

Written evidence submitted by RSPCA Cymru (HIL0007)

HOW UNIQUE ARE FAMILY FARMS AND HOW SIGNIFICANT IS THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO WALES' CULTURAL LIFE? WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES FACING FAMILY FARMS SPECIFICALLY, AND FARMING COMMUNITIES MORE GENERALLY, IN WALES? WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS FOR FARMERS IN WALES? HOW, IF AT ALL, IS THE UK GOVERNMENT'S CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AGENDA IMPACTING ON FAMILY FARMS, INCLUDING THE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF FARMERS, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES IN WALES? WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN THE UK GOVERNMENT TAKE TO SUPPORT THESE COMMUNITIES AND HOW SHOULD THE UK AND WELSH GOVERNMENTS WORK TOGETHER TO SUPPORT THESE COMMUNITIES' UNIQUE CULTURE, INCLUDING THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WELSH LANGUAGE, AND HERITAGE?

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Affairs Committee's consultation concerning the economic and cultural impacts of trade and environmental policy on family farms in Wales.

While the significance of family farms to Wales' culture and heritage are clear, the RSPCA's comments are reserved for areas specifically related to the welfare of animals - as per the charity's remit.

This consultation comes at a pivotal moment for agriculture in Wales, and farm animal welfare. This significance is notably two-fold, with the UK Government negotiating trade agreements which will potentially have a significant impact on the farming industry in Wales; and the Welsh Government formulating its own plans for an Agriculture (Wales) Bill, which will lay the foundations for agricultural policy for some time to come. The outcome of these major policy developments may impact the future of family farms in Wales.

Climate change policy at both the UK Government and Welsh Government level, too, is likely to have a significant impact on farmers and farms in the coming years. Increased flooding of fields and reduced crop production could have consequences on the supply of bedding and feed for livestock, and livestock reared outside may be subjected unseasonably hot or cold weather, which may exacerbate problems, such as pathogen load in warmer weather or, for example, lamb deaths due to exposure in colder weather. As such, reasonable requirements to help mitigate against climate change are important for farm animal welfare. The RSPCA's new strategy notes that "climate change ... (is) an existential threat to both animals and people"¹.

The RSPCA believes that it is necessary to react to, think ahead, and consider what can reasonably be done to mitigate any negative effects that adverse weather conditions may have/be having on the welfare of farm animals now, and in the future. Examples of important considerations include:

- the need to ensure that the farm buildings can withstand more severe weather conditions
- ensuring ventilation systems are working efficiently
- ensuring that ventilation systems are working efficiently will be even more important, particularly in the case of poultry, which are vulnerable to adverse temperature changes

¹ RSPCA Strategy - Together for animal welfare, 2021-2030 strategy

- in addition to ventilation systems, providing misters/showers in areas where cattle are gathered or handled, or above the feed line, to assist temperature regulation
- ensuring that drinking water systems are working efficiently (e.g. not leaking), to prevent drinking water from being wasted.
- Ensuring that wallows for pigs are designed so that they remain fit for purpose during dry periods, and there is a sufficient quantity of them, will help to keep pigs cool.
- With regards to sheep, the need to plan forage provision keeping in mind the possibility of prolonged dry periods resulting in less grass for grazing and preservation

Since the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, the RSPCA has been working to seize opportunities and mitigate risks for animals associated with withdrawal. The negotiation of Free Trade Agreements poses profound challenges for agriculture in Wales, notably family farms, particularly if an FTA allows the importation of agricultural products reared to standards lower than domestic rules allow. However, despite this, mutual zero tariff market access for agricultural products has been a persistent talking point of FTA negotiation - such as in the deal being struck between the UK and Australia.

Australia has lower legal animal welfare standards than in Wales, including utilising barren battery cages for hens, producing chlorinated chicken, the use of sow stalls that confine pregnant pigs, mutilating the rear end of sheep (mulesing), sometimes without anaesthetic, and growth hormone treatment for beef. Lower-cost production methods in Australia therefore risk importing greater quantities of cheap, lower welfare Australian products into Wales; produced at far lower legal welfare standards than Wales producers' must meet. This could put the livelihoods of farmers in Wales at severe risk - and the situation in particular for small-scale, family farms could be especially profound; reducing their impact, commercial relevance and economic viability.

The UK Government announced in October that a Trade and Agriculture Commission will have legal responsibility to scrutinise trade deals, and a report from the Commission will be laid at the same time any FTAs are laid before the UK Parliament. However, the TAC contains no specialist animal welfare expertise on its membership, despite the ongoing negotiation of FTAs which could impact family farms and the wider agricultural sector in Wales. In its 2019 manifesto ahead of the UK General Election, the Conservative Party said that "in all ... trade negotiations, we will not compromise on .. animal welfare and food standards". It is clearly vital to family farms in Wales that this manifesto pledge is adhered to by the UK Government².

Conversely, the Welsh Government presently has the greatest opportunity to improve domestic farm animal welfare since the onset at its disposal - which has the potential to economically support family farms delivering the higher welfare standards, and ensure 'Brand Wales' is synonymous both with higher welfare standards and traditional farming communities. As part of its plans for an Agriculture (Wales) Bill, a Sustainable Farming Scheme will be published next year, which will pave the way for a post-Brexit payments scheme for farms in Wales. It is hoped this scheme will financially incentivise farmers for delivering higher welfare standards - including smaller farms and family farms. However, it remains unclear the extent to which animal welfare will feature in the Scheme, and whether family farms in Wales could be directly incentivised or paid for delivering higher standards of welfare. The RSPCA continues to urge the Welsh

² Conservative Party 2019 UK Manifesto - Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain's Potential, p57

Government to ensure the Scheme directly incentivises farms delivering higher welfare standards - raising standards across Wales.

People across Wales and the wider UK are supportive of farmers being subsidised for their delivery of higher welfare standards; and for these issues to be given greater credence in policy setting. Polling by the RSPCA found that 82 percent of people surveyed supported farmers receiving subsidies to improve animal welfare³, with a further 80 percent of adults in Wales saying the welfare standards of the animals reared is important in their purchasing decisions⁴. Furthermore, the Eurobarometer surveys highlighted that 62 percent of the British public do not feel animal welfare receives adequate importance in UK food policy⁵, while 72 percent would pay more for products from animal welfare-friendly production systems⁶.

Amid a challenging economic backdrop, and with the full economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic yet to be realised, family farms may have implemented, or be actively considering, diversification. Indeed, diversification and a need to "support farmers who wish to venture and diversify" was a focus of Farming Connect's recent '*laith y Pridd*' project⁷. While diversification revenues on farms in Wales average only 3.4 percent of farm revenues, compared with 7.7 percent in England⁸, dog-related businesses are commonly regarded as a viable option for farm businesses to diversify into. Indeed, the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group, as part of its Welsh Government-commissioned review into Wales' dog breeding legislation, noted that "many large-scale dog breeding establishments in Wales have arisen as farm diversification schemes"⁹.

While many dog breeders deliver high standards of welfare, Wales has long harboured a negative reputation for the prevalence of breeding, and has been labelled the UK's 'puppy farming capital'; while supply of young companion animals is believed to outstrip local demand. There are concerns that, amid a short term spike in pet acquisition, more farm businesses could seek to diversify into a dog breeding venture, further increasing the prevalence of dog breeding activity in Wales. RSPCA Cymru continues to urge the Welsh Government to revisit many of the positive, 55 recommendations made by the Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group in its review of Wales' dog breeding legislation - in the hope of securing better welfare in the sector; and ensuring welfare would need to be an even greater consideration in any such diversification schemes. It is hoped that future policies in Wales - both from the UK Government and Welsh Government - will not necessitate such diversification; and will instead ensure family farms delivering the highest welfare standards are instead supported, economically viable and synonymous with food production in Wales.

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³ RSPCA Report – Into the fold: Targeted financial support to improve farm animal welfare.

⁴ YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,001 Welsh adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 4–8 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

⁶ European Commission, 2016. Attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare. Special Eurobarometer 442.

⁷ Farming Connect - '*laith y Pridd*', p7

⁸ Senedd Research - Diversification and resilience of Welsh farming: prospects after Brexit, December 2019, p1

⁹ Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group - Review of the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014, December 2019