

Written evidence submitted by The Prince's Countryside Fund (HIL0016)

How unique are family farms and how significant is their contribution to Wales' cultural life?

The Prince's Countryside Fund (PCF), and our Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, believe family farms play an essential role in Wales' cultural life, providing significant social, cultural and environment benefits. These include producing high quality food, maintaining the unique appearance of the Welsh countryside, enhancing the environmental sustainability of our rural areas, and supporting rural communities and ensuring the sustainability of the Welsh language, particularly in North Wales.

Therefore, the PCF has invested significant time and resources to ensure the viability of Welsh family farms and the rural communities they provide by delivering our Farm Resilience Programme (FRP) in Wales every year since 2016. We've run a minimum of two groups per year, supporting 109 Welsh farming families in total. The FRP is a series of business and environment skills training workshops to ensure the viability of family farm businesses. We have also received corporate support from Aldi, and from the National Trust, to run the FRP in Wales to directly support Welsh farming families.

A farmer who participated in 2017 said "I was also aware of the effect that farming had on my local community, particularly on the small, traditional, Welsh speaking village that I live in – if the farms disappear, so will my local culture, and in many instances the Welsh language also."

What are the main challenges facing family farms specifically, and farming communities more generally, in Wales?

From our engagement with farmers through our Farm Resilience Programme, we have identified the following challenges facing farmers in the UK:

- Farmers on the FRP note the uncertainty they are facing over the next few years.
- 71% of 2019/20 PFRP farmers have identified the need to change their farm business over the next 5 years; affordability and uncertainty are the dominating barriers to implementing change.
- 63% see 'changing government agricultural policy as their 'main challenge'.
- There are significant issues regarding digital accessibility – both infrastructure/connectivity and training to use IT systems.
- Finance, succession, and support for new entrants have all been identified as key challenges.
- There are also concerns around the impact/workability of new agricultural policy on tenanted farm businesses and issues with tenancy agreements.

Compounding these challenges are associated issues with mental health and stress. The PCF works with organisations such as Tir Dewi and the Farming Community Network to provide pastoral support to farm businesses 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?

- Provide opportunities for farmers to feed back on changes to policy.
- Provide clear information, including precise timeframes, on all new plans; uncertainty around future policy is of huge concern to farm businesses.
- Provide a locally delivered support package of training to farmers on topics such as business resilience, support for environmental management such as measurements and monitoring, and nature friendly farming practices, learning from what's worked with Defra's Future Farming Resilience Fund and PCF's own experience as a delivery partner.
- Continue supporting Farming Connect.
- Plan how to support 'hard to reach' farms that do not engage with existing support.
- Invest in Farm Support Groups that can support farmers in local areas (often 'hard to reach').
- Ensure provision is made for succession, new entrants and progression to enable the "life-cycle" of farming to work.
- Ensure support is available (including financial/capital support) for small and local abattoirs which offer private kill services to support family farm businesses and local food networks. Our work in supporting rural communities has also highlighted the role community shops play in local food sourcing.
- Ensure support is available for livestock auction markets, noting their significant role in the cultural and social fabric of farming communities above their function as a place to buy and sell livestock, as evidenced in our [recent report](#).

November 2021