

# Necessary Policy Changes emerging from The Battle for Trecadwgan Farm

County farms, which are owned by local authorities, are one of the most powerful levers that local authorities have for helping new entrants into farming. They offer real potential to support the economic viability of local farming, to promote innovative farming methods, and to deliver environmentally sustainable farming. However, after years of austerity local authorities are under ever greater pressure to sell off public land and these valuable public assets are disappearing into the private sector, often ceasing to be farms at all. Instead of balancing the books, cash strapped councils have started selling off the family silver to pay for basic services.

It doesn't need to be this way. Where councils are no longer able to keep these farms themselves, they can still ensure that they remain community assets by transferring them directly to the local community as community-owned farms. Community farms enable people to be a part of creating their own local food supply and gather together around food. They bring people closer to nature and encourage the next generation of farmers.



Welsh Government, local authorities and UK Government should learn from the example of Trecadwgan farm, a County Farm that was put up for sale, which the local people have been raising money to secure and turn into a community farm and agroecological education centre. In this case the local authority has been mean spirited and obstructive towards the local community's efforts, when they should have done their utmost to facilitate them.

We are calling on local authorities to move away from short-term thinking to account for the needs of future generations and for both Welsh and UK Governments to provide the necessary support to both local authorities and local communities.

## Maintaining Public Land for Public Good

We call for proactive Welsh Government legislation and a UK Government fund to maintain the county farm estate or enable community buy-outs of county farms if councils decide to sell.

The Welsh Government should use all the power it has to encourage councils to increase their county farm estates and prevent further sell offs. Government should immediately create a County Farm Review Group to address county farms in the following legislation:

- **Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2016.** The WBFG Act should be amended to include an explicit requirement for local authorities to examine their county farm estates. The Future Generations Commissioner should create guidance for local authorities outlining the importance of these estates providing template processes for local councils to integrate policies for either protecting their county farms, or enabling community buy outs of the farms. These policies should feed into the councils' annual action plans.
- **Community Right to Buy Legislation.** We advocate for a law creating a requirement for councils to consult the community before selling county farms and, if there is local interest, give them the opportunity to turn the farm into a community farm. This could be modelled after Scotland's Community Right to Buy legislation. This could also be incorporated into the legislation implementing the Welsh Government's final post-Brexit agricultural policy.
- **Welsh Government's Post-Brexit Agricultural Policy (implementing Sustainable Farming & Our Land).**

County farms should be given an explicit role in tackling climate change and supporting new entrants - the upcoming agricultural policy legislation should include a requirement for the Environment Minister to make money available to local authorities to invest in their county farms in order to support new entrants and promote agroecological practices. This should be supported by additional funds made available by Westminster.

- **A review of the General Disposal Consent (Wales) Order (GDCO).** This Order allows Local Authorities to sell assets to be sold at less than the highest offer they can get (provided the difference between the sale price and the highest offer they can get is less than £2 million), if they believe that the sale would result in the promotion or improvement of: economic well-being; social well-being; or environmental well-being. Giving priority to the local community when selling county farms would frequently further all of these. However, as the order only allows rather than requires councils sell below best price to further these aims, as the local community found in relation to Trecadwgan, they often won't. The order should be amended to contain further guidance about valuing the social and sustainability benefits of county farms with a presumption in favour of selling them at less than best price to further the interests of future generations.
- **Community Asset Transfers.** Welsh Government/Ystadau Cymru have provided guidance on the transfer of public assets to community groups, Community Asset Transfers. Although not explicitly excluded, the current guidance does not refer to County Farms as an example of an asset that could be transferred. This guidance should be updated to refer to include County Farms.
- **Council Community Asset Transfer Policies.** Many councils have policies outlining how they will manage Community Asset Transfers. We note that Pembrokeshire County Council has explicitly excluded county farms in theirs. This makes sense where the Council intends to keep them, but where they would otherwise be sold into the private sector, county farms should not be included as potential subjects of a Community Asset Transfer.
- **New Local Authority Policies to retain overall acreage.** To guard against the wholesale disposal of county farm estates in future, councils should pass policies to retain the current overall acreage of their estate. Gloucestershire and Norfolk county councils are already do this.

## Funding for the County Estate and Community Farms

- **National Community Wealth Fund.** Welsh Government should explore how to develop a National Community Wealth Fund the resources to acquire farmland for community ownership and to have first refusal on future sale of publicly owned farmland.
- **Welsh Agricultural Land Bank.** In a similar model to the Development Bank of Wales, Welsh Government should introduce a Welsh Agricultural Land Bank. As well as providing low and zero interest loans for new entrants and new entrants, this Land Bank could provide finance for communities looking to purchase land and farms including county farms. It could also help Local Authorities buy new land to grow the County Farm estate.

For more information please contact [holly@landworkersalliance.org.uk](mailto:holly@landworkersalliance.org.uk)

