# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE** | **Farming in Wales** |
| **DATE** | **27 February 2024** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS**  **Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd** |

Farming – and agriculture more widely – plays an important role in Welsh life. It is part of our economy, identity and culture.

The Welsh Government is committed to supporting a successful future for Welsh farming. We want to keep Welsh farmers farming, as we tackle the climate and nature emergency.

The sector is facing significant challenges as a result of persistently high inflation and energy costs, global instability, high input costs and volatile farmgate prices together with substantial change in the industry.

We continue to listen carefully to the concerns expressed by farmers and farming unions, including about some of the Welsh Government’s policies. We can today confirm the following action to support the sector.

**Bovine TB and on-farm slaughter**

We recognise the devastation a TB breakdown brings to a farming family and business. The slaughter of cattle on farm can be particularly distressing to those who witness it and can have a detrimental impact on farmers’ and farmworkers’ wellbeing and mental health.

We are committed to exploring other approaches to on-farm slaughter. We are today appointing a Bovine TB Technical Advisory Group, as previously announced in November. Its first priority will be to look at the current on-farm slaughter policy and provide advice to Ministers, as a matter of urgency. The group will examine all the evidence and documentation in relation to this, including the summary views of the NFU Cymru TB focus group, which met last month to discuss on-farm slaughter.

**The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations**

Farmers are custodians of the land and share our determination to protect it. Regulations are needed to protect the environment from poor practice, which is causing considerable damage to the reputation of the sector.   
  
The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) Regulations were introduced in April 2021 and set out an all-Wales approach to mitigating the risks of water pollution from agricultural activities. Implementation has been spread over a four-year period and the final set of measures, relating to storage requirements, will come into force later this year. A 12-month Enhanced Nutrient Management Approach was introduced for the 2024 calendar year to give affected farm businesses more time to comply with the requirements.

We are making £20m of additional funding available to help farmers comply with the requirements and we will be launching a new round of the Nutrient Management Investment Scheme shortly, which will be specifically targeted at supporting the investment and improvements to help farm businesses to mitigate risks to the environment.

We are now putting in place the arrangements for the first statutory review of the effectiveness of the regulations. We will consult on the suitability of the alternative measures proposals received from the sector.

We also intend to appoint an independent external chair to oversee the process.

**Sustainable Farming Scheme**

We have been working in partnership with farmers over the last seven years to design the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) – a new form of made-in-Wales farming support to secure food production and the environmental improvements Wales needs to keep farmers on their land for generations to come as the climate changes.

The SFS will help us to meet the commitments we have made to everyone in Wales, securing a stronger and greener future for us all and ensuring public benefits from sustainable farming in return for public money.

The current SFS consultation will close on 7 March.

We welcome the responses to the consultation. Every consultation response received, including the issues raised and discussed at the 10 roadshow events during the consultation period, will be analysed and properly considered. We will publish that analysis and a summary of the responses.

On the basis of the views expressed to date, we are today setting out some potential next steps:

* Ensuring that where farmers are asked to gather information as part of SFS, this process will be as efficient as possible, GDPR compliant and maximises the value of that data to farmers.
* Ensuring actions within SFS are appropriately targeted at improving the economic resilience of farms. This includes ensuring woodland and habitat requirements do not make farms unviable.
* Ensuring farm payments are distributed fairly and accessible to all.
* Considering an evidence-based review of any further and alternative proposals to achieve carbon sequestration within the Sustainable Farming Scheme.
* Establish regular review points between the Welsh Government and the farming unions and representatives, in formulating final proposals.
* Carry out an updated economic analysis.

The incoming First Minister, who will take up post on 20 March, will want to carefully review the results of the consultation and consider in detail the pace of implementation of SFS.

The Final Budget is due to be debated and voted on by the Senedd on 5 March. It includes the Welsh Government’s intention to sustain the Basic Payment Scheme budget in full at £238m.