

Dyddiad: Dydd Mercher 25 Hydref 2000
Amser: 9.00am hyd 12.05pm
Lleoliad: Ystafell Bwyllgora, Adeilad y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol

Nid yw'r cyfieithiad Cymraeg ar gael ar hyn o bryd.

REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

Welsh Development Agency Fast Track Bid for Objective 1 Funding

1. The Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) considered fast track bids for Objective 1 funding on Monday 16 October. The Welsh Development Agency's was the only bid under Priority 5 for the agri-food sector. The PMC has approved the bid but capped it at 50%.

2. The bid covers grant schemes to support processing and marketing of agricultural products, training and other business advisory services to help farming adapt and diversify and investment in agricultural holdings. Detailed work is underway with the WDA on implementation.

Food Fairs

3. On 13 October I opened the Llangollen Food Fair. A very successful fair - attended by a range of North Wales food producers with an impressive array of Welsh foods on display.

4. I will be attending the SIAL biannual international food fair in Paris on Tuesday, 24 October, along with representatives of Welsh food companies and the WDA's Agri-Food Directorate. This is a good opportunity for our companies to meet overseas buyers.

Agri Diversification Seminar - Carmarthen

5. I attended the seminar at Trinity College, Carmarthen on 12 October on the theme of "sustainability through diversity". One of most interesting presentations was that by Gordon Macatee, Assistant Deputy Minister for Agriculture in British Columbia, on their experience of diversification. It provided a good example of what can be achieved.

Welsh Meat Company

6. I am pleased that the company has achieved the minimum number of subscribers it wanted and is now going live. The company is holding a series of meetings across Wales with subscribers to explain their

proposals to develop the business including procurement and joint ventures in processing.

BSE Inquiry Lord Phillip's Report

7. The Report will be presented to Parliament on Thursday, 26 October and a Government statement is expected to be made early on Thursday afternoon.

Assembly Budget 2001-02 to 2003-04

8. The draft budget figures were, of course, made public on 19 October and will be the subject of a statement from the Finance Secretary on 26 October. The Committee will be considering a paper on the budget proposals for the Agriculture & Rural Development MEG at its next meeting.

School Milk Scheme

9. As part of the Partnership Agreement's commitment to Education and Lifelong Learning, the initiative for free school milk for all pupils at key stage one from January 2001 is being actively pursued by officials in relevant Assembly Departments, local authorities, the FSA and the WDA's Agri-Food Directorate, and I will be making a substantive announcement shortly.

GM Seeds

10. Following the vote in the plenary session on 19 October on the Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations it is likely that the UK Government will now make these regulations for the whole of the UK, since they bring in EU obligations which Member States are compelled to translate into domestic legislation. As I indicated on 19 October, I will be setting up an all-party strategy group on GM issues to look at the scope for reflecting the Assembly's policy in possible amendments to these Regulations and in the drafting of the Seeds Marketing Regulations which are also required.

Organic Farming

11. I visited Richard Tomlinson's organic dairy farm, in Rosset recently which provided a useful contrast to the conventional dairy farms which I have seen to date. Richard is involved with Calon Wen, an organic co-operative which the Assembly has grant aided. Continuing this organic theme, I will be opening the Welsh Organic Farming Event on Friday at the Pembrokeshire College in Haverfordwest.

12. The Committee asked me on 11 October to clarify the source of the additional £2.28 million for the Organic Farming Scheme in 2000-01. This addition to the budget has been made as a result of a technical adjustment arising from a reclassification by the Treasury of expenditure from the Departmental Expenditure Limit to Annually Managed Expenditure. It is additional expenditure which has not been taken from an underspend on other agriculture programmes.

Fisheries

13. In connection with my fisheries responsibilities, I will be visiting the Environment Agency on 25 October, 2000 to hear about its work on inland fisheries, and will also have an opportunity to see at first hand its salmon and trout work on the River Taff. Later in the week I will be aboard the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee's patrol vessel, "The Cranogwen" on one of its enforcement patrols off Milford Haven.

Consultations

14. The consultation document on the establishment of an independent appeals panel went out on Friday, 20 October. Members should have had a copy and we are asking for responses by 22 December. I will come back to the committee once I have considered all the responses received.

15. We have embarked upon a series of roadshow public meetings to explain the new Tir Mynydd scheme. So far, 24 such events have been organised and the Divisional Offices are working closely with the NFU Cymru and FUW to encourage a good attendance at the meetings.