

Dear Chair and Members of the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee,

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to your inquiry on the *Future of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in Wales*. We believe that the principles that should underpin the new agricultural and rural development policies in Wales should be those enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015<sup>1</sup>.

1. The Act places statutory duties on public bodies in Wales, including the Welsh Government, to carry out sustainable development which means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle aimed at achieving the well-being goals (see below).
2. Whilst this is of course an apprehensive time for farmers and rural communities this presents a real opportunity to develop policy in a way which improves wellbeing and takes into account the needs of future generations.
3. Farming shapes our countryside and everything that lives in it – however our current approaches to food and farming are environmentally, economically and socially unsustainable<sup>2</sup>. Brexit offers a historic opportunity for the UK to develop a food and farming policy which “supports our environment, climate and public health alongside our food producers”<sup>3</sup>. This kind of holistic policy has huge public support – 57% of the British public think farming subsidies should either put more or the same emphasis on environmental protection than the current EU farm subsidies do.
4. This is an opportunity to re-examine any detrimental aspects of the current agricultural policy – which continues to incentivise large, environmentally destructive methods of farming, often at the expense of nature and biodiversity, despite it being the largest source of environmental funding across the UK. The challenge is summarised well by Jean-Charles Bocquet<sup>4</sup>, Director General of the European Crop Protection Association, as the need for “increased production to be achieved while using less land and water, maintaining biodiversity and coping with climate change - these challenges make farming one of the toughest jobs in the world.”
5. Aside from the fact that the Act places statutory duties on public bodies (and **must** therefore be a lead principle in any future redesign of the agriculture and rural development policy for Wales), it provides a useful framework for us to consider how policy in this area can work holistically to make a significant contribution to the economy and the environment as well as the social and cultural wellbeing of communities in Wales.

<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wcl.org.uk/farmingfitforthefuture.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.foe.co.uk/blog/brexit-what-next-food-farming>

<sup>4</sup> Speaking at Politico’s Innovative Agriculture event in Brussels in January 2016, Director-General of the European Crop Protection Association

6. I see a great opportunity here as our natural environment and healthy ecosystems are fundamental to well-being in Wales. A redesign of the agricultural sector together with a redefinition of rural development policy will allow a cross-sector approach to tackle some of Wales' biggest issues such as climate change, pollution, food safety and affordability, health as well as the sustainability of rural economies.

### The Requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act

7. The Act sets out seven national well-being goals which public bodies are required to maximise their contribution to as well as the sustainable development principle (five ways of working) which outline the way in which public bodies should work. These principles are:
  - a) Looking to the **long term** so that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs - policies must be based on a consideration of long term trends and scenarios and seek to consider the long term social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales rather than just focus on a short term fix. Key long term issues which will need to be considered include food security, the effects of climate change and the increased use of technology and what this will mean in terms of security of jobs in rural industries and the sustainability of these rural communities.
  - b) Seeking to **prevent** problems occurring or getting worse - key issues for consideration here should be how we manage land in a way which prevents soil degradation, reduces carbon emissions and supports the wellbeing of people in rural communities so that long term health and welfare issues do not emerge or get worse.
  - c) Taking an **integrated** approach - in developing policy in this area we must consider how the approach we take can maximise contribution to all seven of the wellbeing goals (listed below). It will also be key to involve all players within the food supply chains are involved and able to contribute.
  - d) **Involving** people in the decisions that affect them - policy development should seek to engage people at the earliest opportunity. Consideration should be given to how this can be done in a way which engages directly with communities and individuals within them as well as more traditional approaches to consultation and calls for evidence.
  - e) Working with others in a **collaborative** way to find shared sustainable solutions - policy must not be developed in silo's and must be done with a range of partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as the industry themselves.

### Alignment with the well-being goals

8. Whilst the rural and agricultural sectors are not directly covered by the Act, the seven well-being goals that set out the vision of Wales we are aspiring to are particularly pertinent to Welsh farmers and our agriculture industry. As outlined in the recent "Farming fit for the Future"<sup>5</sup> report, their vision for farming is one that is better for nature, people, land and livestock and ready for the future. Any new policy and funding package should be developed in

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wcl.org.uk/farmingfitforthefuture.asp>

a way which maximises contribution to all of the goals. Agricultural and land use issues link across all well-being goals as illustrated below:

- 9. *A prosperous Wales - An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.***
10. Farming is the cornerstone of the rural economy, and plays a significant part in the £6.1bn Welsh food and drink supply chain industry which employs over 220,000 people<sup>6</sup> in Wales. Farm businesses are the axis around which rural communities thrive and therefore, it is vitally important that the industry gets a fair deal post-Brexit. However the context of the Well-being of Future Generations Act requires us to think more holistically in terms of how we support rural economies and there is a need to consider specifically how future policy in respect of the rural economy can be framed in a way which supports the definition of a more prosperous Wales in the Act. Areas which should be considered are:
- support to develop an innovative, productive, low carbon rural economy;
  - increase usage of technology to increase efficiency and productivity;
  - a shift in the reliance on non-renewable energy sources to more renewable sources;
  - steps to ensure that the working conditions for all those who work on our farms and within this sector are fair and secure; and
  - a focus on local employment opportunities and the development of skills in the sector.
- 11. *A resilient Wales - A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).***
12. Agricultural landscapes occupy about 40% of all terrestrial ecosystems, providing habitat for many animal and plant species worldwide. In Wales around 84% of our land area is dedicated for agricultural use so it has a key role in supporting and enhancing a biodiverse natural environment with healthy and functioning ecosystems that support economic and ecological resilience. The intensification of agricultural practices has however resulted in a general decline of farmland species adapted to more intensive farming.
13. As we continue to experience the effects of climate change here in Wales with increased flooding, the focus on adaptation following the recent Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report will be crucial in terms of moving towards a more resilient form of agriculture. The report highlighted the top six areas of inter-related climate change risks for the UK, with 'risk of shortages in the public water supply and for agriculture, as well as risk to natural capital, including terrestrial, coastal, marine and freshwater ecosystems, soils and biodiversity' listed as areas where high action is needed, now and for the future. Development of agricultural policy must consider these issues and how current land management practices can reduce the future impacts of flooding through better management of soils, planting trees and habitat restoration.

<sup>6</sup> <https://businesswales.gov.wales/foodanddrink/key-facts>

14. The food system itself contributes to climate change through its emissions and therefore unsustainable increases in food production, while increasing short-term food security, can jeopardise future food security. In 2004 13.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and 31 per cent of EU GHG emissions were attributed to the food supply chain<sup>7</sup>. In Wales agriculture and land use is responsible for 20% of our (devolved) emissions, and 11% of overall emissions, with very little change having occurred since the baseline in 1990<sup>8</sup>. New policies will also have to consider the requirements in terms of Carbon budgets, with support provided for the sector to play its part.

**15. A 'healthier Wales' - A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.**

16. The availability and affordability of a good balanced diet is crucial to physical and mental health and well-being – we should be looking to maximise availability of local food and support local producers through our procurement practices. Access to green space and natural landscapes are also an important consideration, and much of our rural landscape supports physical activity as well as the tourism industry.

17. We also need to consider the health of our rural communities – we need to ensure that Wales' rural economy is supported as the links between poverty and ill health are well evidenced.

18. Finally we need to consider the role farming has to play in helping to address antibiotic resistance, and consider how it can address this and future health challenges.

**19. A more equal Wales - A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).**

20. Ensuring that the working conditions for all those who work on our farms, and within this sector, are fair and secure; that farmers are listened to to secure a fair deal for themselves and their workforce; and get a good deal out of their relationships with those they supply to will help us achieve the goal of a more equal Wales. Over the past few months, we've heard so much about how we're a 'divided nation', how our communities are torn and how the metropolitan city-dwellers fail to understand the lives of those who live and work in the countryside and vice versa. The duty upon public bodies to follow the 'involvement' principle gives us a real chance to bridge those gaps and rebuild these relationships.

21. Any future policies also need to consider how they can widen participation through apprenticeships, mentoring schemes, to ensure that young people from a range of backgrounds are able to access work in the sector in the future.

**22. A Wales of cohesive communities - Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities**

23. Sustainable agriculture and rural development should be at the heart of sustainable, safe and

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/Food%20Security%20-%20Research%20paper-21062013-247261/13-045-English.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/climatechange/welsh-emissions/?lang=en>

well-connected communities particularly in rural Wales – future policies need to ensure that our rural economy and communities are supported.

24. Again, access to the industry for young people has been highlighted<sup>9</sup> and recommendations provided on the support required by the next generation in to farming.
- 25. *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language - promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.***
26. Agriculture, farming and land use have been an integral part of, and have shaped, Wales' culture, heritage and national identity for centuries. The higher percentage of Welsh speakers has traditionally been from rural areas<sup>10</sup>. It is therefore important to regard rural communities as crucial in meeting this wellbeing goal and I encourage you to see the Act as an opportunity to ensure the sector can play a key role in supporting a vibrant bilingual culture across Wales in the future.
- 27. *A globally responsible Wales - A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing***
28. Across the globe, the pressures on the sector and the complications of European trade regulations mean that making changes for the future is difficult, but the threat of climate change and the consequences it will reap across the planet – often affecting those in developing countries who are least equipped to deal with it – mean that we have to take action now. It is critical that policies consider the impacts of climate change on land use and food, as well as the impact of emissions from the sector. Other considerations include (global) supply chains and ethical sourcing.
29. In addition to contributing to the seven well-being goals, I would also expect a new Welsh policy on agriculture and rural development to be aligned with the Welsh Government's Well-being objectives (which they published on November 4<sup>th</sup>) and I would expect the Welsh Government to demonstrate how they have used the five ways of working to set out the new policies.

I look forward to continuing working with your Committee as it scrutinises any emerging new agricultural and rural development policy for Wales.

Yours faithfully,



Sophie Howe

Future Generations Commissioner / Comisiynydd Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol

<sup>9</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/141023-the-next-generation-into-farming-en.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.cymru/English/Publications%20List/Adroddiad%20-%20Y%20defnydd%20o%27r%20Gymraeg%20yng%20Nghymru%2c%202013-15%20-%20Saesneg.pdf>