

# THE WELSH FARMING AND COUNTRYSIDE SCHEME

Supporting Welsh Agriculture to produce food, protect the land and keep farming for generations to come.



Welsh Conservatives

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig

STANDING UP FOR WALES



# OUR PLAN TO SECURE WELSH FARMING FOR THE FUTURE



**DELIVERING** a baseline support system so that farmers can plan ahead, helping to expand or diversify.

**GUARANTEEING** that funding for agriculture goes into our rural economy and not on climate change.

**ENABLING** support for all different types of farms to thrive.

**PUTTING FOOD SECURITY FIRST** and ensuring transparent and fair funding.

**ENDING THE ONE SIZE FITS ALL** model of farm funding, giving farmers flexibility to opt into the best approach for their individual farms.

## FOREWORD



**The future of Welsh Agriculture is under threat like never before, and must be supported before it's too late.**

After 25 years of successive Welsh Labour Governments running farming in Wales, our rural communities have been constantly attacked. Under the Welsh Labour Government, we have seen cuts to farming support, Bovine TB allowed to run free and food security ignored with farms being used for tree planting.

Our vision of a Welsh Farming and Countryside Scheme (WFCS) offers a compelling alternative to the Welsh Labour Government's disastrous Sustainable Farming Scheme, which would have seen livestock units slashed, the rural economy hit and a loss of 5,500 jobs. Our streamlined scheme, with an emphasis on essential actions and flexibility with optional actions, offers significant benefits not just to agriculture, but for the whole of Wales. Furthermore, the scheme promotes environmental stewardship and contributes to achieving national climate change goals.

We will cultivate a future where Welsh farms continue to provide high-quality food, safeguard our environment, plan for the future and contribute to the vibrant social fabric of Wales for generations to come.

There can be no denying that these figures are damning for the Welsh agricultural sector. It is vital that our Welsh farmers are not sold down the river, but are given the support that they deserve as the guardians of the Welsh landscape and have a scheme that works with them, for them and achieves the objectives for the whole of Wales.

The National Farmers Union has called out the UK Labour Government's recent autumn budget where they announced a cut to Agricultural Property Relief, saying that it "threatens family farms" and that after the budget, "farmers, including tenants, have more uncertainty and worries". This death tax on our family farms once again illustrates Labour's contempt for the countryside.

With Welsh family farms feeling more under attack than ever before, it is vital that we develop a Welsh agricultural scheme that supports our Welsh farmers to produce high quality, local food whilst feeling supported by their Government. It is important that we give our farmers back their confidence that has been knocked out of them by successive Labour administrations. Welsh food producers are amongst the top rated worldwide for the quality of their produce, innovations and animal welfare standards – they deserve to be fully supported by their Government.

Without a drastic change in direction and policy, Welsh agriculture faces a perilous future under successive Labour Governments. The Welsh Farming and Countryside Scheme is designed to support our farmers while ensuring we look after our natural environment. We believe that working together, with input from those directly involved in the agricultural industry, is key to creating a more effective and practical scheme.

The Welsh Farming and Countryside Scheme paves the way for a future where Welsh agriculture flourishes, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous industry that nourishes Wales in every sense of the word.

This booklet offers an insight into the Welsh Farming and Countryside Scheme by outlining the five key points that would be adopted by a Welsh Conservative Government, putting Welsh agriculture at the forefront of our administration.



**Andrew RT Davies MS**  
LEADER OF THE WELSH CONSERVATIVES



**James Evans MS**  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS



# 1: DELIVERING

a baseline support system so that farmers can plan ahead, helping to expand or diversify.

## **The WFCS goes beyond the income forgone and costs incurred model of the Welsh Government's proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).**

The WFCS proposes a baseline payment of 70% current Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to actively support the work undertaken by active farmers. This tiered system offers farmers the security of a guaranteed 70% baseline payment if they fulfil basic universal actions. It also provides flexibility and the option to earn up to an additional 30% by implementing specific environmental practices that might not be financially viable otherwise. Therefore, farmers will be able to access the full BPS payment (70% + 30%) by producing food sustainably, and fulfilling other priorities such as environmental goals.

In return for this baseline payment, a series of universal actions will be undertaken by all farms. These universal actions would include benchmarking, targeted training, soil health testing, integral pest management, animal health and welfare, much of which are already being undertaken by those in farm assurance schemes.

We recognise that a 70% payment is needed for stability, long term planning to encourage investment and recognise the wider environmental work and land management that farming undertakes. The payments will be guaranteed to match the BPS payments for at least four years, and will be linked to inflation.

The 70% baseline payment, along with other incentives, will help new entrants into the industry by providing them with financial stability, fostering a more robust and resilient industry, ultimately contributing to Wales' long-term food security.

The remaining 30% of the BPS payment will be made up of a suite of optional actions that each active farmer can choose from. This flexibility allows farmers, if they so wish, to undertake additional actions that align with their farm's specific characteristics, geography and ecology. These could include: habitat creation and management, woodland management and agroforestry, and enhanced animal welfare practices.

# 2: GUARANTEEING

that funding for agriculture goes into our rural economy and not on climate change.

## **Farming is at the sharp end of climate change. As an industry, it feels the effect of extreme weather patterns more so than any other, and it also has a pivotal role in helping us futureproof our communities for the challenges ahead.**

Farming can be a vital part of the solution to climate change. This solution can take the form of innovative measures such as flood mitigation through the improvement of water quality in catchment areas and enhanced carbon sequestration measures. In the WFCS, farmers will be given the freedom to choose whether they want to pursue exceptional actions, and can expect additional support for doing so.

The WFCS aims to maintain the current budget, ensuring financial sustainability whilst implementing changes. The entire Rural Affairs budget presently only accounts for 2.1% of the Welsh Labour Government's spending. As such, in regard to the WFCS, the Climate Change budget will be used to pay for any actions that are clearly identified as climate change mitigation measures that are not directly related to food production, such as woodland management.

There was widespread opposition to the SFS's proposal for compulsory 10% tree cover across all Welsh farms. NFU Cymru stated that farmers "will not plant trees on their productive land". We have listened to our farmers, and recognise the issues that can arise from compulsory tree planting on all farms. As such, we have ensured that tree planting is an optional action, and each active farmer can decide what is or is not right on their land. Some will exceed the 10% tree cover, others will have less, but together we expect Wales will meet its tree planting targets overall, and more importantly, we will have the right tree in the right place.

As Welsh Conservatives, we recognise that by fulfilling pure environmental actions, farmers are not producing food, therefore the environmental actions will be paid for by the climate change budget. We recognise that some land would potentially be used for special climate change measures, so are offering extra support (on top of the 70% universal and 30% optional payments) to mitigate the loss of outcome.





# 3: ENABLING

support for all different types of farms to thrive.

**Our Welsh farms are the beating heart of rural communities and countryside, providing jobs and underpinning the local economy, supporting the Welsh language and cherished cultural traditions.**

The WFCS has been designed with all farmers in mind, including tenants, young entrants and those with common land rights. This will take the form of a 4-yearly offer based on delivering actions targeted at and supporting the active farmer – it is imperative that tenant farmers are able to participate in the scheme on an equal footing to owner-occupiers.

All farmers are guaranteed the opportunity to participate in the scheme, regardless of land tenure. A NFU Cymru report found that over 25% of Welsh agricultural land is farmed by tenants, making them a key component of the Welsh agricultural industry. The WFCS aims to encourage collaboration between tenant farmers and landowners. This could involve establishing mechanisms for longer-term tenancy agreements with provisions for compensation for tenant investments upon lease termination.

Collaboration can foster a more secure environment for tenant farmers to invest in sustainable practices that benefit both parties.

The WFCS will propose that young entrants are granted higher capital grant intervention rates, which will make starting a farming business more financially accessible. This will help young people overcome the initial hurdle of obtaining the necessary equipment and infrastructure required to operate in an investment heavy industry.

A flexible approach has been adopted by the WFCS, allowing for bespoke projects and initiatives for each and every area of common land in Wales. This requires a collaborative approach between graziers, landowners, agencies such as NRW, National Parks and all other stakeholders. Funding is vital to undertake the environmental work on these predominantly upland areas which can be rich in peat, have great biodiversity and play a pivotal role in water management. This funding is available through the additional options.





# 4: PUTTING FOOD SECURITY FIRST

and ensuring transparent and fair funding.

**There can be no denying that food is central to our survival and often plays a major role in the social aspect of our lives. By implementing a policy that generates great food security for the people of Wales, we are benefiting not only the Welsh economy, but also rural communities. It is of utmost importance that Welsh farmers are rewarded, and acknowledged, for producing food to the highest welfare and environmental standards.**

A 2022 report by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales states that “over half the fresh fruit and vegetables we consume in Wales are imported, with some estimates suggesting that it could be as high as 90%”, illustrating our dependence on imports to feed the nation. Furthermore, Wales currently imports around 60% of all its food.

Over reliance on global markets makes Wales vulnerable to price fluctuations, supply chain disruptions and potential food shortages, not to mention the carbon footprint of importing food. By strengthening and stabilising domestic food production, this scheme will enhance our ability to withstand global challenges.

In order to become more sustainable as a nation, we must continue to produce a large proportion of our food here in Wales. It is short sighted to take land out of food production to lower carbon emissions, if that then risks ‘offshoring’ our carbon emissions abroad. It is counterproductive and does not align with the ethos of the Welsh Conservatives.

Through the WFCS, food productivity will be boosted in a non-exploitative manner, through the encouragement of the use of precision farming techniques and new technological innovations.

Through the WFCS’ emphasis on soil health, we can see an increase in yields over time. Additionally, support for precision farming techniques like data-driven planting and resource management can optimise productivity on existing active land. The WFCS has been designed to allow farmers to fulfil environmental goals whilst simultaneously producing high standard, traceable food for the nation.







## 5: ENDING THE ONE SIZE FITS ALL MODEL OF FARM FUNDING

giving farmers flexibility to opt into the best approach for their individual farms.

**It is clear that a one-size-fits-all farming scheme does not work. There must be flexibility in any system, and an approach that collaborates with active farmers to understand what works for each set of circumstances to achieve the optimum results. The WFCS prioritises flexibility in the form of optional actions, allowing individuals/businesses to select what is appropriate for them.**

Flexibility on targets and actions is vital, allowing farmers to work in partnership with advisors to identify and implement actions that contribute to environmental goals while considering their specific farm situation. This will be critical for those with SSSI land or shared land, such as commons.

The WFCS will take into account force majeure, extreme weather events and extenuating circumstances. With an ever changing climate, it is not always possible to farm by calendar, so the WFCS offers a more nuanced approach.

A report conducted by the Country Land and Business Association in Wales (CLA Cymru) found that just 3% of farmers trust the Welsh Government. The report went on to say that just 6% would opt

into the SFS in its current form. We ensured that we worked with farmers when designing the WFCS to establish a scheme that would be suitable for farmers across the length and breadth of Wales, and would give them the opportunity to tailor the scheme to suit their farming business.

The inflexibility of the Welsh Labour Government's Sustainable Farming Scheme means many of Wales' smaller farms, often tenanted, are unable to meet the criteria or to maintain a viable business. The WFCS offers a more flexible, tailored approach with targeted financial assistance to ensure the viability and sustainability of Wales' smaller farms.

This streamlined approach will also aim to reduce bureaucracy for the farmer, and where universal standards have been met, this will be recognised by outside agencies. A clear set of standards across Wales will help both the industry and consumers make more informed decisions, giving clear assurances of the high welfare standards of Welsh produce and the environmental work being undertaken alongside this.





# THE WELSH CONSERVATIVES

# STAND WITH OUR FARMERS

