

FWP 33

Ymateb gan : Undeb Cenedlaethol yr Amaethwyr (NFU Cymru)
Evidence from : National Farmers' Union of Wales (NFU Cymru)

1. NFU Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into forestry and woodland policy in Wales.
2. NFU Cymru champions Welsh farming and represents farmers throughout Wales and across all sectors. Our vision is for a productive, profitable and progressive Welsh agricultural industry and our aim is to establish the background conditions in which farm businesses can be profitable and develop.
3. The importance of the farming industry in rural Wales cannot be over-stated. Welsh farming businesses are the backbone of the Welsh rural economy, the axis around which rural communities turn. The raw ingredients that we produce form the cornerstone of the multi million pound Welsh food and drink industry which is Wales' largest employer employing over 222,400 people. We are part of a UK food and drink industry worth £108bn to the economy.
4. Welsh farmers also play a key role maintaining and enhancing our natural environment – Wales' key asset. Farming activity across over 80% of the land area of Wales supports a diverse range of species, habitats and ecosystems; provides a range of ecosystem services including flood alleviation, carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation; and delivers the spectacular backdrop for Wales' tourism and recreation sector worth an estimated £2.5bn annually.
5. Overall Welsh farming makes a unique and unparalleled contribution to the economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of Wales. The contribution of the sector to the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and the seven well-being goals is summarised in Annex 1 for information.
6. We note that the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales is seeking views on forestry and woodland policy in Wales, specifically the delivery of the Welsh Government's Woodland for Wales Strategy arranged around four strategic themes. This Inquiry is timely now in the context of the new legislative framework established in the Well-Being of Future

Generations Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as well as the UK transition out of the EU.

7. NFU Cymru is a farming organisation so our comments in this response will be restricted to the areas of relevance to our members.
8. We refer to the outcomes established in the Woodland for Wales Strategy. This includes more woodlands and trees managed sustainably; healthy and resilient woodland ecosystems; woodlands better adapted to deliver a full range of benefits; and increased woodland cover.
9. We highlight that with 80% of the land area of Wales managed by farmers, the sector has been well placed to make a key contribution to the outcomes identified in the strategy. Many farmers in Wales recognise the multiple benefits of woodland on-farm including improved productivity through shelter and enhanced biosecurity; biodiversity, soils and water as well as provision of timber and wood fuel which have the potential to both reduce costs and deliver additional diversified income.
10. Farmers in Wales, should be viewed as key contributors to the delivery of the Woodland for Wales Strategy and evidence shows there has been a significant trend for increasing area of woodland over the last 15 years. Evidence also shows that woodland currently extends to 14% of the land surface in Wales – an increase of 10% from 4% in 1905.
11. In terms of environmental quality, the Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (GMEP) which shows there has been an increase in woodland bird species and overall plant species richness in woodland habitat is stable reflecting an improving situation.
12. In line with Welsh Government strategy, NFU Cymru is supportive of measures that facilitate additional woodland planting and ongoing management on farms in Wales and it has been our experience that many farmers are prepared to consider farm woodland at an appropriate scale including small scale shelter belts, field corners and parcels with a mixture of deciduous and evergreen species of both trees and shrubs together with hedgerows and streamside corridors that contribute to improved connectivity at the landscape scale.
13. In our view the measures described should be a key focus and key contributors to policy aimed at increasing woodland cover in Wales. We also identify there are opportunities on marginal land and farmers would possibly be prepared to consider afforestation on a bigger scale with appropriate levels of long-term support.

14. Overall, we would emphasise that the aim of increasing woodland cover does not necessarily have to be delivered through large scale forestry plantations; farm woodland has the potential to play a very significant role and farmers are interested in this type of approach as evidenced by the levels of interest in schemes such as the Glastir Woodland Creation and Glastir Small Grants schemes – where we understand that a number of Expression of Interest windows have been over-subscribed and action of woodland creation only limited by the budget allocations.
15. Policy should also recognise that whilst farmers are willing to get involved with tree planting, farmers will not, in the main, consider planting on the best, most productive land on their farms, which once planted is permanently lost from agricultural production.
16. NFU Cymru identify a number of challenges and barriers to progress to increased woodland creation and management; these include:
 - a. the key mechanisms available to support woodland planting and afforestation such as Glastir Woodland Creation currently are far from straightforward for farm scale planting. The application process is lengthy and very time consuming and often, once approved, there is little time to complete the planting and fencing for exclusion of livestock
 - b. the Woodland Opportunities Map does not necessarily facilitate planting where farmers are most likely to be willing to undertake it. The evidence base/data sources underpinning the Woodland Opportunities Map as well as other targeting mapping approach requires very careful scrutiny.
 - c. as highlighted above, a number of scheme windows have been over-subscribed with more farmers applying than funding available. This has limited the area of woodland created in recent years.
 - d. there is a need to recognise that a significant proportion of farmers the establishment of woodland or forestry at significant scale is at odds with their key food production role. Flexibility, good scheme design and effective communication are key to promote the full range of opportunities available to farmers
 - e. A further key challenge and barrier to widespread uptake is the length of time taken for the crop to reach maturity for harvesting which can take many decades. During this period the landowner is unable to derive any income from the land and, it could be argued, that this is a significant barrier to uptake of woodland/afforestation schemes. The emerging diseases in larch and ash add an element of risk

- f. A key challenge for the future is the fact that the key mechanisms available to support woodland planting currently are predominantly funded via the second pillar of the CAP and, as such, are now time limited and uncertain

17. In the context of new legislative framework including the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 we note that 'increasing woodland cover and bringing more of our existing woodlands into appropriate management' has been identified by Natural Resources Wales as one of the seven key opportunities within the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)

18. Whilst we acknowledge the benefits of increased woodland planting we would also highlight our concerns with respect to potential impacts to biodiversity, soils and water quality associated with some types of woodland cover such as extensive coniferous stands. We believe that detailed analysis of the full range of benefits, impacts and unintended consequences associated with increasing woodland cover and large scale afforestation should be undertaken.

19. This should include analysis of the impact to Wales' food production potential should a significant area of land be taken permanently out of food production. Whilst this may not appear like an issue of immediate concern, the SoNaRR makes reference to the latest Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report which highlights key risks to the global food production system which should be taken into account when considering how the Welsh environment is managed in future. We also refer to the COP21 Paris Agreement which recognises the fundamental priority of food security and fostering low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production. NFU Cymru would anticipate that this should be reflected in the carbon budgets and emerging policy priorities.

20. In the context of developing the Natural Resources Policy and future domestic agriculture/land-use policy, we also believe that analysis of potential delivery mechanisms should be undertaken. We are concerned that a number of mechanisms such as the Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) identified as having a role in the delivery of the Natural Resources Policy may be limited in their effectiveness, particularly where forestry and woodland policy are concerned. At this stage there appear to be significant challenges turning PES from an aspiration to reality and the effectiveness of relatively short-term collaborative project approaches such as SMS is very much unproven across the delivery of a range of environmental objectives.

21. Moving forward, NFU Cymru would emphasise the need for careful analysis of the impacts and unintended consequences of increasing significantly woodland cover.

Further analysis is also required of the best methods to achieve the policy objectives, including a lessons learned exercise from the existing RDP mechanisms.

22. To conclude NFU Cymru is supportive of policy and agri-environment mechanisms that positively reward farmers for public/environmental good measures including increasing woodland cover and improved management which allow farmers to continue their role caring for the countryside, wildlife and mitigating climate change alongside their core food production role.

Annex 1 - The Contribution of Agriculture to the Well-Being of Wales

The Welsh Government Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is designed to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act establishes seven goals that all public bodies, including Welsh Ministers, must work to achieve. The contribution that farming makes to achievement of all seven goals is unparalleled by any other industry, as highlighted in the following below:

Well Being of Future Generations Act:	NFU Cymru: Agriculture is the Answer
Well-being Goals A prosperous Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60,000 employed full or part time in farming in Wales • £1.5bn Gross Output • Farming underpins a food supply chain worth over £6bn • Over 220, 000 people in Wales are employed in the agri-food sectors – that’s 17% of the workforce and Wales’s biggest employer • The Welsh countryside managed by farmers provides the backdrop for the tourism industry worth over £2.5bn • The Welsh agricultural industry is a key generator of wealth and employment for the people of Wales
A resilient Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers care for 81% of total land area of Wales – that’s over 1.84m hectares • 600,000 ha of environmentally designated areas • Almost 560,000 ha managed under Glastir Entry Sustainable Land Management Scheme designed to combat climate change, improve water management and maintain and enhance biodiversity • Farming supports a diverse range of species, habitats and ecosystems • Farmers provide a range of ecosystem services including carbon sequestration and management, water quality and water quantity management for flood alleviation • Low carbon, local energy installations have the potential to meet 57% of Wales’s electricity consumption and the evidence shows a large proportion of projects are located within Wales’s rural local authorities • GHG emissions from agriculture have declined by 20% since 1990 and further decreases are being achieved through production efficiency measures • Welsh farmers play a key role maintaining and enhancing our natural environment and supporting the provision of a full range of ecosystem services
A healthier Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh agriculture is a key provider of safe, nutritious, high quality Welsh food which plays a fundamental contribution in supporting the physical and mental well-being of the people of Wales • Welsh farmers are known to operate to some of the highest standards of welfare and production in the whole world • Welsh farming also delivers a significant proportion of Wales’s access provision which includes 16000 miles of footpaths, 3000 miles bridleways, 1200 miles of cycle network, and 460,000 ha of open access land • Welsh farming makes a key contribution to the physical and mental well-being of the people of Wales
A more equal Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Wales is home to 33% of the Welsh population. • The vitality and potential of rural areas is closely linked to the presence of a competitive and dynamic farming sector. The NFU Cymru ‘Why farming Matters to the Welsh Economy’ shows that each family farm is typically economically linked to

	<p>some 40-80 other businesses in the region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through direct and indirect employment in rural communities, Welsh farming underpins the rural economy and contributes to a more equal Wales
<p>A Wales of cohesive communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities in rural Wales are heavily dependent on agriculture for financial and social prosperity. • Leadership and voluntary roles in rural communities • Welsh farmers make a key contribution towards the provision of attractive, viable, safe communities in rural areas
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture has the highest proportion of Welsh speakers of any sector. • Farming is the bedrock of rural communities across Wales which have been shaped by farming activity spanning hundreds of years. Farmers continue to maintain these traditions, preserving rural culture and sense of place • Welsh farmers are key promoters and protectors of our culture, heritage and the Welsh language
<p>A globally responsible Wales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current levels of self-sufficiency at a UK level are at 62% • Future challenges to our global food production system include climate change, a growing UK and global population, water scarcity. Given its climate and rainfall, Wales is predicted to be an area of favoured production in the future • Welsh farmers have a key role to play feeding the people of Wales and in contributing to global food security now and in the future.