



Background

The [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) (NFFN) is a farmer led organisation established in January 2018. We are uniting farmers across the UK who are committed to managing their land for wildlife and the environment, as well as growing and providing healthy, nutritious food. We have 10 farmers on our NFFN Cymru steering group, and almost 300 farmer members in Wales who support our manifesto, clearly emphasising the support for nature friendly land management from farmers who are looking for a voice to influence future policies.

Context

The landscape in Wales is shaped by farming, with farmers managing over 80% of the country's land. Yet not all change in recent times has been desirable; soils have been depleted, water courses degraded, and nature has struggled to cope with the pace of change. The [State of Nature 2019 Report](#) highlights that 1 in 6 wildlife species in Wales is threatened with extinction, whilst NRW's [State of Natural Resources Report](#) shows that none of Wales' ecosystems are resilient. Furthermore, agriculture is responsible for 16% of Wales' total greenhouse gas emissions.

However, many farms are bucking this trend, and many farmers are playing an incredible role in helping nature and the environment flourish on their farms - we believe that they should be better supported and rewarded for their good work. If more follow this lead, we can reverse these declines. Nature-friendly farming can help tackle the nature and climate crises, support vibrant rural communities and economies, produce plentiful healthy sustainable food and improve public health. Put simply, nature friendly farming offers countless benefits for those areas that sit under the Committee's remit. In order to achieve this, we urge the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee to prioritize the following key areas.

Agriculture (Wales) White Paper

With the Welsh Government intending to introduce a new **Agriculture Bill** in the first year of this Senedd; scrutiny of this landmark piece of legislation will be vital to ensure that Wales' agriculture industry is well equipped and supported to produce plentiful healthy food, whilst also tackling the nature and climate crises.

Scrutiny of the proposed **Sustainable Farming Scheme**, which is likely to be the main vehicle for agricultural support following the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme and associated agri-environment schemes should also feature prominently within the Committee's work programme. A future agricultural support system must facilitate and reward farmers appropriately for delivering environmental benefits such as improved biodiversity, clean water and air, carbon sequestration and natural flood management. Currently, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the detail of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme and the associated transition period as the Basic Payment Scheme is phased out.

Community Food Strategy

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government outlines plans to develop a **Wales Community Food Strategy**. We need a transformative food system that ensures farmers earn a fair return whilst ensuring food is healthy, affordable and sustainably produced. Many NFFN farmers are changing the way they supply the food they produce, and are marketing directly to the public, through local supply chains or online (please see our [Feeding the Nation](#) report)

A shift towards a more local food system can yield numerous positive results, with the recent UK report [The Case of Local Food](#) highlighting that a 10% shift in the food retail market towards more sustainable local food systems could yield up to 200,000 more jobs, support a green economic recovery and restore nature. Attention

should be given to areas such as public procurement and routes to market, secondary production and retention of value, as well as promoting horticulture and mixed farming enterprises. As such, we consider the scrutiny of this potentially transformative strategy to be a key priority for the Committee.

Tree Planting Targets & Carbon Offsetting

The Welsh Government's [plans for woodland creation in Wales](#) sets out the need to plant 43,000ha of new woodland by 2030 and 180,000ha by 2050. There is no doubt that trees play a vital role in addressing the nature and climate crisis – woodland makes us more resilient to climate change and can create a nature-rich landscape that is beneficial to both farmland and wildlife.

However, this is an ambitious stretch and a roll-out to this magnitude could have [unintended consequences if not actioned cautiously](#), not least on our biodiversity and wider environment. Planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can also threaten farmland biodiversity and in fact lead to perverse negative outcomes for our climate. In some instances, the opposite of tree planting is more appropriate for contributing to the bigger picture of climate mitigation and nature restoration, where we should be *felling trees* on peatland or shelterbelts near areas used by ground-nesting birds.

Equal consideration should be given to other carbon-rich agricultural habitats such as hedgerows, heathlands, peatlands, species-rich grasslands, hay meadows and multispecies leys. As it stands, degraded UK peatlands emit more carbon than what even the most ambitious UK Climate Change Committee tree planting targets could capture and store. We call on the committee to scrutinise the Welsh Government's **tree planting targets**, to ensure they don't adversely affect valuable farmland habitats and species.

National Minimum Standards for Agriculture

The recent Agriculture (Wales) White paper outlines plans to create new **National Minimum Standards** (NMS) and enforcement regime for agriculture. Maintaining our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards has never been as important. Scrutiny of the proposed NMS would be welcomed to ensure that farmers are able to produce safe, healthy food whilst helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish

Conclusion

Nature-friendly farming has a vital role to play in tackling the nature and climate crises. Adopting on-farm nature-based solutions to climate is something that every farm in Wales can deliver, however, urgent policy support is needed to take nature friendly farming to scale. We sincerely hope the Committee understands the importance of nature friendly farming and its relevance to the Committees work areas. Nature friendly farming's role in meeting Wales' climate change ambitions must not be overlooked – it is an area that deserves the utmost attention.

Given the Committee's wide remit, we believe that the above issues strongly lend themselves to joint working and collaboration with the *Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee*. If not, there is a danger of siloed and incoherent policy making from Welsh Government as a whole.

Thank you for considering our submission. We look forward to working closely with Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee over the term of the sixth Senedd.

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