

**Consultation
Response Form**

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Sustainable Farming and our Land: simplifying agricultural support

Summary of Questions:

1. BPS payment rates and annual allocation

Q1. Do you agree with the proposal for Welsh Ministers to set the BPS ceiling, in regards to Wales?

Yes, it is important for the devolved administration to be able to allocate the funds that are required to encourage the development of a green recovery in Wales. By accepting a Westminster prescribed ceiling there may be limitations to the steps open to the assembly to direct sufficient funding into the agricultural and forestry sectors to achieve policy aims. Forestry, farming and rural land management requires a period of stability. The risks associated with Brexit and compounded by Covid are significant and we would respectfully request that the amount of funding available through BPS through the transition period should be clearly set out at the start with a commitment to delivering quality advice to land managers on making the most of the post-transition framework, so that they may plan for the future of their business. This will give land managers the confidence to engage in the change process and deliver the outcomes that WG seeks.

Q2. Do you agree with the proposal to introduce additional measures allowing the Welsh Government greater flexibility to control any unspent BPS budget?

Yes, with the caveat that it remains within the rural sector. Historically forestry received just 2% of the RDP funding in Wales though it accounted for around 15% of the land mass. An adaptive system that allows for more flexible redistribution of funding could significantly influence the ability for the Welsh forestry industry to deliver on the administrations afforestation and management targets.

2. Cross border single application rule (UK wide)

Q3. Do you agree with the proposal to remove cross border applications and only consider Welsh land for BPS claims in Wales, removing the need to wait for checks from other paying agencies?

We do not support this proposal as it appears to unfairly disadvantage small landowners and farmers who have holdings split across the border and may rely on accessibility to BPS derived schemes more than larger landowners. In addition this approach will double the burden of applications and management for landowners and farmers with significant holdings in each country.

Q4. Do you agree with the proposal for minimum claim size to remain unchanged and not to make any provision for farmers who currently rely on land in another parts of the UK to achieve the minimum claim size area of 5 eligible hectares?

No view.

3. Greening

Q5. Do you agree with the proposal to maintain greening practices through cross compliance?

We support this proposal in principle. While Greening has received widespread criticism, it is at least a step towards a presumption that recipients of public money should deliver environmental benefit. While this principle is much more deeply integrated into forestry, with all public money being contingent on the comprehensive environmental standards of UKFS, removing Cross-compliance would widen the gap between environmental standards in different land uses. Greening should be retained as the basis for a level playing field for environmental standards within an integrated land use framework.

Q6. Do you agree with the proposal to remove the Crop Diversification rule from the Greening requirements?

We do not support this principle. Under the UK Forestry Standard, no more than 75% of the land may grow one crop; the remaining 25% must include a different crop species, plus 15% managed for wildlife without any production. Removing the less onerous Crop Diversification rule (3 crops with no more than 75% a single crop) further increases the gap in standards between forestry and farming. Although in reality this affects very few Welsh farmers, it is essential for green and integrated land use that farming and forestry practice under similar principles.

4. Young Farmer Scheme

Q7. Do you believe we should close the Young Farmers Scheme to new applications from 2021?

We support this proposal. In its current form whilst young entrants for farming businesses may require additional support its methodology is exclusive and appears unlikely to target those most in need.

Q8. Other than the option to close the Young Farmers Scheme to new applications from 2021, are there further options which could be considered?

A scheme focused on purely young farmers misses out on the requirement to support all land management based rural jobs. Any future proposal should focus on identifying the gaps across the land management sector and support those roles where required.

5. Late supporting documentation rules for BPS

Q9. Do you agree with the proposal to extend the BPS supporting document submission date to 31 December?

No view.

Q10. Do you agree with the proposal to keep the SAF deadline and late claim penalties unchanged?

No view.

6. National Reserve

Q11. Do you agree with expanding the national reserve categories to include additional land acquired?

No view.

Q12. Are there any other categories or proposals which you believe should be taken into consideration for National Reserve?

A National Reserve system principally benefits the farming sector the operation of the scheme appears sensible. We would welcome the expansion of the scheme to include support outside the direct farming sector but remain within the rural sector. Whilst the reserve operates on claw back funds and is therefore compromised in committing to multi annual support, with the change in funding moving away from the EU there is potential for some innovation or skills support to be delivered through this system.

7. Inspection Rates

Q13. Do you agree with this proposed reduction in BPS inspection rates?

We do not support this proposal. This would mean farmers could expect to be inspected only once in their career. As recipients of significant amounts of income from public funding their level of accountability to the public should be greater.

This change may become more tenable with the development of remote sensing technology but with the most likely methodology for supporting farmers over the next decade being payments for action undertaken (likely to achieve desired outcome) a stronger evidence based/inspection methodology may be required.

8. Over-declaration of land

Q14. Do you agree with the proposal to remove the “yellow card” restriction?

No view.

9. BPS Payment window for un-validated claims

Q15. Do you agree with the proposal to introduce an advance and balance payment model and the removal the requirement for claims to be fully validated before an early advance payment?

A loan-based system has been used to assist farmers who have been delayed in receiving their BPS payment. It is unclear whether this is due to mistakes in applications, overload of RPW’s workforce or an alternative reason.

The emphasis should be on developing a payment system that works without suffering critical peak and trough loading at one particular point in the year. This cycle has been repeatedly seen when applying for Glastir Woodland Creation with numerous schemes withdrawn or abandoned because contracts have been issued too late to allow completion. Whilst expenditure must be considered from year to year the rigidity of application windows persistently makes schemes time pressured, difficult to administer and infeasible to implement.

10. Active Farmer requirement

Q16. Do you agree with the proposal to remove the active farmer negative list requirement and retain the minimum levels of 'agricultural activity'?

We support this proposal, as the re-admission process is simplistic in its approach and as a result there appears to be little gain in retaining this process loop. The greater question should focus on the definition of what an active farmer is. In Scotland, timber growing and harvesting qualifies as an agricultural activity, in common with other cultivated non-food crops.

11. Hemp

Q17. Do you agree with the proposal to remove land used for the cultivation & production of hemp from the list of eligible crop codes and no longer be eligible for BPS?

No view.

Domestic Rural Development Proposals;

1. Mission, objectives and priorities

Q18. Do you agree with replacing the European Union mission, objectives and priorities for rural development support with Welsh specific definitions for rural development?

No, the European statement appears to be clearer, simpler and more than adequate to achieve the goals that we are aspiring to in Wales.

The intent of any future legislation in Wales must be in part to simplify what that legislation hopes to achieve. The proliferation of rules, the legislative environment and bureaucratic attitude that exists in Wales has disempowered decision making from ministerial level right down to civil servant level.

Whilst the principles of the Environment Act and the Well Being and Future Generations Act are well derived and sensible their interpretation by those that administer schemes based upon their principles leave much to be desired.

2. Measures

Q19: Do you agree with the proposed amendments of the Measures?

The amendment of measures is positive but there are some notable omissions. If Animal health and welfare are expressly referenced, we believe that plant health should be equally bolstered.

The control regs (1305 2013) for this RDP Article 24 under para 3 covers to some extent tree health but we believe that threats to timber supply should be specifically noted.

Article 24 could also be used to strengthen the case for funding to deal with Ash Dieback as this is undoubtedly a plant health crisis.

The significant impact of diseases such as Chalara fraxinea (ash Dieback) or invasive pests such as the Ips typographus (larger eight-toothed European spruce bark beetle) have the capacity to devastate not only the forest industry but the resilience of woodlands, forestry and Welsh targets for decarbonisation and biodiversity.

Q20: Are there any further amendments or simplifications you would like to suggest for any Measure?

The profile of Measure 8 & 15 (forestry) should be extended from 8.2 (Support for establishment and maintenance of agroforestry systems) to include management for all forestry and woodland systems. The Committee on Climate Change report "Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK" makes strong recommendations for the benefits of bring woodland back into active management. Woodland management has a significant role in delivering annual emissions sequestration by 2050 of 14 MtCO₂e in forests with an additional 14 MtCO₂e from harvested materials. To date the focus within RDP expenditure has primarily focused on woodland creation and is yet to address the challenge of management head on.

As harvested timber products will also play a major part in route to a Zero Carbon Wales an additional statement within the Measures prioritising support for productive wood fibre for Welsh woodlands to secure the future of such objectives as Zero Carbon homes would be appropriate. The Wood Knowledge Wales report "Modern Methods of Construction" highlights we are reaching the limit efficiency for conventional on-site building methods. All possible tools must be used to align the timber industry supply chain to meet the demands made of modern forestry.

3. Administrative arrangements

Q21. Do you agree with removing detailed regulations setting out requirements for the content and amendment of a future rural development programme?

Yes, simplification of the detailed requirements will form part of the process to unblock tree planting as well as assisting in a move to improve land management in line with Welsh Government policy aspirations. The alignment of requirements of the managing authority with the existing Welsh Government reporting appears sensible so long as it does not

remove a data set that any industry/external body is reliant upon. These responsibilities must be highlighted and secured so that the Welsh Government cannot elect to remove them later without industry collaboration and engagement.

Q22. Do you agree with strengthening the Managing Authority's role?

No we do not agree with this proposal. The Managing Authority in Wales has already shown that it interprets identically legislation to that in force in Scotland and England in such a way as to make some processes significantly more challenging than in neighbouring countries. The managing authority needs to have a process of true accountability and some form of bench marking against the rest of the UK would be of benefit. To date this accountability does not appear to have been present at senior levels in Welsh Government. Whilst Wales has its own eccentricities and local challenges to delivering good quality land management there is a great deal to learn from the rest of the UK.

4. European networking

Q23. Do you agree with removing regulatory requirements relating to networking?

We reject this proposal. There is a significant risk to removing this legal requirement to engage with international partners. We have significant concerns that if it isn't required it will be lost as soon as there is a squeeze on funding. This would be catastrophic, excluding Wales from important advancements in innovation and good practice.

5. Monitoring & evaluation and reporting

Q24 Do you agree with integration and enhancement of monitoring and evaluation of support for rural development, using Welsh-specific objectives and indicators?

Yes. Public accountability for rural development must be commensurate with its scale as a proportion of the whole Welsh Government budget. There must be a platform of benchmarking to ensure that Wales continues to develop and does not stagnate by measuring performance against a benign set of parameters that fail to meet the needs of the Welsh people and businesses.

Q25. Do you agree the Welsh Government should report annually on the implementation of its rural development programme?

Yes, see above.

Additional Questions:

Q26. We would like to know your views on the effects that the suggested proposals to the Basic Payment Scheme and Domestic Rural Development Scheme would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

No view

Q27. Please also explain how you believe the proposed options could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

No view

Q28. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

No additional comment

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: