

AIMS *response to the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee.

1. AIMS is delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the Consultation from The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee. We take the clear view that bearing in mind the importance of grazing livestock to Welsh Agriculture as a basic mainstay of the economy of Wales, the importance of Welsh agriculture to the maintenance of the Welsh speaking communities and its cultural heritage; the marketing and promotion of the products of Welsh farming has a vital part to play in delivering a sustainable future. In this context we also draw attention to our deepseated concern at the reduction in confidence of farmers in their future as a recognisable negative reaction to the concept of tree-planting in areas of the country where traditional grazing and family farming is inherent. The reduced headage of suckler cows is seen as gravely worrying while the in excess of 30% reduction of breeding ewes is seen as nothing short of disastrous. Effectively, the lowest point since 2011.
2. All of this has contributed to the incalculable loss of confidence by livestock farmers in the strategy guided by Government which has arguably delivered a serious reduction in confidence in livestock farming and resulted in a drop in excess of 30% in the number of breeding ewes, a reduction in the number of suckler cows and a general malaise in all matters which play a serious part in the production of Red Meat. This loss of confidence must be placed firmly at the door of the Government as it is Government action which has resulted in a change in the support system. The excuse provided for the change in the support system is the fact that Climate change is an overarching global catastrophe driven by the misguided thought that by-products of livestock farming are contributory causes. Consequently Government changes have been made to encourage the blanket planting of trees on traditional grazing land ignoring several issues which we in AIMS believe should not be ignored. These include the fact that the majority of trees planted will be Sitka Spruce a species which we understand transmits poison to the undergrowth with run off damage to trout and salmon river. In Ireland which has a considerable new woodland of Sitka Spruce the forest has an undergrowth of an ecological dead zone. It also has a lifespan of up to 600 years grows up to 55metres high but can reach 100 metres. Effectively these plantings could tie up the land for several 100 years contributing massively to the challenge of maintaining the already elusive Welsh Culture while also demonstrably undermining the family farming based livestock farm and destroying the already challenged meat processing business. Aims cannot see any merit in this particularly against the background that even if the whole of Wales were to be planted in trees it would have virtually zero effect on the global situation affecting climate change but would contribute massively to the destruction of Welsh Culture, family farming systems and the entire unique Welsh way of life, a matter which we understand the Government is charged with sustaining.
3. In drafting this response AIMS has relied upon information gathered from its own membership, its own understanding of the importance of livestock farming to Wales as well as a great deal of information in the public domain to provide a guide to our thoughts. We are particularly indebted to the Senedd for circulating the document submitted by Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) which we've found to be informative and from what we can see largely accurate. We have also read other responses which have been equally helpful.

Association of Independent Meat Suppliers

Association of Independent Meat Suppliers PO Box 125, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 2YG

Tel: 01609 761547 Email: office@aims2001.co.uk Web: www.aims2001.co.uk X: @AIMS_Meat

The Association of Independent Meat Suppliers is a company limited by Guarantee. Company Registration No. 4389636. VAT Registration No. 7721907 22

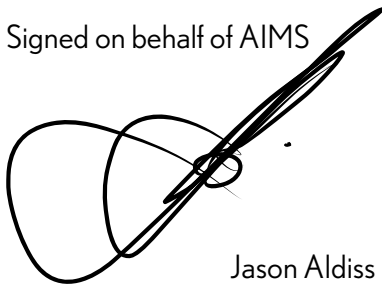
4. There are a number of issues to which we feel we should draw attention and they include the fact that HCC appears to be operating within a confined and potentially restrictive area and is probably hampered in its ambitions as a consequence. This includes the fact that in a period of relatively fast inflation its spending budgets have been reduced substantially coupled with which HMRC has decided to include its financial affairs within the curtilage of VAT consequently providing a further serious depletion in available cash for its essential spending to promote Welsh Meat.
5. We also take note of the fact that HCC operates under delegated Powers from Welsh Government, a matter which we understand everyone concerned is aware of and which are described as Section 7 of the Red Meat Industry (Wales) Measure 2010. Section 2 of this Measure identifies as
 - i. To increase efficiency or productivity in the red meat industry.
 - ii. To improve marketing in the industry.
 - iii. To improve or develop services that the industry provides or could provide to the community.
 - iv. To improve ways in which the industry contributes to sustainable development. Many of these matters are covered under the stated objectives of Hybu Cig Cymru but it does occur to us that due to the potential influence of the Government as the overarching legal parent of HCC that some political opportunities were taken to introduce changes in land use which as described in Para 2 above will potentially have a hugely damaging effect on the livestock sector. At the very least a means should be found to compensate the industry for the now apparent serious loss in confidence.
6. The most direct negative effect on farming confidence has been attributed to the blanket planting of trees through the central Welsh grazing land. As an organisation which looks after the economic viability of the meat processing sector AIMS would be failing in its duty if it did not voice its deep concern. Furthermore, we draw attention to the fact that in a world where global tensions are rising exponentially that it will become of greater importance to grow more not less of our own food in order to be self-sufficient. It could quickly become a matter of life or death. The matter of climate change is of course serious but will hardly be spared a breath by those now intent on waging war. Consequently we would advocate for the retention of far more of our own ability to grow grass to grow quality meat and all the other products which depend on grass. This has always been an important aspect of farming in Wales. It has also been an important reason why Welsh lamb and increasingly Welsh Beef has developed a following for the excellence of its meat products. It has the breeds, the grass growing ability and the stockmanship to derive maximum benefit in meat tenderness and quality of flavour. We would also take the opportunity to remind everyone concerned from politicians to practitioners that once land has been planted into trees, there is a real likelihood that it will remain in trees for an extended period, probably in excess of several 100 years as a minimum. Meanwhile this would have an intolerable negative effect on food production to say nothing of the untold damage to Welsh traditions which rely on indigenous communities dealing with livestock production. There have been clear signs of the language being re-established and associated with that the vitally strong musical heritage. If we continue down the route currently being followed, it seems to us that the beneficial work which has been done to try to re-set the cultural dial will have been a total waste of time, and that would be excessively shameful.
7. Following on from the foregoing it would be fair to say that we have questioned how the entire promotion has got to the present point and in some respects find ourselves bewildered by the seeming magnitude of what should be a relatively simple problem. That simple problem being how best to harness the HCC organisation to deliver a successful and meaningful promotional business model for the benefit of the overall livestock and meat business while also being aware of the essential need to encourage and enhance the unique Welsh Culture. It is in this context that we tend to consider whether there are structural issues which reduce the ability of HCC to function to its optimum. Having questioned whether the people most involved in the production, processing and marketing of Welsh products have a proper

understanding of their responsibilities and because each one represents an area of associated interest in which they are qualified, one would expect that they should. Then we should have to look at other potential hurdles, one of these being whether there is any negative interference from the parent body, The Welsh Government. If that draws a blank then it might be sensible to analyze financing systems and see if there are any resources currently untapped which might be deployed.

8. It is this aspect which might prove to be a fertile area to engage with and that then depends on the interpretation of what is considered to be meat as in the direct translation of Cig. According to the terms of the 'Measures' the second point in the description identifies as "to improve marketing in the industry" This is a wider concept than that which is currently deployed and under the right circumstances could bring in store stock as well as actual meat and might provide the key to unlock some essential finance. We understand this might not be popular, but there might be a way of promoting it if a positive view could be taken of removing Government Involvement.
9. The fundamental issue at play is whether there is a will to have a promotion body and if so then the means has to be found to finance it. Any Government money will come at a price which might mean more involvement from Government, we are guessing this would not be acceptable and consequently recommend that the industry leaders should think as far as possible outside the box to see whether a better solution can be found than exists at the moment.
10. The Government could of course help in this entire matter by placing its senior advisers in positions to work with the livestock industry and help to find an acceptable route out of the present unsatisfactory mess. Instead of loading extra costs onto the HCC administration we feel that given a positive will a means could be found.
11. With this in place, and the backing of Welsh leaders in all the fields which have a part to play, we take the view that the fortunes of the sheep sector could be quickly recovered from the present slough of despond along with a continued healthy development of the beef herd and HCC could emerge from the current malaise as an important focus of a thriving livestock sector to be proud of.
12. That is our achievable vision for the future, more than anything it will depend on the will of a welltuned, understanding and ambitious Government working in harmony with a meat and livestock sector striving to become the best it can be. Wales has able and hardworking farmers, the ability to grow grass which is the best in the United Kingdom and a tangible opportunity to show its mettle.

*AIMS is the most comprehensive of the meat processing representative bodies as such it takes a deep and involved interest in meat processing at all levels throughout UK with connections to Europe and the world

Signed on behalf of AIMS



Jason Aldiss
AIMS Executive Director

Association of Independent Meat Suppliers

Association of Independent Meat Suppliers PO Box 125, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 2YG

Tel: 01609 761547 Email: office@aims2001.co.uk Web: www.aims2001.co.uk X: @AIMS_Meat