



## Nature Friendly Farming Network Cymru A Green Recovery: How Farming can be the Solution

### Introduction

The [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) (NFFN) is a farmer led, independent organisation established in November 2017. We are uniting farmers who are committed to managing their land for wildlife and the delivery of public goods, as well as growing and providing healthy and nutritious food. We are an UK wide movement, with an established [NFFN Cymru Steering Group](#).

The landscape in Wales is shaped by farming. 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**. However, many farms are bucking this trend, and many farmers are playing an incredible role in helping wildlife 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 climate and ecological crises, support vibrant rural communities and economies, produce plentiful healthy sustainable food and improve public health. In order to help achieve this we urge all political parties to commit to the following **6 key asks**:

1. Maintain and redirect payments towards mainstreaming nature friendly farming
2. Commit to zero carbon agriculture by 2040
3. Maintain strong environmental and animal welfare standards
4. Build markets for nature friendly farming products
5. Invest in local food systems
6. Educate on food, farming and nature

With over 80% of Wales being farmland, we need to act now. By committing to these 6 points we can help ensure that...



## 1. Maintain and redirect payments towards mainstreaming nature friendly farming

A future agricultural policy can play an important role in tackling the nature and climate crises, it can support rural economies and communities, produce healthy, sustainable foods and improve public health.

- A new Wales agriculture policy should be centred on *public money for public goods* that **rewards nature friendly farming** and the multiple environmental benefits it provides.
- There needs to be **sufficient long-term funding** to support farmers in their transition to nature friendly systems and continue to reward public goods production.
- Appropriate **advice and guidance** are essential in order to help farmers during this transition period and beyond.
- Future schemes should be made **accessible to more farmers** with no limits on uptake based on the size of the land holding. All farmers have the potential to provide environmental goods and services and this can be encouraged without prejudice to any one sector.
- We'd also welcome **financial support to invest** in infrastructure, machinery, equipment and technology to help make **food production more sustainable**.

The shift towards a more nature friendly approach delivers broader benefits to the public, including flood protection, water and air quality, and access to thriving natural landscapes. Furthermore, nature friendly farming can often be the most profitable way of producing food. For example, implementing sustainable livestock levels based on the natural productive capacity of the land can be a route to [increasing profitability](#). Whilst intensive farming systems can also be financially profitable, this is short term thinking due to its negative impact on our natural resources - the very building blocks of food production. Here's some more information on why [nature means business](#).

## 2. Commit to zero carbon agriculture by 2040

Land well managed for nature also stores carbon and helps [mitigate climate change](#). Simple **nature-based solutions** such as tree and hedgerow planting, improving soil health and encouraging grassland biodiversity, as well as more complex management like peatland restoration can play a big role in tackling climate change.

- Wales' agricultural sector should be **net zero carbon by 2040** at the latest. Every farmer can make changes to reduce carbon emissions and store carbon on their farm.
- All businesses should have a **baseline carbon audit** to provide a broad understanding of the situation on their farm and help to track progress.
- **Advice and support** across the sector will be important to help farmers to select the right measures.

Many actions to reduce a farm's carbon footprint can make economic sense, for example simple changes to a crop rotation to include legume crops or herbal leys can reduce the need to buy artificial fertiliser. Sustainable livestock levels and grazing management can enhance carbon sequestration and biodiversity, and play an important role in nutrient recycling. Our report - [Farming for our future: The nature friendly climate solution we urgently need](#) demonstrates how nature friendly farming can help tackle the climate emergency. For more information read the [NFFN position on Net Zero Farming](#).

### 3. Maintain strong environmental and animal welfare standards

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of our dysfunctional relationship with nature, environment and our food with studies linking the disease to the collapse of ecosystems and wildlife destruction. Maintaining our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards are therefore vital.

- We remain concerned that future trade deals could undercut the high standards set by Welsh and UK farmers. The Welsh Government must put pressure on the UK Government to commit to **high food, environmental and animal welfare standards for trade deals**; to ensure that farmers in the UK are not undercut by imported food produced to lower standards, and protect the public from products which do not meet our own high standards.
- A future agricultural policy in Wales must deliver **strong baseline environmental regulations and a long-term funding commitment**. Fundamentally, it must enable farmers to produce safe, healthy food whilst helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish.
- A robust baseline of environmental standards for land management should **apply to all**, even those who choose not to engage with any environmental land management schemes.

### 4. Build markets for nature friendly farming products

We believe that food produced to high nature and environmental standards should be recognised in the market and that farmers adhering to them are rewarded. This can help deliver environmental, economic and social enhancements. The wonderful thing about food is that you get three votes a day. Every one of them has the potential to change the world.

- We recommend that funding is used to help **develop supply chains and markets for nature friendly products** that will help incentivise and reward the sustainable management of natural resources in Wales.
- Labels such as *Fair to Nature*, *Leaf Marque*, *Organic* or *Pasture for Life* are good indicators of environmental sustainability and farmers should be encouraged and supported to adopt such farming practices. Membership of such schemes can provide a business advantage for producers, but this relies on **disincentivising unsustainable practices** which may undercut them.
- Food produced on **land managed under government funded environmental schemes could be marketed** based on its role in delivering environmental benefits.
- Similarly, there are opportunities to create **geographic indicators** for products emanating from particular landscapes.

There is a clear role for government to be proactive in providing primary producers with a business environment that enables them to secure a fair return from the market, and a fair share of the profit that exists in the supply chain.

## 5. Invest in local food systems

We need a system that ensures farmers earn a fair return whilst ensuring food is healthy, affordable and sustainably produced. When it comes to food policy, Government's role should be an 'enabling' one, setting up structures to facilitate a strategic national approach to food.

- **Public procurement rules should prioritise buying local** food direct from Welsh farmers where possible and give preference to farmers with established nature friendly farming practices and excellent environmental land management.
- One could argue that there is no such thing as local food without the presence of **local food infrastructures**. Hidden costs along the entire supply chains e.g. high food miles or livestock feed that drives global deforestations, can mislead consumers. Investment is needed in this area, and facilitating local abattoirs, on-farm butchering and manufacturing facilities if there's a demand, is vital if we are to truly develop a local food system.
- Develop **food hubs** to connecting local farmers and producers with consumers - **transparency in a shorter food supply chain** may help reconnect people with where their food is produced and how it shapes the environment.
- WG should develop a realistic strategy or vision of what kind of foods we need to produce in Wales, aligning production, supply and consumption.

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. See our report [Feeding the Nation: How Nature Friendly Farmers are Responding to Covid-19](#) for examples. Here's some more information on [NFFN's Food Policy Position](#).

## 6. Educate on food, farming and nature

Education around where our food comes from and its effect on the planet is vital in order to improve public understanding about food, farming and the environment.

- Food, farming and nature should be included in our **school and college curriculums**.
- **Re-connecting people with farms and their food** through school visits, community education and workshops on local farms can help drive change. Farmers should be supported to engage the public which could be supported by central or local government.
- **Farmers would also benefit** from appropriate training/ skilling up/ peer to peer learning/ education on the benefits of nature friendly farming. Advice and guidance, for example the government funded Farming Connect programme, should place **greater emphasis on nature conservation and the business benefits of nature friendly farming**.

Currently, there's a disconnect between customers and farmers and a lack of understanding on what is good or bad for the environment. We need to educate people where their food comes from and the positive environmental, social and economic impacts of nature friendly farming systems.

## Conclusion

Nature friendly farming has a big role to play in ensuring a Green Recovery following Covid-19. It can help improve public health, rural economies and communities as well as underpin food security and tackle the nature and climate crises. The NFFN would welcome the opportunity to work closely on drafting policies and developing initiatives to help mainstream nature friendly farming in Wales. For further information, please contact Hilary Kehoe (NFFN Cymru Chair) [hilary.kehoe@nffn.org.uk](mailto:hilary.kehoe@nffn.org.uk) or [info@nffn.org.uk](mailto:info@nffn.org.uk)