



Priorities for the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: NFFN Cymru Response

Background

The [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) (NFFN) is a farmer led organisation established in January 2018. We are uniting farmers across the UK who are committed to growing and providing healthy, nutritious food whilst managing their land for wildlife and the environment. We have 10 farmers on our NFFN Cymru steering group, and almost 300 farmer members in Wales who support our manifesto, clearly emphasising the support for nature friendly land management from farmers who are looking for a voice to influence future policies.

Context

Nature-friendly farming plays an integral part in supporting vibrant rural communities and economies, whilst producing plentiful healthy sustainable food and improving public health. Furthermore, farming with nature can be the most profitable way of producing food; the [Less is More](#) approach that implements sustainable livestock and/or cropping systems in line with the natural productive capacity of the land ([maximum sustainable output](#)) can be a route to increasing farm business profitability, thus creating more resilient rural economies and communities.

A shift towards more nature and climate friendly farming approaches will also help tackle the climate and nature crises – arguably the biggest threat facing agriculture. Our food and farming system depends on a healthy and resilient environment; healthy soil, water, air and biodiversity are the very building blocks of food production. When these natural resources are degraded, it threatens the resilience and longevity of Welsh agriculture, which as we know is the backbone of our rural economies and communities.

Put simply, nature friendly farming offers countless benefits for those areas that sit under the Committee's remit. To help achieve this, we believe that the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's short term strategic priorities should cover the following key areas.

Agriculture (Wales) White Paper

With the Welsh Government intending to introduce a new **Agriculture Bill** in the first year of this Senedd; scrutiny of this landmark piece of legislation will be vital to ensure that Wales' agriculture industry is well equipped and supported to produce plentiful healthy food, whilst also tackling the nature and climate crises.

Scrutiny of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme, which is likely to be the main vehicle for agricultural support following the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme and associated agri-environment schemes should also feature prominently within the Committee's work programme.

Whilst the NFFN agrees with the high-level direction of travel proposed in the recent Agriculture (Wales) White Paper, there is a worrying lack of clarity surrounding the detail of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme and the associated transition period as the Basic Payment Scheme is phased out.

Community Food Strategy

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government outlines plans to develop a **Wales Community Food Strategy**. We need a transformative food system that ensures farmers earn a fair return whilst ensuring food is healthy, affordable and sustainably produced. Many NFFN farmers are changing the way they supply the food they produce, and are marketing directly to the public, through local supply chains or online (please see our [Feeding the Nation](#) report)

A shift towards a more local food system can yield numerous positive results, with the recent UK report [The Case of Local Food](#) highlighting that a 10% shift in the food retail market towards more sustainable local food



systems could yield up to 200,000 more jobs, support a green economic recovery and restore nature. Attention should be given to areas such as public procurement and routes to market, secondary production and retention of value, as well as promoting horticulture and mixed farming enterprises. As such, we consider the scrutiny of this potentially transformative strategy to be a key priority for the Committee.

Tree Planting Targets & Carbon Offsetting

The Welsh Government's plans for **woodland creation in Wales** sets out the need to plant 43,000ha of new woodland by 2030 and 180,000ha by 2050. There is no doubt that trees play a vital role in addressing the nature and climate crisis – woodland makes us more resilient to climate change and can create a nature-rich landscape that is beneficial to both farmland and wildlife.

However, this is an ambitious stretch and a roll-out to this magnitude could have [unintended consequences if not actioned cautiously](#), not least on our rural communities and economies. Large-scale investment companies and private businesses have been [buying farms across the country](#) to plant trees to **offset carbon emissions**, threatening local culture, language and heritage. Planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can also threaten farmland biodiversity. We call on the committee to scrutinise the Welsh Government's tree planting targets, to ensure they don't adversely affect our rural communities, farm businesses and valuable farmland habitats and species.

National Minimum Standards for Agriculture

The recent Agriculture (Wales) White paper outlines plans to create new **National Minimum Standards (NMS)** and enforcement regime for agriculture. Maintaining our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards has never been as important. Scrutiny of the proposed NMS would be welcomed to ensure that farmers are able to produce safe, healthy food whilst helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish

Whilst **international trade** is listed as one of the Committee's work areas, we appreciate that this field largely falls under the competence of the UK Government's Department for International trade. However, we remain concerned that future trade deals could undercut the high standards set by Welsh and UK farmers. As such, we would encourage the Committee to scrutinise new international trade regime to ensure they do not expose us to the sort of low standards and cut-price competition that will drive farmers towards more harmful ways of farming for both land and livestock.

Conclusion

Given the *Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's* wide remit, we believe that the above issues strongly lend themselves to joint working and collaboration with the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee.

Nature-friendly farming has a big role to play in ensuring a Green Recovery following Covid-19. It can help improve public health, rural economies and communities as well as underpin food security. Farmers are key to addressing these issues, and urgent policy support is needed to take nature friendly farming to scale.

Thank you for considering our submission. We hope the committee shares our view on the importance of nature friendly farming in meeting the Committee's objectives. We look forward to working closely with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee over the term of the sixth Senedd.