



Landworkers' Alliance Cymru Response to Economy Trade & Rural Affairs Committee Consultation on its Priorities

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a grassroots union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers with a mission to improve the livelihoods of our members and create a better food system for everyone. We have over 1000 small, medium, community, and family farms and prospective new entrants across the UK and LWA Cymru represents around 200 in Wales.

Our members are small business owners and workers, who practice, or are seeking opportunities to work in, agroecological farming and sustainable forestry. Their markets are largely local, using short supply chains, keeping money in local rural communities. The practices they use are already achieving many of the goals that Welsh Government seeks to achieve with its new Sustainable Farming Scheme such as improving biodiversity and sequestering carbon, whilst producing food and generating local employment. However, despite providing many of the public goods that Welsh Government and opposition parties say they want, small scale farmers, foresters and new entrants face many hurdles in getting started or expanding their businesses. Many of these are avoidable bureaucratic and policy barriers such as the 5-hectare threshold for agricultural support; public procurement policies; planning hurdles for both forestry and farm businesses and limitations to capital grants that make them unsuitable for horticulture; small-scale livestock and mixed farming. Others are more systemic such as the high cost of land and rural housing; the domination of supermarkets in the food supply chain; and limited poverty and low wages amongst both consumers and producers of food.

As practitioners of sustainable agriculture and forestry our members have a valuable insight into what needs to change if Wales is to meet the challenges of tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, whilst providing food and maintaining resilient rural communities. Many have offered to share their knowledge, experience and challenges with committee members either in a meeting or through hosting farm and woodland visits. Please contact on 07737970229 or holly.tomlinson@landworkersalliance.org.uk to arrange this.

A whole food system approach

The climate crisis, biodiversity crisis, soil erosion, food supply chain threats, farmers' mental health, food worker conditions and diet related health problems are all linked to the way we produce, trade and consume food. Tackling them requires a systemic approach, which looks at the food system as a whole. Many of the food and agriculture policies and aims of Welsh Government are positive; however, they are often isolated siloed. For example, the Welsh Government's proposed agricultural policy says nothing about ensuring that Wales is able to produce a healthy diet, including fruit & vegetables, for the people of Wales.

Over the next 6 months the Committee should explore how policy proposals related to agriculture affect other parts of the food system and ways of ensuring a more systemic approach. Please see the Food Policy Alliance Cymru policy proposalsⁱ for more on such an approach.

Wales' resilience & the need to expand edible horticulture

Within Wales there is a deficit in fruit & vegetable production compared to what consumers currently buy, which itself is well below health recommendations. The UK overall produces just 57% of the vegetables and 16% of the fruit we consume. In Wales just 0.1% of agricultural land is currently used for fruit & vegetable production. This reliance on imports makes us more vulnerable to supply chain shocks. The current lorry driver shortage is just one example of this, but with many of our fruit & vegetables coming from climate change vulnerable countries, we risk many more. Researchⁱⁱ by Dr Amber Wheeler has found that if just 2% of Welsh agricultural land were used to produce fruit & vegetables, it would be possible to produce all of Wales' population's "5 a day" needs. Lack of access to land, housing and capital, and planning constraints are all barriers to horticulture farm establishment and expansion. **Over the next 6 months the Committee should examine how barriers can be addressed and the Welsh edible horticulture sector can thrive.**

The Sustainable Farming Scheme

A key focus of the Committee over the next 6 months and beyond must be the Welsh Government's new post Brexit Sustainable Farming scheme. Whilst LWA Cymru would like more ambition with respect to food production and support for social and health benefits farms can provide, we support plans to move the basis for financial support to environmental benefits and away from land ownership.

However, we are concerned that farms below 5 hectares may be excluded as they are from current subsidies. Research by LWA and Coventry Universityⁱⁱⁱ found that small diverse farms often deliver more environmental, social and economic benefits per unit area compared to larger farms. They must therefore be included both in their own right and as part of landscape, wildlife corridor or catchment wide projects. As an alternative eligibility threshold, we propose Farming Connect's criteria^{iv} of 550 hours worked per year. **We urge the committee to ensure that the new scheme enables participation by small farms (<5ha).**

Please see enclosed our response to the Agriculture White Paper for more of our position on Welsh Government's plans and our paper on Farming & the Climate Crisis^v for practical ways in which farming can help tackle the climate crisis.

A Bold Community Food Strategy

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to developing a Community Food Strategy. This presents a huge opportunity for transformative change to increase our food security, ensure farmers have access to secure local markets and build local community resilience. However, without sufficient ambition, this will not be realised. **The Committee should prioritise scrutiny of the Community Food Strategy, when it is released, to ensure that it has ambitious plans such as:**

Targeted local public sector procurement: hospitals, schools and other public bodies could provide a secure market for local Welsh produce at a time when Welsh livestock farmers face threats from new imports produced to lower standards; increased challenges exporting to the EU. The Committee should look to Preston's^{vi} Community wealth building, Copenhagen's^{vii} success with local organic procurement¹ and the findings of the Foundational Economy Carmarthenshire pilot, to see how procurement can achieve public policy aims and support local businesses.

Supporting Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes: CSAs are a partnership between farmers and local communities, where risk is shared. They give farmers a guaranteed local market and many customers, who become members also get involved in growing. Several market gardens, such as Cae Tan in the Gower and Caerhys Organic Community Agriculture near St David's, have been set up using the CSA model. However, access to land and capital hold back more CSAs from being established and the Committee should explore how a bold community food strategy could address this.

Engaging local communities and councils: the strategy should combine national strategic direction with bottom up community engagement. Community kitchens and food groups, community and town councils and other public bodies should be a part of this process. The Sustainable Food Places network provides a good model for this.

Includes land allocation: to be successful, land must be available to meet the demands of food growing for the community food strategy. Where there is public land available that could meet this, it should be allocated to community food growing as a priority and planning policy should facilitate rather than obstruct this.

Access to land & managing succession

With an ageing farming population and the change in subsidies, it is likely that many existing farmers will retire, some without an obvious successor. This poses a danger of a farming exodus crisis, as small farms are consolidated into ever larger holdings or sold to hedge fund investors. This would contribute to the loss of jobs, rural communities and the Welsh language. Meanwhile there are many new entrant farmers and growers who are struggling to access land. Farming Connect's Venture programme^{viii} provides an excellent service for connecting up retiring farmers with new entrants; however, high housing costs, planning and financial barriers may still make such partnerships and transfers impossible. To ensure that farmers can retire with dignity and new entrants can ensure farming communities continue, **in the next 6 months the Committee should investigate:**

How planning policy can be amended to make dwellings with agricultural ties easier to get consent for. Retiring farmers may wish to stay in their homes and it may be impossible for new entrants to buy or rent at an affordable rate nearby. The threshold for an agricultural worker's dwelling is currently very restrictive. It is often easier to build a holiday let than accommodate people working on the land.

Enabling tenant farmers to access finance: raising finance to start or diversify a farm is especially challenging for tenant farmers, who do not have assets to mortgage. The committee should explore how the Welsh Development Bank could support tenant farmers to raise finance.

Ensuring forestry benefits local communities

To help tackle the climate crisis, Wales must significantly increase tree cover with diverse well managed woodlands and agroforestry. Just 15% of Wales is currently forested and recent records on planting have been pitiful (just 80 hectares in 2017/18). Getting more trees in the ground is challenging and must be done with care with the right tree in the right place ensuring biodiversity, not monocultures. However, with enough support, working with farmers and land managers, tree cover in Wales could significantly increase. We welcome plans to increase tree planting, but it is essential that local communities can access woodlands and it does not lead to rural unemployment and depopulation.

Agroforestry is one way to achieve this. Here tree planting is integrated with farming, bringing multiple benefits such as shelter belts and flood management, whilst ensuring farming can continue. New forests can create new jobs but only with the right policies. **Over the next 6 months, the Committee should consider the potential impact of tree planting on rural communities and policies** to ensure they benefit. We propose support for new entrants into primary and secondary timber processing; investment in short timber supply chain infrastructure and using public procurement to support local timber processors. As with farming, planning policy should be reviewed to enable better forestry tied housing as well as permission for primary processing and storage on site. Please see our Forestry Manifesto^{ix} for more details on how working woodlands can be supported.

References

- ⁱ Food Policy Alliance Cymru (2021) *Our Priorities for a Food System Fit for Future Generations* <https://foodpolicyalliance.cymru/>
- ⁱⁱ Wheeler, A. (2018) 'A New Food Diplomacy: Participatory Action Research Findings of a Food System Approach to Public Health Nutrition', PhD Thesis, Prifysgol De Cymru/University of South Wales, available at: https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/files/5479834/Amber_Wheeler_PhD_1_.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ Laughton, R. (2017) *A Matter of Scale: A study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (20 ha and less)*. Landworkers' Alliance and Centre for Agroecology, Coventry University available at: <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/matterofscale.pdf>
- ^{iv} Farming Connect *Eligibility Criteria* https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/sites/farmingconnect/files/documents/eligibility_%20%281%29.pdf
- ^v The Landworkers' Alliance (2019) *Food, Farming, and the Climate Crisis: How we can feed people and cool the planet*. https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Farming-Food-and-the-Climate-Crisis_v2.pdf
- ^{vi} Preston City Council (2021) *Community Wealth Building* <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/1334/Community-Wealth-Building>
- ^{vii} FAO (2018) *Copenhagen: Organic Conversion In Public Kitchens* <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Brief-15-Copenhagen-2017.pdf>
- ^{viii} Farming Connect (2021) *Venture Programme* <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/business/venture>
- ^{ix} The Landworkers' Alliance Woody Branch (2020) *Forestry Manifesto* <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Forestry-Manifesto-LWA-final.pdf>