channel and a drop off of high margin convenience foods towards lower margin cook from scratch products. Manufacturers have reduced the number of promotional items and options for pack sizes to enable them to maximise production. This has had an impact on the convenience sector in particular, and the removal of promotions may have contributed to an increase in basket costs.

Food Innovation Wales has conducted an impact survey of 250 businesses representing all aspects of the sector:

- 39% of respondents reported a severe negative impact on sales and customers. The most significant impact has been in relation to staffing, logistics and sourcing ingredients.
- 12% of companies reported an increase in sales.
- 46% of companies had diversified to sell their products in a different way (e.g. direct sales to consumers), but some have concerns about long term sustainability of this business model.
- Over 90% of businesses surveyed were aware of the support schemes available. Businesses were reluctant to take on debt, with the majority of businesses having no plans to access loans or alternative finance.

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?

The first challenge in planning support for the hospitality and food and drink service sectors is to gather and analyse the evidence on what has happened within this sub-sector. The immediate challenge is to focus and support recovery in the Welsh Food and Drink industry. The Welsh Government and the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board are working with partners to pinpoint the issues and support businesses through these challenging times. The first task is to understand the situation and help stabilise businesses, then the food and drink industry can move into a recovery phase. Relevant to this, Visit Wales is working with industry partners to develop guidance for the hospitality sector on how businesses can safely re-open. The Tourism Management Board is meeting with the industry every week to identify and discuss issues and share information.

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?

The measures introduced when the food supply chain was suffering extreme stress are temporary. Issues such as drivers' hours are a reserved matter, and the Welsh Government is engaged with Defra to ensure these issues are reviewed as necessary. The on-going need for, and impact of, other mitigation measures is discussed at meetings of the UK Retailer Forum and Food Chain Emergency Liaison Group. The Welsh Government thinks a cautious approach is best. Removing measures too soon would reduce operational flexibility in the supply chain and we cannot rule out further disruption to the supply chain depending on how the Covid-19 outbreak develops.

Food Processing

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

In our response to the Committee report we outlined a number of research projects and investments we have made recently to support the strategic development of processing facilities in Wales. The need for this work has not changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We continue to seek new opportunities and identify potential gaps through links with initiatives such as Food Innovation Wales, Project Helix and Cywain. Our Cluster network is encouraging local and national co-operation and collaboration between businesses both prior to and during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The development of additional processing capacity would support these existing initiatives. The Welsh Government is monitoring how Covid-19 is impacting consumer patterns and supply chains. It is too early to be certain whether changes will be long lasting but we will be mindful of how changing trends might be relevant to processing capacity and production.

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?

The Welsh Government is satisfied that food security and local supply chains are reflected in Sustainable Farming and our Land and food policies. The policies are complementary. Last summer's consultation on a new food strategy included the importance of strengthening business clusters and networks, and adding value to products, throughout the whole supply chain.

It is important the question of food security in Wales and how supply chains function and can develop is considered taking account of the reality that Wales' food supply and security are wholly bound up in how the UK is supplied. Supply chains extend internationally and what counts is the external border between the UK and other countries, trade flows, labour migration, currency and tariff effects. Within the UK, the food system does not recognise internal borders and Wales is not a separate entity in this respect to the rest of the UK. Food in raw, processed and fully manufactured form, ingredients and components necessary to process and manufacture food, to raise animals or grow crops, all move around the UK irrespective of internal borders. The Welsh Government's focus is accordingly on questions of how to improve the productivity and sustainability of Wales' primary and secondary food businesses, how to strengthen and grow routes to market, how to add value to products, and how to address the questions of public benefit concerning healthier diets and the affordability of food for people of limited means.

As part of the UK, and for the reasons given above, the Welsh Government is interested in the question of UK food security. With the other devolved administrations, we engage with Defra on work to assess the UK's food security and have the opportunity to comment on plans and assessments,

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?

The Welsh Government through its business support programmes for the food sector is able to offer a wide variety of advice to businesses to help minimise their carbon impact. Through Food Innovation Wales and Project Helix we are able to provide technical advice about making production more efficient and reducing waste. The Advanced Manufacturing Centre recently established in North Wales regards the food and drink sector as a key area and will be working with businesses on measures to improve productivity with consequent benefits of reducing carbon footprints. The Welsh Government is also working with the food business cluster networks to encourage collaboration between businesses to support local supply chains, again with the potential to minimise carbon footprints.

We have seen local collaborations as a result of the pandemic, for example wholesaler supply to care homes and the introduction of delivery services by small local shops.

Brexit

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

The Covid-19 crisis has ultimately meant many officials who were working on preparations for the end of the transition period have been diverted to work on our response to the emergency. Officials are working hard to respond to Covid-19 while also continuing to prepare for the end of transition. This is against a backdrop of continued uncertainty in our preparation. Clarity on the application of the Northern Ireland Protocol and any trade agreement with the EU is unlikely to emerge until much later in the year, making preparations for the end of year deadline extremely challenging. I have echoed the First Minister's calls for an extension during my meetings with Defra but the UK Government refuses to countenance this. As the First Minister said "we simply cannot, combating Covid-19, do justice to the needs and interests of Wales in the negotiating process". Businesses are in a particularly difficult position; dealing with the impacts of Covid-19 whilst considering their future as crisis measures are loosened. It is a step too far to ask businesses to prepare for a new trading arrangements at the same time.

26. The timescales for the following:

- **Fuel Poverty Strategy Consultation**

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic made it appropriate for me to pause the public consultation on our new plan to tackle fuel poverty, which I had hoped to start shortly after I gave evidence to the Committee's inquiry into fuel poverty. This delay has provided a useful opportunity to revalidate the plan in light of Covid-19 and to ensure all the issues highlighted in the Committee's report have been considered and, where appropriate, addressed in the new plan before the public consultation begins. I expect to be able to publish the draft plan no later than the end of September for a consultation of twelve weeks. I expect the final plan to be published no later than the end of February 2021.

- **National Development Framework**

The intention was to submit the National Development Framework to the Senedd for scrutiny in April but this has not been possible in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is our strong hope the Senedd will be able to scrutinise the Framework when it reconvenes after the summer recess. The Minister for Housing and Local Government aims to agree a new timetable for production, with potential publication in February 2021. These dates will, of course, be subject to final confirmation in due course, as Senedd and Welsh Government business schedules are confirmed.

- **Lucy's Law**

Our proposed changes to commercial third party sales of puppies and kittens goes beyond the 'Lucy's Law' campaign and legislation introduced in England so we should refrain from comparisons. The working title for our Regulations will be Animal Welfare (Licencing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

As the pressures brought about as a result of Covid-19 are easing, although we still have much to do, I am pleased to advise I have recently given permission for officials to start the process for drafting new legislation for commercial third party sales and to undertake a final public consultation on the direction of travel.

The purpose of a consultation is to enable further evidence to be provided and for key stakeholders and the people of Wales, including children and young people, to have the opportunity to have their voices heard. How we achieve this during lockdown has to be taken in to account and my officials are exploring opportunities to use social media options in a positive way. However, it is fair to say the Welsh Government has made numerous announcements on its desire to bring forward these legislative changes and there is, given the interest in this subject, heightened awareness of what we are trying to achieve. We are therefore carefully considering the length of consultation. Dependant on the finer detail and the legislative journey we would be looking for the Regulations to be laid and made as quickly as possible with a coming in to force date providing an adequate cushion for both business and enforcement changes to be made.

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.

From 1 June, Wales' coronavirus regulations were amended to allow any kind of outdoor activity to be undertaken locally. The training of racing pigeons is allowed as long as it is local, in general within five miles of a person's home, and social distancing and hygiene guidelines are followed.

Regards
Lesley

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs