

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig
Bioamrywiaeth ac Ailwylltio
CCERA(5) BR 08
Ymateb gan Undeb Cenedlaethol Amaethwyr
Cymru

Welsh Parliament
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs
Committee
Biodiversity and Rewilding
CCERA(5) BR 08
Evidence from National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Cymru

NFU Cymru is the voice of Welsh farming, championing, and representing farmers throughout Wales and across all agricultural sectors. Our vision is for a productive, profitable, and progressive Welsh agricultural industry, capitalising on global opportunities, contributing to the national economy, and supporting thriving rural communities. As part of the committee's enquiry into biodiversity and rewilding, NFU Cymru is pleased to be able to provide the following written submission.

1. NFU Cymru sees our landscapes as living, working, dynamic landscapes and which require ongoing management. The Welsh landscape is not natural per se, and has instead been created, shaped and is maintained by farmers over generations. The husbandry of grazing livestock has practised over hundreds of years and remains an integral part of Welsh upland agriculture.
2. Farmers manage over 80% of Wales's land area. Within this predominantly rural landscape, 60% of the land is defined as field pattern/mosaic with 20% categorised as open land.
3. Wales' farmers support biodiversity by looking after around 1.8m hectares of farmland (around 80% of Wales' land area). In addition to this, farmers have voluntarily enrolled some 560,000 hectares in agri-environment schemes
4. The rewilding debate ignores the fact that farmers are contributing to the environment. A significant number participate in agri-environment schemes designed by the Government to benefit the environment. Scheme design has been based on the best technical advice available, including advice from environmental groups. In these schemes most farmers have reduced stock numbers on the hills.
5. Today's farmers aim to work much more closely with nature, treading the fine line between maintaining a centuries-old landscape, producing food, and protecting wildlife through participation agri-environment schemes.
6. It must be remembered, however, that agricultural land constitutes part of a rural business. In Wales, for example, there are around 60,000 employed full or part time in farming in Wales. Farming in Wales underpins a food supply chain worth over £7.4bn and over 220,000 people are employed in the agri-food.
7. Rewilding as a concept has received increase focus in recent years. Rewilding has many and varied definitions. It means different things to different people

and we are concerned at the way in which it is being used by many as a vehicle for a specific agenda.

8. Rewilding is a vision that is at odds with how we use our land – the global focus is very clearly on how we can be more productive as an agricultural industry, whether in terms of management or the application of technology. Rewilding would reduce our farmed area and output, and this would have an inevitable impact on the rural economy and jobs.
9. Decisions about rewilding must be considered in the context of the challenges to our global food production system which are now well documented. This includes a growing population together with the impacts of climate change which will see the productive capacity of agricultural land decline in key food producing nations globally. Food security should be a concern to policymakers, and it is unsustainable and undesirable to rely further on food imports and to offshore food production to places where environmental, animal health and welfare and social standards are often lower. Such action cannot be reconciled with the concept of a globally responsible Wales.
10. Many examples of rewilding focus on upland locations. However, the arguments appear idealistic and ignore the economic impacts. Without our uplands, we would not have a UK sheep industry. Farmgate sales of lamb are worth over £1bn to UK agriculture, while sheep-meat exports generated £402 million in 2019. Farming underpins the rural economy – each farm business is typically economically linked to 40-80 other local businesses. To continue managing the countryside farmers need to have a viable business
11. In addition, livestock farming is integral to the landscape value of these upland areas. The tourist revenue from areas where a proportion of the land is maintained by beef and sheep production is estimated around £1.49 billion. The Welsh countryside, managed by farmers, provides the backdrop for a Welsh tourism sector with over £2.5bn.
12. Land is a limited resource and society does need to choose how land is used. The corollary cost to rewilding areas and taking them out of production is the need to import a greater proportion of the food supply in order to make up for the shortfall in domestic production.
13. NFU Cymru does not consider looking after the environment and producing food to be mutually exclusive. We can deliver increased food production and for the environment – the landscape, clean water, biodiversity.

NFU Cymru Vision for Welsh Upland Farming Survey

14. This autumn, NFU Cymru undertook research aimed at understanding the economic, environmental, social and cultural contribution of Welsh upland farming to the well-being of Wales; the understand the concerns of upland farmers for the future; and, to identify the key asks of policymakers for a

productive, profitable and progressive upland farming industry in Wales moving forward.

15. The survey attracted 765 responses, with over two thirds of those who responded identifying land use change (afforestation, rewilding) as a threat to upland farming.
16. A key recommendation of the NFU Cymru Vision for Welsh Upland Farming report is the creation of a decision making framework to guide land use change decisions – Welsh Government must understand the long-term economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts of its policies (for example decarbonisation, re-wilding projects, species reintroductions) - all of which have the potential to change land use from farming, reducing opportunities for the next generation. A decision-making framework is needed to ensure a balanced approach and social justice for rural communities.

Species Reintroductions

17. Recently there has been a growing lobby for species reintroductions. These are species that may have been in the country many hundreds of years ago when the environment was very different to the one we have today.
18. As a country we have many species that are recognised at an international level as being at risk of extinction, for example the nightingale, curlew, and puffin. We are far better to invest in supporting these species that we already have - so we know the environment they need to survive – than spend vast sums of money introducing a new species.
19. Species reintroductions are very expensive, and it cannot be assumed, once released, their behaviour can be predicted, and it is our view that there is a high risk of failure.
20. For those living in the countryside a species release represents a new risk that has to be managed, and raises a number of questions such as the impact on animal disease, the impact on animal welfare, and whether a farming system needs to be changed. Society demands high welfare standards of our farmers, and so farmers will be under pressure to manage risks and threats to the welfare of their livestock.
21. It is also reasonable to ask who will be responsible for the impacts of species reintroductions a generation into the future, after the campaign group has packed up and left. It will of course be those living in the countryside who will have to deal with legacy issues, and it is vital that their voices are fully heard during this debate.
22. A new species will have an impact on the current environment and the species present in it. For example, Lynx will predate other mammals e.g. pine martens, and so introducing one species could be seriously detrimental to another.

23. What happens in an area should be about the people living in the locality and caring for the land. Wales should not be allowed to become a test bed for romanticised notions of campaign groups with no local connection, and no exit strategy if things go wrong.