

RSPCA RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMY, TRADE AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON THE FOOD WALES BILL

Summary

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the Bill's objectives to set a food strategy, which would also complement the provisions in the Agriculture Bill where payments will promote better health and welfare in Welsh farming. A Food Commission is also welcome to promote the goals in the Bill however this Commission needs to work closely with other bodies such as the Future Generations Commissioner, and the Children's Commissioner, to ensure no duplication of work. RSPCA Cymru supports the goals of the Bill but would wish to see the promotion of animal welfare included as a secondary goal within the legislation. Furthermore, we support the idea of 'targets' for each of the secondary food goals as such targets alongside an annual assessment would assess what progress the Food Strategy has achieved in delivering these goals.

1. RSPCA Cymru is pleased to respond to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs on the Food (Wales) Bill and its impact on Wales. The RSPCA is the oldest and largest animal welfare organisation in the world and writes the standards used by RSPCA Assured, the UK's only animal welfare assurance scheme. RSPCA Assured accounts for over 85% of egg production in Wales and 23% of pig production in the UK.
2. In our submission to the consultation on The Food (Wales) Bill in September 2022 RSPCA Cymru stated that we welcomed any attempt - legislative, policy or otherwise - to establish a more sustainable food system in Wales but believed that improving animal welfare should be at the heart of this Bill and this area of policy and was not currently present within the Bill. Food policy offers a central vehicle to promote higher animal welfare choices, make more information available to consumers and encourage those to make efforts to improve the welfare provenance of food particularly as it is becoming a key consideration for consumers.
3. The Bill is concerned with sustainability, and unless there is a significant change to our diets, we are likely to see an unsustainable rise in the number of animals (particularly fish and chickens) farmed for their meat over the coming decades in Wales, and across the UK. This will place even greater pressure on already stressed environments, natural habitats and scarce resources as well as the negative impacts on animal welfare of more animals being farmed, potentially in intensive systems. As such, to counteract these impacts, a reduction in the number of farm animals and a societal move to eating less meat from higher welfare systems, such as RSPCA Assured, will be key. Indeed, a recent review by Henry Dimbleby for the UK Government recommended a 30 percent

reduction in meat consumption over the next decade¹. This followed the UK Government's Climate Change Committee stating that the amount of meat we eat must be reduced by 20-50 percent in order for the UK to reach net zero by 2050; while pledges for a reduction in meat consumption features regularly in the All Wales Plan 2021-25 ['Working Together to Reach Net Zero'](#)².

4. Since September the Welsh Government has published its proposals for the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. This will have at its heart a new Sustainable Farming Scheme for Wales, to help "farmers make sure animals have a good quality of life" and "recognise and reward high animal welfare standards which take into account the animal's physical welfare as well as their wellbeing". Crucially, incentives will hinge on animals having "opportunities for positive experiences which allow them to have a 'good life' rather than simply removing factors that have a negative impact on them"³. The Minister has also confirmed in remarks to this Committee in November that she plans to ensure there is a Veterinary Pathway payment scheme to improve welfare and health in the farming industry. RSPCA Cymru welcomes this but the proposals should be backed up by a robust, ambitious Food Strategy.
5. There is clearly scope for Wales' food policy and the new duties being placed on public bodies proposed by this legislation to work in tandem with this policy intention of incentivising farmers to deliver the highest welfare standards. This Bill's overarching principles - with animal welfare at their heart - could play a key role in achieving that.
6. However, the RSPCA would wish to see the promotion of animal welfare included as a secondary goal within the legislation. Through their procurement practices, public awareness work, via education and so much more, the public bodies listed by this legislation are well placed to create opportunities to provide higher welfare alternatives; and to promote their existence to the communities they represent. As such, should this legislation progress, the RSPCA hopes promoting the welfare of animals will be added as a secondary goal, alongside economic well-being, health and social, education, environment and food waste.
7. We believe this would be in line with the public's wishes. Indeed, polling for RSPCA Cymru has previously found that 80 percent of adults say that animal welfare standards are important in their purchasing decisions⁴. In a similar vein, Eurobarometer surveys show that 62 per cent of the British public do not feel animal welfare receives adequate importance in UK food policy⁵. The RSPCA's new [Animal Kindness Index](#) found 66 percent of UK adults consider animal welfare standards in their dietary choices; while one third of people have reduced or stopped eating meat in the past year to help animals. Clearly, consumer demand exists for increased access to higher welfare produce.
8. The Bill establishes 'food goals' and places a duty on specified public bodies to take reasonable steps to advance those food goals. The Bill sets out the food goals in two categories: • Primary Food Goal: this is the overarching goal of providing affordable, healthy, and economically, environmentally and socially sustainable food for the people of Wales. • Secondary Food Goals: these underpin the primary food goal and cover specific areas including: Economic well-being, Health and social, Education,

¹ National Food Strategy - An independent review for the UK Government

² All Wales Plan 2021-25 - Working Together to Reach Net Zero, April 2022

³ Welsh Government - [Sustainable Farming Scheme Outline Proposals for 2025](#)

⁴ YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,001 Welsh adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th - 8th September 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

⁵ European Commission, 2005. Eurobarometer – Attitudes of consumers towards the welfare of farmed animals Q12.

Environment and Food waste. As stated above RSPCA Cymru welcomes these objectives and would wish to see the promotion of animal welfare included as a secondary goal within the legislation.

9. The Bill also makes provision for setting 'targets' for each of the secondary food goals. The RSPCA would support such targets and an annual assessment of what progress the Food Strategy has achieved in delivering these goals.
10. Finally the Bill sets up a Welsh Food Commission and a national food strategy. The RSPCA agrees with the idea of a Welsh Food Commission as this can set targets for public bodies to meet and it would be the first of its kind in the UK and so act also as an advocate for Welsh food both nationally and internationally. RSPCA Cymru also agrees that certain public bodies such as the education service have a duty to meet food targets such as providing a certain percentage of food to higher animal welfare standards, ensuring the delivery of sustainable food and reducing food waste. England has agreed that its procurement strategy for public bodies on food needs radical overhaul to ensure that it is promoting higher welfare food, meeting carbon reduction targets and not permitting imported food produced to lower standards than permitted to farmers in this country.
11. The Bill proposes local food plans. RSPCA Cymru agrees that any encouragement to local authorities and local health boards to establish their own local food plans are welcome too. But, in a similar vein to any National Strategy, these must ensure animal welfare is a focus. Indeed, as noted above, if animal welfare is not included as a specific secondary goal, there is a risk all local authorities and local health boards will have a statutory obligation to provide a Local Food Plan that doesn't need to reference the welfare of animals. Through their procurement functions, and in their contact with citizens of the communities they represent, both councils and health boards are exceptionally well placed to promote animal welfare information, improve the accessibility of higher welfare options, and help citizens make informed, healthy choices about their food.
12. These discussions come as a new school curriculum is rolled out across Wales - where pupils will be taught through new Areas of Learning and Experience; Learning will include (under the Health and Well-being AoLE) empathy; and (including under the Humanities and Science and Technology AoLEs), becoming "ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world"⁶. Such teaching offers opportunities to learn about animal welfare and sustainable food in the classroom; and the RSPCA would welcome discussions about how such opportunities could feature in a Local Food Plan published by a local authority under this proposed legislation. To this end, the RSPCA's new Animal Kindness Index found 88 percent of people in Wales believe animal welfare should be taught in schools; the highest of any UK nation.
13. RSPCA Cymru believe the Food Commission should have dedicated members whose expertise on animal welfare will be able to *advise, inform and assist public bodies, and other persons, in relation to food matters*". Additionally, animal welfare should be central to the work of the Commission when carrying out its function *"to keep the public adequately informed about and advised in relation to matters which significantly affect their capacity to make informed decisions about food matters"*.
14. A Food Commission should also be able to work with bodies in Wales, such as the Future Generations Commissioner, the Children's Commissioner, to ensure no duplication of work. For example, under the Well-being of Future Generations Act, public bodies in Wales must already think about the long-term impact of their decisions, and to tackle health inequalities and climate change - so it would be prudent to explore how such bodies would work together; and to avoid unnecessary overlap.

⁶ Hwb - [Curriculum for Wales](#), accessed 15 September 2022

15. RSPCA Cymru supports the concept of a national food strategy. This should utilise opportunities to transform animal welfare standards, regardless of whether these are added to the list of goals contained within this Bill. This process could involve 'joining-up' existing Welsh Government strategies related to food and drink, such as 'A Vision for the Food & Drink industry from 2021', plans for a Community Food Strategy, and the upcoming Sustainable Farming Scheme; ensuring they were accessible to impacted sectors and the wider public in Wales. A food strategy would also complement the provisions in the Agriculture Bill where payments will promote better health and welfare in Welsh farming.