



**Confor**  
Promoting forestry and wood  
Hyrwyddo coedwigaeth a choed

## **An inquiry on Farming Connect on 22 February 2024 by The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee**

Confor welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence for the committee on how Farming Connect specifically supports Forestry Businesses. Confor ([www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)) is the not-for-profit organisation for the UK's sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. It has 1,500 member companies, representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain from seed to structure in the UK.

The Farming Connect platform has the capacity to host the Continuous Personal Development (CPD) programme for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and we, Confor, believe we could add significant value to the writing group. Forestry and woodland management are applicable to farm profitability, by supporting improvements to soil, habitats, water and air quality, as well as potentially improving animal welfare with shelter and shade carbon storage, the economic return of harvested wood products and the contribution to security of future wood supplies. To realise these improvements, it is anticipated that farm business owners will need training and understanding, this is when the expertise from the forestry sector can support the farming sector.

To support the SFS, multiple woodland themed learning units need to be considered. Initially, the first module should include a high-level overview of information on the rules and regulations in forestry including felling licences, grants, potential routes to harvesting timber, deer and pest management. Once completed, other modules such as those listed below will be able to support the farming business in the direction they want to take. Due to the length of time woodland operations can take, it is strongly suggested that the initial woodland module is mandatory in the first year, and potentially each year afterwards. This prevents the farming business to 'do and forget' the valuable information learned.

Ideas for other woodland modules:

- Benefits of trees on farms
- Marketing Timber
- Creating new woodland
- Managing existing new woodland
- Agro-forestry options for farms
- Silvicultural systems explained
- Deer management and venison

After completing these modules no landowner will become an expert in woodland management but will have enough information to make informed decisions and have the opportunities to be signposted towards further information along with industry experts for further help and advice as needed. Signposting should include the Institute of Chartered Foresters and other professional bodies and/or a register of consultants/agents who can help support landowners.

We are concerned that if only a single CPD module on woodland is created and made available, it will not give farmers sufficient information and could even create further problems. Woodland management is a long-term commitment, it takes years to manage and to complete a cycle, this can be seen as very different to the normal yearly agricultural cycle, hence why suitable support is needed.

The role of trees on farms has long been under-estimated, hence the inclusion of the Benefits of Trees on Farms module. This would seek to change attitudes and potentially increase the uptake of woodland creation schemes. It is important the landowners see the increased benefits they achieve with tree and woodland management, so they proactively want to engage rather than being forced to comply.

The units listed above would be custom written for Farming Connect, as although the information exists, it does not exist in 1 hour e-learning blocks. As mentioned above, the forestry industry and specifically Confor should be involved at the writing stage to ensure the modules are suitable for both sectors.

In conclusion, farming and farm woodlands need to be better aligned. The forestry sector can help support this process, with its wide range of knowledge and experience. Farming Connect has a key role and can help bring the two sectors together.

**Action Point: Additional Paper from Confor as requested during the in person inquiry.**

*During the session, you agreed to write to the Committee to provide further detail on how Confor and Farming Connect might complement each other in terms of the woodland elements of the Sustainable Farming Scheme. The Committee looks forward to receiving your response to this.*

Additional comments:

A working group should be set up to create the CPD elements and Confor are keen to be involved.

All registered woodland planners should have access within the mentoring scheme to support farmers and not be bound by a procurement process. These are professional foresters and registered with NRW. A cut of the money will then not go to a third-party making management plans uneconomically viable for the forester's time and preventing farmers having access to this opportunity. Confor is keen to ensure that an unbiased approach can be undertaken.

In addition to the modules set out above, consideration should be given to:

- Carbon sequestration with woodlands
- Investigating economical models of farm woodlands and working at scale and what other options are possible outside of the SFS
- Species choice for productivity and potential economic returns.
- Support should be provided by Confor, the Institute of Chartered Foresters, Bangor University and Forest Research

The format should work for the sectors and be varied such as podcasts, online learning, in person events, example farms and literature and should not be limited to the sole SFS applicants.


Learning should be for all land-based practices as the future model of farming is land management and this includes woodland and habitat management as well as agriculture. The conservationists and foresters need to learn too about agriculture and their constraints to work better together, in harmony.

The name farming connect might need a re-brand to fulfil its future purpose.

Sign posting, there is limited help and support for landowners on pre-engagement of an agent, below is an example of what is available in England. As Confor Wales, we are interested in how we can investigate utilizing something similar, it might need to be one step apart from farming connect, we are keen to discuss this further if the committee are keen.

**Subject:** Maximize revenue from tree planting

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**Tree Planting - Benefits, Grants and Support**

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All of this should have an overall working group, with a clear vision, objectives, and ability to adapt and change as the needs of the SFS grow and develop to ensure it continues to serve the needs of the sectors involved.