



Evidence paper for Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs for General Scrutiny at ETRA Committee

Information on key achievements provided to aid the Committee in advance of the Cabinet Secretary's attendance at General Scrutiny on 5 March.

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1. Sustainable Farming Scheme

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) commenced 1 January 2026, after the secondary legislation required to operate the scheme and to transition from the Basic Payment Scheme, was passed in December. This is the result of extensive partnership working with stakeholders, in particular through the SFS Ministerial Roundtable.

This delivers on two Programme for Government commitments:

- To create a new system of farm support that will maximise the protective power of nature through farming, recognising the particular needs of family farms in Wales and acknowledging ecologically sustainable local food production.
- To introduce a transition period to the new farm support scheme, including continuing stability payments, beyond the current Senedd term.

The mood across the agricultural industry towards the SFS is largely positive. Feedback from farmers, for example through the SFS Roadshows undertaken last October, suggests large numbers of farmers are preparing themselves to enter the scheme. However, we will not know how many farmers will join the scheme until after the Single Application Form (SAF) closes on 15 May. The individual actions included within the SFS will support farmers to deliver against the Sustainable Land Management objectives established in the Agriculture (Wales) Act.

Other than further operationalising the SFS, the next significant piece of work is to introduce the Operational and Collaborative Layers of the scheme later this year, and then ongoing throughout the Transition Period. Building upon the foundations of the Universal Layer and the SFS Preparatory Phase schemes, the Operational and Collaborative Layers will support those farmers who want to go further in delivering more targeted actions to improve the resilience of their farm business, as well as important nature and climate commitments.

2. Supporting farmers through the transition from EU funding

Historic support for farmers in Wales came via the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with direct income support payments to farmer under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) - a range of measures to support sustainable land management, farm viability, rural economic growth and community -led development across Wales.

Following EU exit in 2020, the Welsh Government committed to providing domestic funding to maintain BPS payments to farmers in Wales, until the introduction of the new SFS, with around £1.4bn of funding paid to farmers under the scheme since EU exit, providing stability and certainty to the farming sector.

As part of the EU exit deal, RDP funding continued to 31 December 2023, and Welsh Government successfully delivered the programme, fully utilising the £842m budget. In addition, we introduced a range of transitional and preparedness schemes, bridging the gap between EU funding and the introduction of SFS. These schemes not only provided essential support to the farming sector, but also served to pilot new initiatives to ensure that some aspects of SFS, e.g. delivery of Habitat Wales, were tested with the farming sector.

Rural Investment Scheme (RIS) 2022-2025

Over £200m was made available to support sustainable food production and action towards the climate and nature emergencies. This allocation of funding responded to the ending of the EU RDP and ensured continuity of support for important actions previously funded under the RDP. We have supported sustainable food production by Welsh farmers, and we want our rural communities to have a green and sustainable future. This package was designed to support these aims. A strong rural economy can only be beneficial for our rural communities. Funding has included a focus on woodland and forestry, on farm environmental improvements, sustainable land management, productivity and diversification. We have also targeted landscape scale land management and food and farming supply chains.

Many of the schemes that we have supported complement the development of the Sustainable Farming Scheme, which will reward farmers and land managers for the work they do to meet the challenges of the climate and nature emergencies alongside the sustainable production of food, with benefits for food

security in Wales and globally. The schemes we have developed and run over the last three years have laid strong foundations for the Sustainable Farming Scheme – Preparatory Phase, as some schemes continued, and others are being adjusted to ensure best alignment to the ~~coming~~ Sustainable Farming Scheme.

During 2025/2026, the following SFS Preparatory Phase schemes have been offered with the investments being delivered in between 2026 and 2028.

- Growing for the Environment
- Small Grants – Environment
- Small Grants - Efficiency
- Habitat Wales Scheme – Commons
- Organic Conversion Scheme (2026)
- Organic Support (2025)
- Nutrient Management Investment Scheme
- Small Grants – Yard Coverings

3. Review of Agricultural Pollution Regulations

The independently chaired review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations determined that the general approach that the Welsh Government has taken to reduce and prevent agricultural pollution is the right approach. However, the review has also highlighted that there is significant scope to improve the regulations for the benefit of farming and the environment.

In response to the review, the Welsh Government has outlined the next steps for taking forward the 23 recommendations, at pace, detailing the key actions required to take forward a work programme in what is a complex area. Written Statements outlining the next steps were issued on [31 March 2025](#) and [8 October 2025](#).

Due to the complex and technical nature of the recommendations and the importance of a collaborative approach, the experience gained from the Sustainable Farming Scheme stakeholder engagement process has been used to inform the way forward. Welsh Government officials have established a new Task and Finish Group to engage on the recommendations and inform the development of proposals.

The membership of the Task and Finish group includes representatives from a wide range of key stakeholders with significant expertise on the subject areas covered by the recommendations. Members of the Task and Finish Group were provided with the opportunity to meet the Chair of the group and discuss the work programme at the Winter Fair.

The first formal meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 6 January, when the group began to discuss the Terms of Reference and the recommendations. The recommendations will be considered by the Group in 3 phases, the first within 18 months of the completion of the review, the second phase within 18 months to 3 years and the third phase in 3 years or more.

To underpin this work, the procurement of scientific and agronomic advice is being procured in advance of phase 2, to inform the Task and Finish Group's consideration of key recommendations, including alternatives to the closed periods and the 170kg limit and soil protection measures. The Welsh Government is also engaging with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) - a neutral, independent and not-for-profit body - on its

review of industry guidance on best practice in relation to slurry storage for designers, contractors and agricultural operators to inform future slurry storage designs. The potential of a farm pilot or pilots is also being explored.

4. Blas Cymru and growth of the Food sector

Blas Cymru/Taste Wales is Wales' signature trade event to promote the food and drink industry in Wales in a national and international setting. Since its inception in 2017, Blas Cymru/Taste Wales has taken place every two years at the International Convention Centre Wales, (ICCW) in Newport.

From 2017 to 2025, Blas Cymru/Taste Wales has shown consistent growth in scale and economic impact. The number of exhibitors and buyers has steadily increased, with 2025 marking the highest participation and economic return to date. The event's international reach has also expanded, showcasing food and drink from Wales to international buyers from global markets. The value of business opportunities generated by the brokerage has grown from £16 million in 2017 to £45 million in 2025, reflecting Blas Cymru's increasing importance as a trade platform.

The 2021 event, held during the COVID-19 pandemic, still managed to generate significant business, demonstrating the resilience of the sector. The 2023 and 2025 events highlight a post-pandemic rebound, with record-breaking sales and broader international engagement.

Development

Prompted by industry feedback and research, considerations around value for money, and the need to maintain the relevance of Blas Cymru/Taste Wales, the format of the event has changed, with the exhibition and brokerage becoming two different events which are expected to take place in alternating years.

The exhibition has been developed to showcase more extensively the infrastructure support available to the industry in Wales, and the first BC Conference was held on 24 October 2024 at Venue Cymru, Llandudno. The conference was aimed at industry and business. Around 200 people attended, predominantly businesses, and initial feedback was very positive.

The next conference is scheduled for 3rd-4th November 2026, Venue Cymru Llandudno – subject to approvals. The conference joins previously separate events and will showcase the extensive Welsh Government support available for the food and drink industry and include plenary sessions, workshops, an exhibition and a networking dinner.

The Blas Cymru “Meet the Buyer” (Brokerage) event took place from 21–23 October 2025 at the ICCW, Newport. The event brought together 150 producers

and 321 buyers, showcasing 200 new product ranges. Over the course of two days, 2,766 meetings took place. Activities began with a Ministerial Welcome Dinner on the eve of the event, followed by the main brokerage sessions. Delegates also benefited from a networking reception, industry showcases, and guided tours of the exhibition.

The unstaffed industry showcases highlighted a wide range of Welsh food and drink, including GI products, meat, dairy, seafood, and horticulture. To date, the event has generated over £45.2 million in potential sales, demonstrating its strong commercial impact for Welsh producers. Planning is already underway for the next Brokerage event, anticipated to take place in 2027.

Stats from previous Blas Cymru events:

Year	Venue	Theme / Focus	Buyers	Suppliers	Meetings	Sales Generated	Highlights
2017	Celtic Manor Resort	First international showcase	150+ (14 countries)	100+	1,200+	£16m	Launch event, export focus
2019	Celtic Manor Resort	Accelerating Sustainable Growth	190 (18 countries)	150	1,600	£12m	159 new products, 200 buyers
2021	ICC Wales	Food and Drink for Future Generations	200	100+	1,695	£16m	Hybrid format, Welsh Kimchi
2023	ICC Wales	Resilience & Innovation	276 (30 int'l)	122 + 15 Rising Stars	2,100	£38m	203 new products, record sales
2025	ICC Wales	Meet the Supplier	321 (41 int'l)	149 + 22 attended as part of a study tour	2,766	£45.2m	3,000 products, 200+ new launches, Rising Star Marketplace

5. Community Food Strategy

CFS Launch – Programme for Government Commitment

The Community Food Strategy (CFS), published on 29 April 2025, delivers the Programme for Government commitment to increase the production and use of locally sourced food in Wales. Its six objectives aim to use food policy to support Wales' economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being. By strengthening local food systems, the strategy promotes community-based solutions that can help tackle social inequalities, improve diets and health, and support green economic growth.

Grant Funding for Local Food Partnerships

All 22 Local Food Partnerships in Wales have now received grant funding through a cross-portfolio package supporting rural development and work to tackle food poverty. This puts us on track to meet the Community Food Strategy commitment of providing over £2 million of support in this financial year. The funding strengthens local food networks and enables community-led food solutions. Partnerships are developing projects tailored to local needs, working with local authorities, health boards and producers. Activities include trialling farmers' markets and local veg-box schemes, running farm visits and community events, offering cooking skills sessions, and involving residents in local food charters and strategies. A further £240,000 has been made available for collaborations between Partnerships. For example, Bwyd Powys is leading a joint Mid and West Wales project involving four Partnerships to develop a regional food resilience strategy and begin delivering practical action.

Ministerial Advisory Group

The Community Food Strategy includes a commitment to create a Ministerial Advisory Group made up of key stakeholders and delivery partners. The group will provide expert recommendations on turning the strategy into practical, measurable action. Following targeted engagement, the group held its first meeting on 3 December to agree its remit, priorities and membership approach. Core members include representatives from the Future Generations Commissioner, Food Sense Wales and Social Farms & Gardens. The next steps are to develop a structured workplan and recruit wider members through an open expression-of-interest process.

Collaboration with Future Generations Commissioner

Welsh Government has worked with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and Food Sense Wales to produce new guidance for local authorities on strengthening local food systems. Launched by the Future

Generations Commissioner on 19 November at the Wales Real Food & Farming Conference, the guidance responds to growing demand from councils for clear, practical advice. It brings together current good practice across governance, planning, procurement, access to food, food waste and promoting healthy diets. The guidance shows how local action can support national priorities, including the Community Food Strategy, Healthy Weight Healthy Wales, the Child Poverty Strategy and the Well-being of Future Generations Act. This collaborative approach, aligned with Objective 1 of the CFS, is already building local capacity. Ongoing engagement with councils and Local Food Partnerships will continue to share learning, with updates provided to the Ministerial Advisory Group.

Wider aspects of WG delivery referenced in the CFS

a. Public Procurement

The CFS includes a commitment to increase the amount of Welsh public sector spend on food of Welsh origin by at least 50% by 2030. To this extent, Foundational Economy funded food projects have strengthened partnerships between growers, local authorities, health boards and wholesalers, increasing the supply of Welsh, sustainable produce and improving food education and procurement. The Welsh Veg in Schools project has delivered 200,000 portions of organic Welsh vegetables in seven local authorities, boosting child nutrition and contributing to a 20% increase in vegetable-growing land. Support for 52 Welsh food businesses has helped retain 1,119 jobs. Wholesalers are also sourcing more local produce, with Castell Howell increasing its spend on Welsh food by 173%, and Harlech reporting rises of 90% for meat, 120% for milk and 64% for school drinks since 2021. Food Division are currently preparing a commission to reassess Welsh public sector spend on food of Welsh origin.

b. Food in Schools

Work to roll out universal primary free school meals has increased awareness of the benefits of using local food, provided procurement training and supported pilots that encourage growth in locally sourced products on school menus. As the revised Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations come into force in October, we will continue supporting local authorities and the school food supply chain to maximise opportunities for sourcing Welsh produce.

c. Tackling Poverty

Since 2019, over £29 million has been provided to community food organisations to tackle food insecurity and support wider services that build financial resilience. This funding has helped organisations improve access to good-quality food, distribute surplus, and provide essential items such as baby formula and warm goods, alongside support like baby banks, uniform banks and food-skills

activities. In 2025/26, a further £4.8 million is being invested to help alleviate food insecurity and address its root causes.

d. HW: HW

The Healthy Weight Healthy Wales strategy focuses on preventing obesity and supporting early intervention, with targeted help for those most at risk and action to create healthier environments for everyone. A new two-year delivery plan, published in September 2025, sets out cross-sector themes and places renewed emphasis on supporting children and young people to lead healthy lives into adulthood.

6. Strategic Approach to Welsh Fisheries and Aquaculture

On 29 January the Deputy First Minister published a [Written Statement](#) alongside a [progress update](#) highlighting the good progress we've made against our priority areas, 12 months on from publishing the Strategic Approach to Welsh Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Significant progress has been made on Fisheries Management Plans (FMP), including steps to implement Bass and Scallop, development of Wales's first Crabs and Lobsters FMP, and contributions to seven joint UK plans.

To support sustainable economic benefit domestically from our valuable natural resources, we have continued to manage permitted fisheries based on the latest scientific evidence. This has included the introduction of a new adaptive cockle management system, adaptive management of our whelk fishery and the launch of a recreational bluefin tuna fishery.

Sector resilience is being supported through seafood supply chain initiatives, wellbeing projects, and funding schemes, including £1,146,984 awarded under Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS) Round 5, £430,132 through the Coastal Capacity Building Fund.

The Welsh Government has allocated an additional £1.29 million for 2026-27 to support and enhance our important fisheries and aquaculture sectors and our coastal communities across Wales.

The intention is to focus the investment on market development, environmental protection and sustainability, workforce investment, coastal growth and capacity building and science and evidence.

The [WMFS Round 6](#), which opened for applications on 7 January, includes an uplift in its budget to provide the first opportunity for the fisheries sector and our coastal communities to access this additional funding.

Following the EU Reset agreement in 2025, officials continue to press for clarity from the UK Government on the final Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement with regards to Live Bivalve Molluscs (LBMs). We are hopeful it will allow LBMs from class B waters to once again be granted market access to the EU. We recognise how important this is for our aquaculture businesses in Wales.

7. Animal Health and Welfare

Bluetongue update

As of 13 February, for the current 2025-26 vector season, there have been a total of 291 confirmed Bluetongue cases, 269 in England and 22 cases in Wales. Seven of these 22 cases of Bluetongue Serotype 3 (BTV-3) were detected on farms in the border counties of Monmouthshire, Powys and Wrexham during BTV Winter surveillance in Wales. This surveillance took place from November to December in each of the counties bordering England and along the south coast of Wales. In addition, Northern Ireland confirmed its first cases of BTV-3 in December and the Republic of Ireland confirmed its first case in January in County Wexford on the east coast of Ireland. BTV-3 was also confirmed on the Isle of Man in January with an all-Island Bluetongue Restriction Zone declared in response.

Last October, the Deputy First Minister issued a [Written Statement](#) to declare a Bluetongue virus Restricted Zone (RZ) across the whole of Wales, from 10 November 2025. Since then, livestock without clinical signs of disease have been permitted to move freely between England and Wales, and vice versa, under the conditions outlined in a [general licence](#). Farmers do not need to apply for this licence, but they must abide by its conditions when moving livestock and BTV-3 vaccination is recommended. There are separate licences for movements of germplasm in GB, and for livestock movements to Scotland, which remains a Bluetongue free area. All licences are published on the [Gov.UK Website](#).

On 8 December 2025, GB entered the low vector period where the risk of BTV transmission via biting midges is considered to be Very Low. The low vector period is expected to last until March 2026 and is being kept under review.

Bluetongue vaccination remains the most effective way for keepers to reduce the potentially devastating impacts of the disease. Livestock keepers should discuss with their vet the merits and timing of vaccination for their herd, flock and business. We are also working closely with Farming Connect and the Ruminant Health & Welfare group 'Battle Bluetongue' campaign to develop and deliver information for farmers and vets for the season ahead.

Avian Influenza update

As of 13 February, there have been 93 confirmed cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) for the 2025 – 2026 Outbreak season in the UK to date (73 in England, 9 in Scotland, 7 in Wales, and 4 in Northern Ireland).

The risk of HPAI in wild birds in GB is currently assessed as Very High (event occurs almost certainly). The risk of poultry exposure to HPAI in GB is High (event occurs very often) where there is suboptimal biosecurity and Medium (event occurs regularly) where good biosecurity is consistently applied.

An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) has been in force across the UK since January 2025. In response to increased risk levels and an escalating number of findings of HPAI in wild birds, poultry and other captive birds, the Deputy First Minister issued a [Written Statement](#) on the introduction of additional mandatory housing measures across Wales on 13 November 2025. The housing measures apply to keepers who have 50 or more birds, and those that sell or give away eggs or poultry products due to the increased biosecurity risk that comes with trading.

The AIPZ will remain in place until a reduction in risk levels indicates it is no longer required. The requirements within the AIPZ and other measures to reduce the risk of avian influenza transmission remain under regular review based on the latest scientific and ornithological evidence and veterinary advice.

Additional mandatory restrictions also apply to poultry gatherings and in disease control zones in force surrounding infected premises where avian influenza has been confirmed in poultry or other captive birds. Gatherings of certain captive birds may continue, provided they meet the requirements of the [captive bird gatherings general licence](#). However, following the successful completion of disease control activities and surveillance within the zones, all HPAI disease control zones in Wales have now been lifted.

All keepers are legally required to register their birds with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Additionally, it is a legal requirement to complete the [biosecurity self-assessment checklist](#) for keepers of small poultry flocks, commercial poultry, and gamebirds when an AIPZ is in force.

Animal Health and Welfare – Key Achievements

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

The Wales AMR Animal Health Group (2024-2029) advises the Welsh Government on its approach. The Group recommended the [Animal AMR Control Plan for Wales \(2025-2029\)](#) which was published in March 2025.

Delivery continues to be supported by the Welsh Government funded Arwain DGC programme. Arwain DGC has been extremely successful, winning two

awards at the 2025 Antibiotic Guardian awards hosted by UKHSA, in the 'Animal Health, Agriculture & Food Supply' and 'Innovation and Technology' categories. In October 2025, Arwain DGC also received recognition from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations for the projects outstanding demonstration of innovation in advancing Sustainable Livestock Transformation.

TB Eradication Programme

New TB Eradication Programme governance: Programme Board and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established in 2024. This Governance structure has driven several changes, such as a reduction in the number of cattle requiring on farm slaughter and a strengthening of policies to address the increased risk posed by Inconclusive Reactors.

The Programme Board is currently preparing a position paper, informed by the TAG.

Improvements to communications: Ongoing work with NFU Cymru, FUW, Farm Liaison Service and other partners to ensure clarity and empathy with Welsh Government communications. Further work alongside APHA, Defra and industry partners to improve APHA TB correspondence. A number of letters have been revised and agreed; these will be used as a blueprint to revise other letters going forward.

Wider TB improvements and progress include:

Our support to farmers, industry and associate charities (such as Tir Dewi and DPJ) recognising welfare and mental health concerns. Further promotion of information and data sharing across Official Veterinarians (OVs) and to prospective buyers for informed purchasing. The continued success of the **Pembrokeshire and North Wales Projects**, led by vets and farmers to explore local, informed disease control.

Animal Welfare

We continue to work collaboratively with other administrations and stakeholders to consider how our farmed animal welfare standards can be further strengthened, including through joint UK-wide consultations on [lamb welfare](#) and [phasing out cages for laying hens](#).

We published new [standards of modern zoo practice](#) in May 2025, confirming our commitment to responsible, ethical wildlife management.

The [Animal Welfare \(Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets\) Act 2025](#) became law in December 2025, providing powers to crack down on low-welfare pet imports,

tackle puppy and kitten smuggling, and prevent the importation of vulnerable or mutilated animals.

The [Dogs \(Protection of Livestock\) \(Amendment\) Act 2025](#) which modernises out of date legislation to better protect livestock from dog attacks became law in December 2025. This brings the law in line with today's farming practices, animal welfare standards, and policing needs.

[Animal Health and Welfare – Programme for Government Commitments](#)

We have delivered against all five Programme for Government commitments on animal health and welfare which are now closed.