

Environment and Sustainability Committee



Priorities for agricultural policy Issues for the next 12 months

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee's stakeholder evidence session on agricultural policy. We provide here a brief note of our recommended agricultural policy priorities for the Welsh Government over the next 12 months.

1. **Maintain the ban on GM crops in Wales.** We commend the Welsh Government on its stance against the use of genetically modified crops within its boundaries. A first priority for the Welsh Government over the next 12 months must be to maintain this approach.
2. **Secure BPS payments for all eligible Welsh farmers this year** following on from changes in the proposed regional structure and removal of the moorland rate. We welcome the current consultation exercise and will respond to it. However, it will be imperative that the Government announces the outcome as soon as possible, giving farmers the confidence to know what they will be paid through BPS and when they can expect to receive it.

Improve the integration of organic into other sectors of agriculture. For example the HCC Strategic Action Plan for the Red Meat Industry 2015-2020 contains no mention of organic meat production, yet there are many opportunities where increasing organic meat output could support the Plan. For example: increasing sales revenue from Welsh Red meat (see point 5 below); supporting the industry to be more resilient, sustainable and profitable (as organic livestock farm incomes have consistently outperformed similar non-organic farm incomes¹ and are less reliant on purchased inputs such as manufactured fertilisers); maintaining animal welfare credentials. The introduction of specific events targeted at organic systems under the Farming Connect programme would also be useful.

3. **Secure sufficient budget to grow the organic sector in Wales through Glastir Organic to 2020.** The UK market for organic food is growing² and this is an opportunity for agriculture in Wales to meet that growing demand. This growth has been particularly strong in the dairy sector. The Welsh Government can support the sector by ensuring that there is sufficient budget allocated to the Organic Measure through Glastir Organic to enable the sector to grow.
4. **Promote the green image and innovation in Welsh Agriculture** to support its marketing into UK and export markets. Other EU countries (e.g. Netherlands and Denmark) have used organic agriculture to boost food exports into a large growing market in the EU. Outside the EU, Australia has markedly increased its organic farming area for sales to China (now the 3rd largest organic market in the world). Research confirming the nutritional benefits of organic fruit and vegetables³ provides a sound scientific basis for promoting organic foods. Of particular relevance to Wales will be similar studies, currently in preparation, on the nutritional benefits of organic ~~and grass fed meat and dairy~~ products. Hence there is a significant opportunity to encourage

¹ Organic Farm Incomes in England and Wales 2012/13. Mearns, Latham and Gerrard, April 2014. <http://orgprints.org/25016/>

² <http://www.soilassociation.org/news/newsstory/articleid/7805/organic-market-shows-improved-growth-amidst-tumbling-food-prices>

³ Source Information: "Higher antioxidant concentrations and less cadmium and pesticide residues in organically-grown crops: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis." Baranski, M. et al. *British Journal of Nutrition*, July 15th 2014.



5. **Ban neonicotinoids.** The EU is due to review the 2 year moratorium on the use of three neonicotinoid pesticides, later in 2015. Confirming a total ban on the use of neonicotinoids in Wales would further these green credentials.
6. **Increase the diversity of farming in Wales.** In addition to improving marketing opportunities this would improve the industry's resilience to global market changes. A new study⁴ has shown how grazing upland areas with cattle and sheep is better for biodiversity than grazing with sheep alone. Similarly, the Pont Bren case⁵ is used as an exemplar of integrating trees into the agricultural landscape to benefit climate, soils and alleviate local flooding as well as providing diversity to farm businesses. The Welsh Government could prioritise the use of Pillar 2 support to increase diversity in the Welsh agricultural industry.
7. **Remove the 3 hectare minimum claim area for Glastir Organic.** This limits the uptake of the horticultural organic payment. Small scale organic horticultural production needs the benefit of this payment in Wales to put it on an equal footing with organic market gardeners elsewhere in the UK. This would also contribute to increasing diversity within the industry.
8. **Increase the uptake of Catering Mark (Food for Life) in Wales.** The Catering Mark is a system which rewards establishments for improving the provision of freshly prepared quality meals using locally sourced ingredients. The inclusion of organic ingredients is only required at the Silver and Gold levels (at 5 and 15% respectively of total food spend). Uptake of the Catering Mark in Wales compares unfavourable with Scotland, where the Scottish Government provides financial support. In Scotland more than 100,000 catering mark meals are served every day (16 150 at silver and gold), whilst in Wales there are only 14 233 catering mark meals per day (440 at silver and gold). Uptake in Welsh schools is particularly poor, with only 71 schools in Flintshire actively involved, whilst no school meals in Wales achieve the Silver or Gold standards.

We would encourage the Welsh Government to consider how it can support the catering mark (particularly at the higher silver and gold levels) in Wales to promote local, sustainable production of food and help build the organic market. This could include promoting the Catering Mark at Welsh Government sites or providing financial support to the Food for Life work in Wales (as happens in Scotland).

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⁴ <http://www.hutton.ac.uk/news/ten-year-experiment-identifies-optimum-upland-farming-system>

⁵ <http://www.coedcymru.org.uk/images/user/5472%20Pontbren%20CS%20v12.pdf>