

Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR03

Ymateb gan NFU Cymru
Evidence from NFU Cymru

Climate Change, Environment and
Infrastructure Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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Your Ref:
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E-mail:
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Date: 9th August 2021

Dear Committee

Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

NFU Cymru very much welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Committee's assessment of priority issues to consider over the next 12-18 months. The committee has a wide remit covering a range of issues, all of which impact to greater or lesser extent on Welsh agriculture and the interests of our members.

NFU Cymru's vision is for a productive, profitable, and progressive farming sector producing world renowned climate friendly food in an environment and landscape that provides habitats for our nature to thrive. Welsh food and farming can deliver economic, environmental, cultural, and social benefits for all the people of Wales whilst meeting our ambition for net zero agriculture by 2040.

After almost half a century we have just stepped outside the Common Agricultural Policy, a development which heralds a significant change for our sector, as we seek to develop a made in Wales for Wales agricultural policy. We do not share the Welsh Government's view that all the economic, social, and cultural benefits provided by Welsh farming, can in future be secured through the Sustainable Farming Scheme whose focus is predominantly on environmental outcomes.

So that we are able to deliver on our aspiration of producing the most climate friendly food, against a backdrop of nature thriving we need the Welsh Government to recognise the supply of safe, affordable, high-quality food as a public good and put the right policy framework in place via its Agriculture Bill to encourage productive, climate friendly agriculture.

This means Welsh Government working with the industry to design a comprehensive and fully integrated food and farming policy built around three cornerstones of

productivity, stability, and the environment. This way we believe Welsh agriculture can deliver the multiple objectives of securing our food supplies, enabling nature to thrive and meet our aspirations for net zero whilst sustaining our rural communities and culture.

Ahead of May's Senedd elections, NFU Cymru produced a Manifesto for the 2021-2026 term, setting out in some detail our key asks of the Welsh Parliament and Welsh Government for the next five years, to help us deliver on this vision. This comprehensive document can be accessed [here](#).

Priority Issues for the Committee to consider

As farmers we are very much on the front line of **climate change** impacts. The continued extreme weather events that we have experienced in recent years is further evidence that our climate is changing. Wales is well suited to food production and, in a changing climate, will increasingly become a country naturally favoured for climate-friendly agriculture through grass-based production systems producing high quality red meat and dairy.

We believe agriculture is uniquely placed to be part of the solution, as both an emissions source and a sink. Farmers in Wales aspire to produce the most climate-friendly food in the world. Recent research has pointed to the fact that Welsh livestock production systems are amongst the most sustainable in the world.

NFU Cymru has a vision for Net Zero Agriculture by 2040, and we believe that this can be achieved by implementing measures that support a thriving and productive agricultural industry and not by displacing farming with other land uses such as large-scale afforestation or rewilding or offshoring food production. Instead, a range of measures are needed including improvements to productive efficiency, improving land management, and enhancing land use to capture more carbon and boosting renewable energy generation.

We are also keen to ensure that Welsh Government understand the long-term impacts of the policy decisions they make in relation to agriculture and that they ensure that the burden of decarbonisation does not fall disproportionately on farming and rural communities. With the prestigious COP26 summit taking place in Glasgow we must ensure that agriculture's contribution to mitigating the effects of climate change is fairly reflected in the debates and discussions around COP26.

Over the next year we see a vital role for the committee in engaging with the sector to understand and promote its net zero and climate ambitions, and in scrutinising the work of Welsh Government to ensure that they institute a range of actions that deliver, incentivise and reward production efficiency and carbon sequestration activity on Welsh farms. The committee should scrutinise Government to ensure a Just Transition and that the burden of decarbonisation does not fall unequally on rural communities.

NFU Cymru would be concerned to see targets for **tree cover** progressed in a way which fails to safeguard the multiple economic, environmental, social, and cultural benefits that Welsh farming provides. NFU Cymru supports the policy principle of “right tree in the right place”.

It is not reasonable for Welsh Government to establish targets for tree planting or a National Forest without understanding costs to farming and the food and drink sector, that are central to the Welsh economy and our rural communities.

External investors in commercial forestry are already buying up farms in Wales for afforestation and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has adopted a policy to acquire land for planting. Consideration must also be given to the impact on tenant farming. The risk of tenancies being terminated or not renewed by landlords to take forward tree planting is significant. All of these have the potential to damage fragile rural economies as the financial benefits are shifted away from those embedded in their rural communities.

Although the Water Resources Regulations 2021 have been remitted to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee for consideration we would make the point that these **regulations** and the risk of falling foul of **regulations** in general remains a source of considerable anxiety for farming families, and in our own survey work of NFU Cymru members it comes across as one of the key factors having a negative impact on farming businesses.

Welsh Government has committed, through the Programme for Government, to introduce a Clean Air Act consistent with WHO Guidance, also extending the provision of air quality monitoring. NFU Cymru identifies that the Committee will have a key role in ensuring that any future legislative framework is underpinned by solid scientific evidence, targets established are practical, achievable, and cost effective for the farming sector with appropriate mechanisms established to safeguard against unintended consequences such as the off-shoring of food production to other parts of the world where environmental standards are lower.

Welsh Government, in their recent Agriculture Bill (Wales) White paper propose National Minimum Standards and enforcement through Civil Sanctions. NFU Cymru believes the development of the regulatory framework should be based on science and evidence and start with a full-scale review and gap analysis of the current regime. Enforcement should be proportionate and fair with appropriate separation of powers.

Whilst NFU Cymru accepts the need for a level of regulation we are firmly of the view that it should be proportionate and based on risk, science, and evidence. We see a key role for this Committee between now and 2026 in terms of ensuring proper scrutiny and accountability when it comes to the deployment of regulatory options by Welsh Government, and bodies working for or controlled by Welsh Government.

Rural Wales needs **an enabling planning system**, with a uniform, consistent and easy to understand approach to planning across each of Wales' local authority areas and designated landscapes. At the moment there appears to be a tension between the regulatory requirements farmers are subject to, and the planning system which can create barriers to regulatory compliance.

The disparate nature of regulations and guidance covering nitrates, phosphates and ammonia lack the necessary strategic oversight and lead to unintended consequences, ultimately preventing farmers from making investments that will deliver environmental improvements on their farms.

We need a planning system which allows farmers to meet with statutory and regulatory requirements as well as allow the investment on farm which will allow agriculture to develop and diversify, rather than hold it back. We would ask that the committee consider an examination of **the planning system** as a priority issue.

Wales geography and topography make us as a nation particularly suited to generating power from renewable energy sources such as wind, hydro, and photo-voltaic developments. NFU Cymru's ambition is that every farm has the opportunity to become a net energy exporter, and in doing so is able to help contribute towards the Welsh Government's Greenhouse Gas Reduction targets and towards our own target of carbon neutral agriculture by 2040.

Our renewables sector would benefit from a simpler planning system, with issues around poor grid connectivity addressed as well. NFU Cymru believes the committee should consider how **Wales' renewables sector** can be developed sensitively, taking on board the needs and desires of local communities.

Rural connectivity or perhaps more correctly poor rural connectivity remains a huge source of frustration for our members and was brought into particular focus when we saw a huge increase in the number of people working from home because of the coronavirus pandemic

Poor mobile phone signal in rural Wales is also a source of real frustration. With farmers and rural dwellers increasingly reliant on mobile devices for communications and are often being let down by the poor supporting infrastructure.

Digital exclusion can be an impediment to the performance of legal obligations such as the completion of VAT returns and the reporting of livestock movements. It can also reduce a rural business's competitiveness by for example throwing up barriers to the marketing and promotion of that business online, and conversely it can also prevent the business from being able to shop around for inputs at a more competitive price. The feelings of social isolation that can stem from being digitally excluded, particularly for young people cannot be overlooked either.

We see an essential role for this Committee in terms of ensuring that Welsh Government continues to work with communications delivery partners to ensure that all parts of Wales can benefit from the modern communications systems that we are increasingly reliant upon.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen the public **access the countryside** in unprecedented numbers for the purposes of exercise and recreation. Despite the fact that Wales has the greatest length of rights of way per square km of any nation in the UK, and a threefold increase in land accessible by right we have seen over the last twenty years a significant strain has been placed on our rural areas including instances of anti-social behaviour, littering, lighting fires, dogs worrying livestock and damage to access infrastructure, including footpaths themselves.

NFU Cymru would not support legislative reforms to increase levels of public access to the countryside, and we believe that there is a role for the committee to play in ensuring that Welsh Government commits to introducing an enforceable code which addresses the costs and impacts on Welsh farm businesses associated with recreational access and ensuring that Welsh Government provides additional investment for appropriate infrastructure.

The Welsh Government Programme for Government confirms their intention to designate a new National Park to cover the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. We hope that as the Government progresses this proposal that this committee provides scrutiny to ensure that the voices of the people, businesses and communities who have shaped this landscape are listened to so that they and their future generations can continue to live, work, and prosper in the area.

NFU Cymru recognises the challenge presented to a committee of six members meeting fortnightly in terms of getting to grips with a range of pressing work areas whilst also delivering an effective scrutiny function. As a Union we welcome the committee's pro-active stance in terms of identifying priority issues for future consideration through stakeholder engagement, whilst stressing the point that we would not want this to mean the de-emphasising of the committee's other important role in terms of scrutinising relevant Ministers, Welsh Government officials and public bodies.

NFU Cymru very much looks forward to working with the CCE&I Committee over the course of this sixth Senedd, and if there is anything further you would like to discuss then please do get in touch.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Thomas'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'M'.

Political Adviser
NFU Cymru