

# “UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Bill could put us back decades” – warns Cabinet Secretary

Speaking at the Royal Welsh Showground, the Cabinet Secretary said devolution had enabled Welsh Government to create policies for the specific needs of Welsh farmers, with their input.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“Devolution has allowed us to tailor our policies for Welsh farmers with an understanding of their distinct needs. I’m worried the Withdrawal Bill, coupled with their lack of engagement with us to understand the needs of Welsh farmers, will mean this understanding is lost and the industry in Wales will move back decades.

“This view was clearly reflected in last week’s report from the House of Lords’ EU Committee, which fully supported our position on the future governance of the UK.

“In Wales we have a higher proportion of sheep farmers than in England and 90% of Welsh red meat exports go to the EU. I want to make sure the support they currently get is not jeopardised by Brexit.”

The Bill as it stands means Wales will have fewer powers and flexibility than it had when in the EU. It would take away the Welsh Government’s ability to interpret EU law and tailor it for Welsh needs. It will give the UK greater power over issues such as farm payments and animal health, which have been devolved to Wales for almost two decades.

The Cabinet Secretary reassured farmers she will continue to stand up for their interests. She will today meet with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, and will raise her concerns.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

“Since this process started we’ve been working with our stakeholders to make sure the approach we’re taking in Wales benefits everyone – something that’s not happening in England.

We’re taking this process seriously. Our policy paper, Brexit and Devolution, highlights leaving the EU must be about the future, not the past. We want to work with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to develop a strong future which benefits everyone.

“Today I’m meeting with Michael Gove and I’ll be raising all these concerns with him. I’ll be making clear this Bill has shown a complete disregard for devolution as did his decision to cancel the next two planned meetings of UK agriculture and environment ministers. These meetings are crucial as the negotiations move forward and cancelling them shows a complete lack of commitment to working together.”

As part of a continued programme of actions to support the specific needs of the Welsh food and farming industry the Cabinet Secretary will this week announce Wales will join the Atlantic Area Food Export Programme, meaning SMEs will benefit from €1.8million to increase their competitiveness in international markets.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We’ll continue to rally behind the Welsh food and drink industry – only last week new figures showed the industry had grown by almost 20% over the past year and we want to see it continue to grow year on year with our support.”