

The Agriculture (Wales) Bill - farming for future generations

We must take this unique opportunity to create an Agriculture (Wales) Bill that uses taxpayers' money to pay farmers to tackle the mounting Nature & Climate Emergency and restore our ecosystems and the vital benefits they provide. This includes the capacity to produce food now and in the future, essential to our food security and the resilience of Welsh farming in a changing World.

The case for change:

Farming occupies almost 90% of Wales. We need it to produce our food, but also to look after nature and the ecosystems nature creates and on which we depend. Farming also has a vital role in helping us mitigate and adapt to climate change, including using nature-based solutions e.g., well-managed habitats like peatlands and woodlands that lock up atmospheric carbon and provide natural flood management¹.

For this reason, we must rethink how and why we use millions of pounds of taxpayers' money each year to support farmers in Wales. This is because current policy and support doesn't take a balanced approach to food production and the needs of nature and society with the result that:

- None of our soils, apart from woodland, are in good condition².
- Agricultural pollution is a major reason why two thirds of all freshwater bodies are not achieving good status and why air pollution caused by ammonia from livestock is rising³.
- Welsh agriculture contributes 12% to our overall greenhouse gas emissions.
- Unsustainable farming is the main reason Wales is one of the most nature depleted countries in the World⁴. This matters, not just because nature has a right to exist, it also creates and maintains the ecosystems we need to survive.

**Life on earth depends on nature to provide clean air, water and healthy soils.
Without nature there would be no food.**

The current support system doesn't even sustain farming. There are 800 fewer Welsh farms today than in 2014 (*Welsh Government figures*). This clearly has worrying implications for the future of rural communities, language and culture.

Farming that's good for people, nature and climate:

Thankfully, the new Agriculture (Wales) Bill provides us with the unique opportunity to use public money to pay farmers for land management that responds to the urgent need to restore nature, repair vital ecosystems, and tackle climate change. We have this one opportunity to pay farmers to look after the very building blocks they need to produce food sustainably for us and future generations.

There are already successful farmers farming with nature across Wales, but this approach is limited in its extent. They include farmers like the Welsh [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) producing beef, lamb, dairy, cereals, fruit, veg and nature rich farms that will benefit us now and in the future.

What we need is an Agriculture (Wales) Bill that supports these farmers effectively and makes the way they produce food and look after nature and the environment the norm.

¹ naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/news/wwf-rspb-report-nature-based-solutions-uk-climate-adaptation-policy/

² [NRW/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/?lang=en](https://nrw.evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/?lang=en)

³ [NRW/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/?lang=en](https://nrw.evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/?lang=en)

⁴ rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/about-us/48398rspb-biodiversity-intactness-index-summary-report-v4.pdf

Investing in nature is an investment in the stability of farming:

Research shows that our current approach to supporting farmers with direct subsidies (aka the Basic Payment Scheme) based on the area they farm actually decreases the stability of farm incomes. In contrast, payments linked to environmental outcomes, like restoring and looking after nature and tackling climate change, increase farm income stability. Reducing inputs e.g., artificial fertilizers and animal feeds, is shown to increase the stability of farm incomes even further whilst also reducing negative impacts of farming on the environment.^{5,6}

[Paying for public goods from land management: How much will it cost and how might we pay?](#) (Matt Rayment, 2019) established the annual cost for securing environmental land management for Wales would be £273 million. This is an amount similar to current levels of funding. Additionally, environmentally focused payments would secure value for public money, unlike the current system.

Examples of successful Welsh farms that are good for people, nature and climate:



Esgairllaethdy, Myddfai is a 63 ha mixed livestock farm at the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park farmed by Hywel Morgan. Hywel keeps 400 White-Faced sheep and 40 beef cattle. Hywel's attitude has changed, from being all about production to realising the benefits of working with – and enjoying – nature.

“...if you haven't got that diversity of wildlife on your farm, you're doing something wrong. You're missing a trick.”

About 15% of the farm is woodland and approximately 1,000m of hedgerow have been restored. A pond was created and has proved very valuable for biodiversity.

Argoed, Mold is a 70 ha organic dairy farm, with about 65 British Friesian cows, farmed by Stuart Taylor. The Friesian cow suit Stuart's focus on grazing and conserved forage and the milk is sold through the Calon Wen organic dairy co-operative.

“Good farming has to include not just food production but habitat protection and restoration. We need nature!”

Through simple changes in grassland management, the swards have become far richer in legumes and herbs. As well as providing high quality forage, this has greatly increased their wildlife value for bumblebees and other pollinators.

Evidence shows we can use current levels of agriculture funding to support farmers to tackle mounting environmental challenges that threaten our and future generations' well-being. Doing this will enhance their ability to produce food and improve the stability of farm incomes across Wales. Using taxpayers' money this way will secure value for public money - an increasingly important consideration given the growing demands on the public purse.

The question is why aren't we already doing this, not whether we should?

Food security:

Historically, responses to food insecurity have been centred around the need for greater production. However, [we currently produce more than enough to feed the global population](#); demonstrating that food insecurity is linked less with calories produced, but instead results from a myriad of factors including food waste (up to 30% of food produced), diet choice and lack of physical and financial access.

Supporting food security in Wales will require linked strategies aligning consumption with sustainable and healthy diets and greater action to decrease food waste. This should be achieved alongside a transition towards sustainable agriculture that delivers for nature, climate and people in the long term.

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⁵ Harkness et al, 2021. Stability of farm income: The role of agricultural diversity and agri-environment scheme payments.

⁶ Clark C, (October 2019). Less is more: Improving profitability and the natural environment in hill and other marginal farming systems.