

NFU CYMRU

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Dyddiad/Date: 21 Dec 2017

Dear Edward,

Re: Asset Management Plan – County Farms

Many thanks for getting in touch with NFU Cymru with regard to the Asset Management Plan for County Farms in Monmouthshire.

As many of the farms have been visited, we assume that individual farmers have been made aware of this Report and have raised views with you directly on an individual basis.

As a Union, we feel strong that County farms serve an important role in allowing that first foot on the ladder for new entrants. Some very entrepreneurial farmers started their careers on a County farm and without that first tenancy, they would not be farming today.

The industry needs new entrants, and these people will be crucial in tackling the nations long term food security needs. We therefore hope that this is recognised in the Report and that Monmouthshire County Council acknowledges the important role County farms carry in a productive county such as Monmouthshire.

We would very much welcome the opportunity of meeting with you to discuss any proposals in greater detail and I do hope you will see an opportunity for such a meeting and an exchange of views in the not too distant future.

I will though take this opportunity to outline very quickly our key objectives in terms of local authority agricultural estates:

NFU Cymru's starting point in this respect is that farms owned and managed by Local Authorities are hugely important and irreplaceable strategic national assets that need to be retained.

These estates have their origins in central government policy of the early 20th century when there was a major concern about the decline in agriculture employment and consequently they are just as relevant today to prevent the exodus of farmers, particularly young farmers out of our rural areas.

We understand and appreciate that local authorities have very competing demands on scarce resources and this comes hand in hand with a weakening in society's link with agriculture and budget restraints. However, the number of applicants trying for vacant tenancies is evidence that there are still many potential farmers, looking to get into farming but who lack the capital to purchase land or to take up larger tenancies offered in the

private sector. There is strong evidence that entrepreneurs will succeed provided entry opportunities exist and clearly local authority estates provide such a route.

We do think that more effort should be made to support existing and future tenants on these estates to sustain their businesses either on the smallholding estates or in actually encouraging moves in the future into the private sector.

In addition, we firmly believe that there could be greater collaboration between individual County farm estates to help with more effective and efficient management.

In 2009 the Association of Chief Estate Surveyors (ACES) updated the rationale for the Farms Estate summarising the benefits already outlined in the report and in line with the adoption of 5 Good Estate Management Principles. NFU Cymru would support the findings of this report outlined below.

Working for Agriculture

- A means of entry into farming for those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to farm on their own account;
- The potential for tenants to establish and develop viable business enterprises, enabling internal progression to larger Council Farms and advancement from the Estate to bigger holdings on privately or institutionally owned let estates;
- A means of supporting the tenanted sector, boosted by the flexibility of opportunities offered by agricultural tenure legislation;
- A tangible means of meeting the aspirations of the young farming community and agricultural industry;

Working for the rural economy

- A valuable source of rural employment opportunities on small family farms, often in remote locations;
- An opportunity to contribute to the wider economic well being and development of the countryside, including local food products for local markets;

Working for the wider community

- A direct stake in the countryside for Councils enabling links to be made between the local farming industry, the rural economy and the wider community through school visits, open days and guided walks;

Working for the environment

- An opportunity to implement best practice in rural estate and sustainable countryside management and stewardship: e.g. Glastir;
- A wealth of traditional landscape features such as stonewalls, ditches, hedgerows and farm buildings which are more likely to be retained on small family farms;
- The opportunity for the implementation of positive strategies that address the challenges of climate change, such as wind farms, anaerobic digestion plants and other renewable energy sources.

To conclude, a wide range of benefits can be provided on the estate with the right incentives and opportunities for tenants. These could include renewable energy, waste utilisation, local food, reconnecting with the urban population, planning policies, green belt management and managing flood risk. In the requirements for Councils to be carbon neutral or reduce their carbon footprint, a well managed farm estate would be a significant help in achieving this. Our key concern is such that once land is sold - this opportunity is lost forever. County Councils are in a good position to get a more strategic approach between departments to realise potential benefits which will help all residents in the county.

As alluded to earlier, we would be more than happy to meet with you or representatives from Monmouthshire Council at any time.

Once again, many thanks for providing us with an opportunity to respond.

With best wishes,

Stella Owen
NFU CYMRU
County Adviser – Brecon and Radnor & Monmouthshire