



NFU CYMRU MANIFESTO

NFU CYMRU 2024
GENERAL ELECTION
MANIFESTO



NFU SUPPORTED BY

NFU Mutual

Welsh farming in figures

Welsh soils contain

410

million tonnes of carbon



£2.1bn

the value of gross
agricultural output in
Wales



£600m

the total income from
farming in 2022



50,400

the number of people
employed on farms in
Wales



Wales has

106,000km

of hedgerows



£8.1bn

the turnover of the food
foundation sector
in Wales



233,500

people are employed
across the food and
drink supply chain
in Wales



43%

of workers in agriculture,
forestry and fisheries
speak Welsh compared
to an average of 19%
across all sectors in Wales



£797 million

the value of food and
drink exports from Wales



67%

of people want UK food
production to be as self-
sufficient as possible



Welsh farmers
manage over

80%

of the land area
of Wales.



Three-quarters

(74%)

of Welsh adults view
food produced in Wales
as high quality



Introduction

The past five years have been a time of significant change and challenge. The UK has navigated its departure from the EU, dealt with a global pandemic and periods of extreme weather while war has erupted in Europe, and conflict rages in the Middle East.

Throughout this time, Wales' farmers have continued to do what they do best – produce high quality, climate-friendly food while maintaining and enhancing our farmed environment and beautiful countryside. As ever, our farmers stand ready to rise to society's great challenges. We are ambitious to continue to grow our £8 billion food and farming industry while working towards NFU Cymru's own target of making the sector a net zero emitter of greenhouse gases by 2040.

Although agriculture has been devolved to Cardiff for a quarter of a century, there are a number of important and significant policy areas reserved to Westminster which impact directly and indirectly on the industry and the rural communities in which our members live and work. The next UK Government will decide on the budget for Welsh farming, a budget crucial if our ambitions to be world leaders in the production of climate-friendly food against a backdrop where our nature is thriving are to be met. NFU Cymru's manifesto for the 2024 UK General Election highlights the policy levers that will sit with our next intake of Westminster MPs and how they can best be used to ensure that we have a thriving agricultural sector and rural economy.

Through this document we offer you NFU Cymru's perspective on what we consider to be the most urgent and pressing matters that a new Westminster Parliament and Government will need to deal with in order to support us in delivering our vision for a productive, profitable, and progressive farming industry in Wales.



Supporting Wales' farmers

Farming is a long-term business with long-term production cycles and has to contend with significant marketplace volatility, weather events, and animal and plant diseases - factors which, more often than not, are outside the farmer's control.

Government investment in agriculture provides stability to farm businesses and is crucial in maintaining the supply of safe, high quality and affordable food for everyone, something which is of growing importance in a world which is increasingly unstable as conflict rages, supply chains are increasingly stressed and our climate changes.

The public stand behind Wales' farmers, with a recent YouGov poll of over 1,000 adults in Wales finding that 82% support the Welsh Government providing financial assistance to farmers to produce food.



OUR ASKS OF THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT

A clear undertaking to provide a UK agricultural support budget for the length of the next parliament - a ring-fenced multi-annual agricultural budget taking us through to the next election.

In conjunction with this, it must also look afresh at the budgetary allocation it provides to support UK agriculture in order to restore its real-terms value, which has been significantly eroded by very high rates of agricultural inflation.

NFU Cymru believes that Welsh farming now needs a minimum budget of over £500m annually to take account of inflation and to help ensure that our ambitions in relation to food, climate and nature can be met.



Promoting our food security

Food production and food security must be given the priority they need and deserve in this country. The pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East have all served to remind us how complex and easily disrupted our food supply chains are.

As well as providing a budget to support productive agriculture, there are a number of other steps the next UK Government can take to ensure we have high levels of primary production in Wales and the UK.



OUR ASKS OF THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT

Establish minimum standards to address imbalances and promote a fair and functioning supply chain, with the oversight and arbitration needed to uphold them. Where necessary, we would like to see Ministers using the powers available to them under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure supply contracts are fair and transparent, building on the work undertaken within the dairy sector.

Increase the powers and resources of the Groceries Code Adjudicator to go beyond the largest retailers and include the whole food supply chain.

A commitment to sourcing an increasing amount of food into the public sector from Welsh and British farmers.

Strengthened country of origin labelling across retail, hospitality and food service, with clear and accurate labelling allowing consumers to make an informed choice about where their food comes from.

The publication of an annual assessment of the impact of our Free Trade Agreements on domestic food production and consumption to provide a clear picture of their cumulative effects, so we can better understand the impact of our new trading relationships with the rest of the world

In addition, we believe that Wales-specific impact assessments of current and future trade deals need to be undertaken, given how important the value of our agri-food sector is to Wales.

Our place in the world

Having left the EU in 2020, our new trading relationship with the EU27 continues to bed in. While there are new frictions to trade where none existed before, there is scope to mitigate some of these and to ease the burden for our exporters.

Generous access has been granted to the UK market for some of the world's largest and most competitive agri-food producers. Agriculture cannot and should not be a bargaining chip when it comes to making trade deals. We need our politicians to be on the lookout for detrimental impacts stemming from third-country trade deals already in place.

The culture, heritage and quality associated with Welsh food and drink means our products are in demand around the world. Politicians should ensure that any new trade deals open doors and allow us to capitalise on the opportunity for more consumers around the world to enjoy Welsh food and drink.

OUR ASKS OF THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT

Securing a veterinary agreement with the EU would reduce the need for burdensome checks on products of animal origin moving from the UK to the EU. This is something we believe the next UK Government should pursue with the EU as a matter of priority.

With border checks now in place on some categories of incoming goods we must ensure these checks, which are at the frontline of our defences against the incursion of plant and animal diseases, are truly robust and fit for purpose, including at our ports in Wales.

A far greater role for MPs and parliament as trade deals are initiated, negotiated and concluded. Parliamentary procedures for overseeing and scrutinising trade deals with third countries should be strengthened. MPs need to have the opportunity to input into the mandate setting process and comment meaningfully on the end result.

In conjunction with this, the start of a formal process of developing and establishing core production standards that apply to agri-food imports and a re-statement of government commitments to retain full sovereignty over our food and farming standards in future FTA negotiations.

A commitment to ensure future trade deals are far more balanced with the needs and sensitivities of all sectors of the economy properly taken into account. Future trade deals cannot be rushed into nor can the terms granted to Australia and New Zealand be allowed to set the precedent for what other countries can expect from the UK in terms of market access.

With the Australia and New Zealand trade deals in place alongside a significant number of other trade deals, the UK Government needs to be vigilant in monitoring for any detrimental impacts on our agricultural sector and be prepared to respond with safeguards accordingly.

Post-Brexit opportunities for high quality Welsh and British produce to be sold into new export destinations have to be fully realised and the network of agri-food attachés in key markets must be retained and developed so they can drive export growth.

Wales' farmers are rightly proud of the PGI status of our Welsh lamb and beef as well as all the geographical indications conferred on a range of Welsh food and drink. In future trade negotiations we want to see these indicators of origin and quality advocated for by UK negotiators so that they are understood, respected and protected by intended trading partners.



Our climate change goals

When it comes to climate change, agriculture occupies a unique position as both an emissions source and sink.

NFU Cymru's ambition is that by working across greenhouse gas inventories, Welsh agriculture should be a net zero emitter of greenhouse gases by 2040. But we cannot do this alone and need the help and support of government as we move towards our net zero goal.

Rural crime

Rural crime presents a significant, on-going challenge to farmers and others living and working in the countryside.

It encompasses a range of offences, from farm thefts to livestock worrying, fly-tipping and illegal off-roading. Rural crime has a significant impact on its victims not only financially, but also emotionally and in terms of their quality of life.

OUR ASKS OF THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT

We need the help of the UK Government to reach our net zero goal by incentivising and supporting renewable energy production on farm.

Nurture and support the research and development which can help the sector reduce its greenhouse gas emissions – many of which are the result of biological processes intrinsic to agriculture – while producing the safe, affordable and high-quality food we all want and enjoy.

A consistent and co-ordinated response to rural crime across police forces, including fair funding for rural policing, and a dedicated rural crime team in every police force area.

Stiffer sentencing of offenders in order to achieve a deterrent effect. We urge Ministers in a future government to make full use of the powers conferred upon them in the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 to widen the scope of the legislation.

Attacks by dogs on livestock are traumatic and can have a devastating impact on a farm business. We would like to see the law strengthened in this area with increased fines for owners whose dogs attack livestock, a clear requirement that dogs should be kept on a lead around livestock and increased powers for the police, including the power to obtain DNA samples from dogs believed to have attacked livestock.

Access to labour



Welsh agriculture is the backbone of Wales' rural economy, producing the raw ingredients for a food and drink sector worth £8.1 billion. Farmers and the agri-food supply chain need to have access to the workforce they need if they are going to be able to continue to operate successful businesses which contribute to the wider economy. In recent years many agricultural sectors and food processors have struggled to recruit the labour they need, be this permanent or seasonal labour. Despite efforts to recruit this labour domestically, UK workers have been reluctant to take up employment in the sector, a challenge which has been compounded by the tight labour market conditions of the last few years.

Labour availability is now a barrier for many farming businesses, restricting growth and even risking a contraction in food production. Foregoing agricultural production as a result of a lack of available labour not only impacts on an individual farming business, but also on our national food security and our wider economy.



OUR ASKS OF THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT

Increasing the general salary threshold to £38,700 for the recruitment of skilled workers from overseas acts as a disincentive to farm businesses to secure the labour they need as it is set at a level which is higher than many of the vacant roles in Welsh agriculture. We believe that these salary thresholds are inappropriate and would ask the next UK Government to look at them again.

Recognition of the practical skills needed for a worker to become competent in certain agricultural roles via the Skilled Worker visa route.

The introduction of a minimum five-year rolling seasonal worker scheme, with visas for seasonal workers of nine months duration and a cooling-off period of three months.