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Chair
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Dear Chair

Priorities for the Committee - Panel Session with Farming Organisations - Questions not reached on Bovine TB

Firstly, can I thank the Committee for the invitation to attend the evidence session on the 11th November 2021 and for giving NFU Cymru the opportunity to set out priorities across a range of important policy areas that will be taken forward during the course of this Senedd. At NFU Cymru we very much look forward to continuing to work with you as a Committee to help deliver our vision 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.

Thank you for your letter dated the 16th November providing the opportunity for comment on the questions the Committee was unable to cover due to time constraints on Bovine TB. You have asked for any information that we would like to provide on the following two points:-

- The bovine TB disease picture and its impact on farm businesses;
- Views on the Minister's statement that she doesn't have enough legislative resource to introduce a mandatory informed purchasing system to help counter bovine TB.

Before I will seek to provide brief comments on the two points for which you have requested information, you will be aware that subsequent to the evidence session Welsh Government, on the 16th November, launched a consultation on A Refreshed TB Eradication Programme. NFU Cymru is currently seeking views from our membership on the proposals put forward within the consultation and will be submitting a comprehensive response to the consultation ahead of the 8th February 2022 deadline. Given the importance of this consultation and some of the proposals within the consultation, in particular around changes to compensation arrangements, we hope that the Committee will be able to consider and scrutinise this matter in some detail in 2022.

There is no doubt that the disease remains one of the main barriers to the Welsh agricultural sector realising its aspirations and potential. NFU Cymru recognises that there are a number of different statistics that can be used to measure current levels of disease. Welsh Government point to the fact that there has been a 48% decrease in new TB incidents since 2009, this is to be welcomed. However, 98,640 cattle were slaughtered as a result of bovine TB between 2010-2020 inclusive - and 10,700 over the past 12 months, this is inescapable proof of the impact of this disease on Welsh farming. In the 12 months to the end of June 2021, there were 633 new incidents on farm, an increase of 3% on the previous year. At the end of June 21 there were 606 herds under restriction as a result of Bovine TB, an increase of 2% on the previous year.

A Bovine TB incident impacts on all aspects of everyday farm management. Marketing will be adversely affected, in particular for those farmers who rely on selling store cattle, breeding animals and calves. Costs increase as there will invariably be a requirement to purchase extra feed and bedding, secure additional housing and farmers also incur higher labour costs to cope with additional animals on farm as a result of TB movement restrictions. There are also costs associated with the significant extra paperwork required as a result of dealing with a TB incident.

More cattle on the holding can put pressure on farm infrastructure such as slurry storage capacity. This has become even more of an issue since the introduction of the All Wales NVZ Regulations on the 1st April 2021. Welsh Government have made no provisions within the regulations for the exceptional circumstances that can arise as a result of the impact of Bovine TB restrictions. There are two key matters to consider, pressure on storage capacity and restrictions on spreading caused as a result of the farming by calendar approach adopted under the NVZ rules and the fact that farms under restriction are unable to export slurry off their farm due to concern over the bacterium being present in the slurry. Some farmers will be placed in an impossible situation with the adherence to one regulation almost certainly meaning that the other regulation will be breached.

The loss of adult productive cattle as a result of a TB outbreak reduces production and therefore reduces the income on affected farms through loss of milk yield on dairy farms or a reduction in numbers of calves born on beef units. These are substantial consequential losses that farming businesses face as a result of a bovine TB outbreak and the more animals that are lost from a herd and the longer the TB incident lasts then the greater the losses, and the higher the costs, inflicted on the business. It is important to note that current compensation arrangements do not in any way cover the consequential losses (the loss of production, inability to market produce, increased housing and feeding costs etc.) sustained by the business as the result of a TB breakdown.

Farmers are extremely concerned to read the options put forward by the 16th November Welsh Government consultation with regards to changes to current compensation arrangements. NFU Cymru categorically rejects any move to tabular valuations. NFU Cymru's firm view is that compensation arrangements must reflect the value of the animal's individual merits, and this can only be achieved via an individual valuation. Welsh Government suggests the review is brought about by overspend of the budget. We are absolutely clear that the only way to reduce any overspend that government may have is to ensure that the disease is controlled quickly and effectively so that the disease has the smallest possible impact on the national herd. The fewer animals that need to be slaughtered as a result of bovine TB, the lower the compensation bill and the lower the cost for both Government and industry.

When considering the impact on farming businesses, it is extremely important to also consider the emotional and mental anguish that this disease places on farming families, seeing bloodlines that have been bred on the farm for many generations being lost to this disease is devastating and we must not forget the strain associated with the disease puts not just on farmers but also the veterinary profession in Wales who work so closely with farming families.

NFU Cymru fully recognises that Bovine TB is a complex disease that requires a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to control and eradicate this disease from Wales, we are broadly supportive of the Regionalised Approach to TB Eradication introduced by Welsh Government in 2017. We agree that in areas where the disease is not endemic that stringent cattle movement and testing requirements are needed to prevent the disease gaining a foothold. The frustration of farmers is focussed on the fact that in areas of the country where both cattle and wildlife are suffering from this horrendous disease that little is being done to actively remove infection from the wildlife population.

We are deeply frustrated that Welsh Government refuses to learn the lessons from England, and all the other countries in the world, who have successfully tackled this disease through a comprehensive TB

eradication strategy. Welsh Government appears to be unique in its thinking that this disease can be eradicated without proactively dealing with diseased animals in both cattle and wildlife populations.

In relation to informed purchasing, in principle NFU Cymru supports proposals that give potential purchasers of animals as much information as possible about the animals they are considering purchasing. It is important that any system adopted strikes the balance between providing the necessary information required without becoming overly complicated or potentially misinterpreted. We believe that the development of the EID Cymru movement database to include a cattle element could play an important role with regards to informed purchasing, giving potential purchasers of cattle information on the TB testing history of that animal prior to purchase.

We previously welcomed Welsh Government making funding available to allow markets to upgrade their facilities so that information about the status of the animal can be displayed on screen and we would support further funding being made available for this purpose.

Informed Purchasing has been introduced in some other countries but in these countries informed purchasing has been introduced alongside measures to actively control the disease in wildlife. By removing the reservoir of infection in wildlife farmers in high incidence areas have a chance to become disease free and improve their status. The feeling in high incidence areas of Wales is that until the reservoir of infection in the wildlife population is tackled then farmers have limited opportunity to become and remain clear of restrictions and by introducing informed purchasing on a mandatory level it creates a two-tier market for stock with the farmers in high incidence areas feeling their ability to improve their disease status is hampered by Government Policy.

In summary, NFU Cymru believe that the development of EID Cymru as a cattle database may provide the opportunity for more information to be made available on the disease status of the animal / herd and there is the potential for this to cover other diseases in addition to Bovine TB. We also support measures that make it easier for this information to be provided at the point of sale. Our current thinking is that there is a need for further discussion between Government and Industry on how these proposals can be taken forward and practically delivered, we do not believe that any legislative proposals can be considered until EID Cymru is fully operational.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide comment on these two matters, NFU Cymru very much looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee over the course of the Senedd.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dylan Morgan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'D' and 'M'.

Dylan Morgan

Head of Policy

NFU Cymru