

Lesley Griffiths outlines her vision for land management in Wales post Brexit

Speaking at the NFU conference in Birmingham, the Cabinet Secretary outlined the importance of devolution and reiterated her commitment to ensure Wales does not lose a penny of funding as a result.

During the speech, the Cabinet Secretary announced the five core principles that underpin the vision for a new Welsh land management policy. They are:

- We need to keep farmers on the land. Welsh land must be managed by those who know it.
- We need to ensure our agricultural sector can be prosperous and resilient in a post-Brexit future, whatever that may be.
- Our new policy should centre on Welsh land delivering public goods for all the people of Wales.
- Our system of support should be accessible to all. That means giving farmers the opportunity to continue to make a living from the land.
- We must not turn our backs on food production. Where sustainable production is viable, we must help our farmers compete in a global marketplace.

Speaking at the conference, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“As we prepare to leave the EU, the case for devolution is stronger than ever. The nature of our farming is different and our rural communities are different. There is no one size that fits all.

“I stand ready to work together on areas of mutual interest with the UK Government and my Scottish and Northern Irish colleagues. But we must stand as equal partners. That means fair decisions, fair governance and above all, fair funding.

“Over 18 months on from the referendum, there is no clarity on what funding will return to Wales. I will continue to insist Wales must not lose a penny and will fight to protect funding returning to Wales from going elsewhere. We must continue this vital support.

“Farming is a vital part of our rural economy. I often have to remind people from outside the sector that over 80% of Welsh land is owned and managed by Welsh farmers, foresters and environmental bodies. We need them and the work they do to help deliver our ambitions for a prosperous Wales.

“I want to start a new phase of detailed discussion on what our new Welsh land management policy should be. Today I am setting out my emerging thinking and the five core principles for the future of

our land and the people who manage it.

“Firstly, we must keep farmers on the land. Welsh land must be managed by those who know it. It’s what’s best for our rural economy, our communities and our environment.

“Second, we need to ensure our agriculture sector can be prosperous and resilient in a post-Brexit future, whatever that may be. My Roundtable group members say the status quo is not an option and I agree. While the basic payment scheme provides important support for many of our farmers, it will not help us withstand the changes brought by Brexit. We need to provide support in a different way.

“My third principle is that our new policy should centre on Welsh land delivering public goods for all the people of Wales. The diversity and richness of Welsh land means we have no shortage of public goods to provide.

“Fourthly, our system of support should be accessible to all. That means giving farmers the opportunity to continue to make a living from the land. But we will be asking our farmers to do different things in return for taxpayer support. This is vital for putting the industry on a secure footing.

“My final principle is we must not turn our backs on food production. Where sustainable production is viable, we must help our farmers compete in a global marketplace. Food is core to Welsh farming values and is emblematic of our nation. We already have a thriving food and drink industry and this is the time to advance it.

“These principles underpin my thinking but this is just the start of the conversation. I want to start detailed discussion with stakeholders about the details and to get their input on what works.

“We must work towards a shared vision. I know farmers can adapt but it is government’s job to give them the time and tools to do so.

“The transition period must be a real one, it must be well-planned and it must take place over a number of years. There is too much at stake – economically, socially and environmentally – to not get this right.

“This is worth taking the time to get right. It is a once in a generation opportunity and I am confident we can make swift progress.”