

Farmers' Union of Wales
Llys Amaeth
Plas Gogerddan
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3BT

10th August 2026

Dear Alistair

It was a pleasure meeting you at the Royal Welsh Show, and thank you again for taking the time to speak with us.

During our conversation, we raised concerns regarding reports that large landowners are reducing the maximum livestock units that some of their tenants are permitted to keep. As this issue appeared to be one you were not previously aware of, I wanted to follow up in writing to provide further context and highlight the concerns that have been shared with the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) by a number of our members.

Several FUW members have expressed growing concern about succession planning. They have told us they are reluctant to pass their tenancies on to their children because they fear that future tenancy agreements or management requirements imposed by their landlord will require significant reductions in livestock numbers. They believe this could undermine the economic viability of their businesses and leave the next generation unable to make a sustainable living from farming.

Since our discussion at the Royal Welsh Show, we have also heard directly from members who have already experienced reductions in livestock numbers as a consequence of their tenancy requirements. They describe the impact this has had on the viability of their businesses and their confidence to invest and long-term resilience. Even cases whereby large flocks have been removed from common grazing areas altogether are creating challenges for the remaining graziers as their hefted flocks are moving further afield, and as we know, reinstating hefted flocks is near impossible. These concerns come at a time when livestock farming in Wales is already under increasing pressure. Welsh Government figures show that sheep numbers have fallen from a peak of 11.8 million in 1999 to around 8.8 million in 2025, the equivalent of a 25% reduction.

Furthermore, recent FUW analysis shows that the average number of livestock units per hectare of grazing land in Wales has declined significantly in recent decades, falling from a peak of 1.2 in 1998 to just 0.9 today.

Whilst we recognise the commitment of large landowners and charities to environmental enhancement, we are concerned that reducing livestock numbers on Welsh upland farms will have unintended consequences on wildlife, the landscape and our rural communities. Over 90% of the land area of Wales is farmed, with much of the uplands only suitable for grazing livestock. Appropriate grazing by cattle and sheep is an essential land management tool, helping to reduce the build-up of combustible vegetation and therefore contributing to wildfire prevention and the resilience of our upland landscapes.

Beyond food production, livestock farms underpin the wider rural economy, supporting livestock markets, agricultural merchants, hauliers, veterinary practices, contractors and local abattoirs. They also play a fundamental role in sustaining Welsh-speaking communities and ensuring that future generations are able to remain in rural Wales. A continued decline in economically viable livestock farming therefore risks significant economic, environmental, social and cultural consequences.

Given the concerns being raised by our members, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and explore how environmental objectives can be balanced with the need to maintain productive, economically viable family farms for future generations, in Wales and across the UK.

Yours sincerely,

LSU/ha

This can be used to estimate the extent to which each individual farming business in Wales can make proportionate contributions to increasing livestock numbers to a more sustainable level.

Livestock numbers in Wales vs average LSUs per ha of grazing area

