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Chairman
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
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Dear Mr Davies

Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Thank you for inviting the Farmers' Union of Wales to submit views on the priorities of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee for the 6th Senedd term.

You will appreciate that, given the FUW's Mission is *to advance and protect Wales' family farms, both nationally and individually, in order to fulfil the Union's vision, that Vision being thriving, sustainable, family farms in Wales*, the below response relates to those priorities related to Wales' agriculture and family farms.

As you have acknowledged, inevitably there will be some cross-over with policy areas which fall within the remit of other Senedd Committees, and it is hoped that those areas where joint-working would be beneficial will be self-evident.

Given the limited space available, while we have provided a non-exhaustive list of key policy concerns, we have kept details of these to the bare minimum and focussed to some extent on answering your questions regarding strategic priorities.

We therefore look forward to providing further detailed information if and when the Committee carries out work in relation to those policy areas we have identified and which are of relevance to Welsh agriculture and family farms.

I would also highlight that many of the below and other priorities are highlighted in the FUW's 2021 Senedd Election Manifesto¹.

Yours sincerely

Nicholas I. D. Fenwick
Head of Policy

¹ https://www.fuw.org.uk/media/attachments/2021/04/09/senedd_manifesto-2021-interactive-eng.pdf

The Committee's strategic priorities over the next six months

1. The Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit process has shown how rapidly matters or impacts dealt with by the Senedd and Welsh Government can evolve. Most recent examples include developments in terms of international trade deals, rapid increases in pressures on rural housing and the sale of farmland for the purpose of tree planting.
2. Given such pressures, the FUW believes it would be in the Senedd and Committee's interests to enhance previous ways of working which allow the Committee to react rapidly to such issues as they arise, while continuing to conduct more traditional inquiries.
3. To this end, the FUW believes it would also be of value for the Committee to hold open-ended/rolling inquiries which allow the regular acceptance of evidence from stakeholders on particular ongoing issues and the publication of regular Committee updates and views on such issues.
4. While the Coronavirus pandemic prevented members of Senedd Committees from meeting with Welsh constituents across Wales for long periods, the adoption of technology has, in a sense, allowed far greater contact with parts of Wales further away from the M4 corridor.
5. There nevertheless remains a perceived distance between many of Wales' regions and the work undertaken in Cardiff Bay that the FUW believes the Committee should attempt to overcome, by holding more meetings and visits in parts of Wales away from the M4 corridor, including those more remote areas where concerns and priorities may differ significantly to those perceived.
6. As such, it is believed that during the coming six months, targets should be established for meetings and visits across Wales where relevant to those issues being considered by the Committee.

The Committee's longer term objectives and priorities for the term of the sixth Senedd

6. As previously highlighted in our meeting with the Committee on 15th July 2021, the FUW believes that tackling the environmental challenges we face as a country and world are a priority that falls within the remit of all Senedd Committees - but that this should sit alongside, and not be allowed to eclipse the economic interests of the people and communities of Wales.
7. As such, the FUW believes a longer term objective and priority for the Committee should be to ensure the three pillars of sustainability - economic, environmental, and social - are given equal consideration and respect and taken forward in tandem by the Welsh Government and Senedd.
8. To these ends, the FUW would highlight the following specific policy areas of particular relevance to Wales' rural and agricultural communities which it is believed should receive the Committee's particular attention:

- a. Funding

Major concerns exist in terms of the impact on Wales' economy and rural communities of UK Treasury and Welsh Government cuts to agricultural and rural funding budgets, and the FUW therefore believes that critical assessments of budgets and impacts of any changes should be undertaken by the Committee.

- b. Agriculture Bill (Wales)

The FUW would emphasise the need to ensure that all sections of the Agriculture Bill place equal emphasis on each of the three sustainability pillars while similarly respecting the Future Wellbeing Goals, including those relating to economic prosperity, resilience, equality, culture and language.

In particular, we would emphasise the need for the Bill to encompass the priorities identified in the FUW/NFU Cymru/Wales YFC *A Welsh Way forward* document: namely *stability; family farms; supporting rural communities and Welsh jobs; sustainable agriculture and rewarding environmental outcomes*².

These should be delivered by design, as defined strategic outcomes supported by evidence, rather than being merely hoped for or inadvertent outcomes.

To this end, future support should be focussed on the family farms which make the greatest contribution to Wales' economy, jobs, communities and culture; capped at fair levels; be simple to administer; minimise discrimination between farms, parishes or regions; and ensure money is not paid to those effectively operating outside Wales' economy.

c. Taking advantage of and mitigating adverse impacts of trade deals

The Committee will be well aware of the numerous UK Government trade negotiations with Third Countries, the concerns relating to these in terms of impacts on Wales' economy, trade and rural communities - issues which fall directly within the Committee's remit - and claims regarding potential benefits of future trade deals.

As such, the FUW believes the Committee should consider these as they emerge, in the context of likely or possible benefits and drawbacks for Wales, and how these might be taken advantage of and mitigated through actions by the Welsh Government and Senedd.

d. Monitor and seek to address the impacts of environmental legislation

It is most welcome that the Committee has been charged with considering the Water Resources 2021 Regulations. Given the potential impacts, positive or otherwise, of this and volumes of similar legislation introduced in recent years or proposed, it is essential that impacts are monitored and mitigation measures/changes introduced by the Welsh Government and Senedd where necessary.

e. Afforestation in Wales

Adverse impacts of past afforestation programmes on Wales' rural economy, communities and habitats are well documented, and while tree planting must inevitably form an important part of climate change mitigation measures, funding for tree planting and increased interest in carbon trading schemes should not facilitate further such damage nor the purchase and loss of family farms³, Welsh funding and carbon to businesses and individuals from outside of Wales.

The FUW believes the Committee should consider how such impacts are mitigated through a 'the right tree in the right place for the right reason' principle, possibly in tandem with the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee⁴.

f. Impacts of Bovine TB and other animal health issues on Wales' economy, trade and rural communities

Maintaining and enhancing animal health and welfare are essential in terms of Wales' rural economy and trade, as well as being of importance in their own right. The adverse economic, social and psychological impacts of animal health issues on rural communities are well documented, with bovine TB in particular now an acute problem in much of Wales.

The FUW believes the Committee should build on previous Committees' work in terms of considering such issues and making recommendations, particularly in terms of ensuring bTB is tackled in both livestock and wildlife, while also considering the net adverse impacts of well-meaning rules that favour foreign competitors and therefore have net negative impacts.

² https://www.fuw.org.uk/images/pdf/NFU-FUW_leaflet-English.pdf

³ <https://www.fuw.org.uk/en/news/14688-fuw-to-discuss-merits-and-drawbacks-of-carbon-trading-quotas>

⁴ <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s61971/FWP%2035%20Farmers%20Union%20of%20Wales.pdf>