

Rebecca Evans AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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Dear Alun Ffred,

2nd June 2015

Environment and Sustainability Committee - Agriculture Scrutiny

During the committee meeting on 20 May I agreed to provide an update on progress in relation to the establishment of a feedback panel for young farmers and on the Working Smarter recommendations that have not yet been completed.

Progress in relation to the establishment of a feedback panel for young farmers

Attracting new blood and fresh ideas is an essential ingredient for any successful industry. I am very keen that young people should play a key role in helping to successfully drive forward individual businesses and the wider industry and in so doing are able to engage with industry bodies and the Welsh Government in an effective manner, representing the views and aspirations of the younger generation of farmers. We are now working very closely with Wales YFC on a number of matters including its Enabling Change project and we are moving forward on key initiatives such as the Young Entrant Support Scheme and wider work following Malcolm Thomas' Next Generation into Farming Review.

There was reference at the Committee session to how work now needed to fit with developments taking place as part of a strategic approach to the agriculture industry. I will launch a consultation on this important initiative at tomorrow's Wales Farming Conference. How young person's interests are properly taken account of needs to be considered alongside the governance and engagement arrangements that we are to establish in partnership with the agriculture industry as part of the work now underway on the strategic framework for Welsh agriculture.

The Working Smarter recommendations that have not yet been completed

The Working Smarter reports prepared by Gareth Williams (independent advisor) have at their heart, better regulation, shared responsibility between the industry and government, as well as efficient and effective customer services and communication. These core principles are being applied to the delivery of the recommendations which cover a diverse range of policies and activities including planning, tourism and agriculture as well as wider Welsh Government engagement with customers.

Good progress has been made to date; 61 of the 78 recommendations are now 'complete' and 17 are ongoing. A summary of the 17 ongoing recommendations is enclosed at Doc 1 with some further commentary below.

Significant progress has already been made to improve the expertise of our staff and their approach to customers as recommended in the Working Smarter reports, but with changing legislation and policies, primarily to reflect changing European legislation, these are not recommendations that can be actioned and completed on a "one-off" basis but need ongoing review and action. For example, recent changes to the cross compliance regime has resulted in the need for additional support for customer facing staff and a revision of the extremely successful 'When the Inspector Calls' guidance produced by the Working Smarter Records Task and Finish Group.

Work on the major recommendations, including the 6 day standstill, EID Cymru and CPH project, is ongoing. Significant progress has been made in conjunction with the industry and our delivery partners to ensure that these significant initiatives on behalf of the industry are introduced in an effective and controlled way to simplify regulations and on farm practices to support the drive for a modern, professional, sustainable and profitable agricultural industry in Wales.

The Working Smarter principles and ongoing recommendations will be taken forward under the strategic framework for Welsh Agriculture that I referred to earlier. This will ensure that the Working Smarter principles continue to be at the centre of the way the agricultural industry and government works together

A further update on progress with the Working Smarter recommendations will be published later this year to coincide with the introduction and publication of the Strategic Framework.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Evans', written in a cursive style.

Rebecca Evans AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food

Doc 1 - Working Smarter Recommendations – Progress Update

Number	Summary	Progress
R3	The Welsh Government officials who communicate directly with farmers must have an understanding of the industry gained through their own farming experience and / or effective training provided by the Welsh Government.	<p>A significant number of front-facing staff, for example within the Divisional Offices and Farm Liaison Team have farming experience.</p> <p>Front line staff are supported by their managers, with additional training and regular briefing to ensure that have the required knowledge to deal with their daily engagement with customers.</p> <p>There is an ongoing commitment to keep this knowledge and expertise up to date.</p>
R21	Where Regulation permits, the Welsh Government must lead partners in further developing earned recognition as a critical factor in deciding which farms to inspect.	<p>A Working Smarter Task and Finish Group reviewed the extent of use of earned recognition in planning farm inspections in Wales and found that regulators are using the approach to target inspections in a significant number of schemes, for example for CAP schemes and farm assurance inspections.</p> <p>The value and benefits of applying earned recognition and risk selection are recognised and will continue to be adopted where appropriate.</p>
R22	The Welsh Government to work with EAW and other partners to develop and introduce a common competency framework for all farm inspectors; this to include training, monitoring, and accreditation.	Welsh Government officials continue to work with other Regulators and Farm Assurance Schemes to ensure that consistent and common standards of service are applied to the agricultural sector by our inspectors.
R28	The Welsh Government should work closely with Defra and the Scottish Government to bring pressure to bear on the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to allow an independent and transparent assessment of their running costs and to fully appraise alternative meat inspection models that will build on the European Food Standards Authority (EFSA) recommendations.	<p>A Steering Group have been working together to develop a discount system to full cost charges for meat hygiene and welfare at slaughter official controls that promotes efficiency, supports improving compliance (within a de-regulatory remit), appropriately supports small and medium-sized enterprises and provides a balanced discount arrangement that seeks to achieve a more balanced and more equitable system.</p> <p>The Steering Group has proposed and considered the impact of a number of options for changes to the method used to allocate discounts, arriving at a broad consensus in July 2014 which was presented to the FSA Board, at its September 2014 meeting, by the Chair of the Steering Group</p>

		The FSA consultation on this closes 12 June.
R31	The Welsh Government must work closely with Defra, the EC and the farming industry, to derive a fair and workable system for responsibility and cost sharing in the event of a major disease outbreak.	<p>Officials are continuing to ensure that policies and their delivery provide an appropriate balance of responsibility and costs between government and keepers during the course of normal business and a disease outbreak.</p> <p>The most recent example of this is the introduction of 'Quarantine Facilities', which has been developed in conjunction with industry representatives to balance flexibility for farmers with movement controls to help prevent the spread of disease.</p>
R32	The Welsh Government must rapidly progress the County Parish Holding (CPH) transfer project.	<p>Officials are working with stakeholders on the design and the delivery options of this major change programme which will start to see the rationalisation of CPH records later this year.</p> <p>Initial focus will be to remove the complications of CTSlinks and SOAs and to implement a distance rule (following consultation) on a whole case working basis.</p> <p>It is expected to take 2 years to cleanse the CPH system before reaching a position of business as usual.</p>
R33	The issues around the 6-day standstill rule must be addressed and resolved by the Welsh Government and the farming industry working together.	<p>Officials in OCVO have been working with stakeholders to develop an appropriate model that provides flexibility for farmers while maintaining movement controls to help prevent the spread of disease. The business case was recently agreed by Ministers.</p> <p>The target for implementation is December 2016.</p>
R35	The Welsh Government should work with the other administrations in the UK to continue to lobby the EC to review the sheep EID legislation as many aspects of this regulation are proving unworkable for farmers.	<p>The implementation of EIDCymru will be a positive factor to reduce the practicalities of this regulation.</p> <p>The experience and statistical evidence from the introduction of EID Cymru will help support any future negotiations with the EC over EID.</p>
R37	The Welsh Government should work closely with Defra and industry groups / partner organisations to develop a national sheep database.	<p>EIDCymu, the national sheep data base for Wales, will be introduced from November 2015.</p> <p>The initial focus will be on livestock markets and abattoirs to ensure that the system works effectively at these high volume premises with full rollout for sheep keepers being achieved in January 2015.</p>
R38	The Welsh Government must continue to work with Defra and the other administrations to thoroughly investigate and	The Welsh Government submitted an application to the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) for consideration of an approved method of storing sheep carcasses prior to disposal. However, this

	research all of the options for on-farm carcase containment.	was not supported by EFSA. Bangor University are now investigating what technical adjustments can be made for the system to be considered for approval for the disposal of pigs/poultry. Possible further developments for ruminant fallen stock may be some time in the future.
R41	Data sharing has been impeded because of copyright issues, data protection law and incompatible databases / systems.	Defra are piloting an approach based on the Health and Safety Executives' (HSE) 'Find It' tool, the principles of which were presented to the Working Smarter Task and Finish Group. Officials are continuing to liaise with Defra and the HSE on the progress of the pilot with a view to considering the introduction of any lessons learnt in Wales.
R46	All inspection bodies need to revisit staff training and competencies.	Welsh Government officials work with other Regulators and Farm Assurance Schemes to ensure that consistent standards of service are applied to the agricultural sector by our inspectors. There is an ongoing commitment to keep this knowledge and expertise up to date, for example through coordinating training and awareness events.
R59	Ensure that officials who engage directly with farming customers have a real understanding of farming, gained through direct experience and/or specific ongoing training.	A significant number of front-facing staff, for example within the Divisional Offices and Farm Liaison Team have farming experience. Front line staff are supported by their managers, with additional training and regular briefing to ensure that have the required knowledge to provide effective and appropriate support and advice to customers on a daily basis. There is an ongoing commitment to keep this knowledge and expertise up to date.
R60	Establish a task and finish group to improve communications and develop customer service – both to a high standard.	The Communications Task and Finish Group has been established in partnership with industry to review communications. The group which is chaired by the Deputy Head of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Division (Gary Haggaty) has met on several occasions to identify priorities for improvements.
R63	Ensure the industry key performance indicators are explained in farmer language, communicated effectively and as a result, are widely understood.	Officials continue to work with stakeholders directly and through opportunities such as Gwlad and the Welsh Government website to provide further explanation of industry key performance indicators such as inspection rates.
R67	The next generation broadband programme must be progressed rapidly to avoid the many	Superfast Cymru is the largest partnership of its kind in the UK working to give, when combined with commercial roll-out, 96% of premises in Wales

	disadvantages suffered by businesses in not-spots.	access to fast fibre broadband by 2016. The roll-out began in earnest in Bangor in January 2013 and is progressing well.
R77	The animal health and welfare role of the AHVLA could be better carried out as part of Welsh Government rather than the current agency status.	<p>The role of AHVLA in Wales is currently being reviewed to identify alternative delivery models. The substance of the recommendation will be considered alongside other service delivery options.</p> <p>The main priority is to maintain effective animal disease surveillance and readiness to respond to notifiable disease outbreaks.</p>