



## Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament

### Election 2021: Landworkers' Alliance Cymru Policy Asks

Senedd Members elected on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 will make key decisions affecting Welsh food, farming, forestry, and the climate and ecological emergencies. This document highlights our key asks for a more sustainable farming, forestry and land use policy and a fairer food system for all.

**Support small farms:** [Research](#) by Coventry University and the Landworkers' Alliance found that small diverse farms often deliver more environmental, social and economic benefits per unit area compared to larger farms. Despite these many benefits, small farms have historically been discriminated against. With the Basic Payment Scheme based on land size and only available to those above 5 ha, most have had little or no support. The 5-hectare limit for permitted development for farm infrastructure means many struggle with planning just to get set up. The next Senedd will decide the future of Welsh farming and we have a chance to change this.

**Help Wales feed itself:** The key function of Welsh agriculture should be providing healthy, local sustainably produced food for the people of Wales. With high reliance on food banks, diet related diseases, and both farmers and consumers reliant on volatile international supply chains, food and agricultural policy should be considered together. The focus must be on meeting the nutritional needs of Wales through sustainable production and local supply. This can be supported by:

- Targeted public procurement, including through food hubs, ensuring schools, hospitals and other institutions get sustainable, locally produced food.
- Support for short supply chain infrastructure such as food hubs, local butchers and slaughterhouses, regional processing facilities, farmers markets etc.
- Supporting farmers and communities to set up new Community Supported Agriculture schemes, which provide farmers and growers with a secure market, and communities with a direct relationship to how their food is produced.
- Supporting partnerships between food aid organisations and farms to move beyond the food bank model.

**Help grow more Welsh Fruit & Veg:** Just 0.1% of Welsh agricultural land currently used for fruit & vegetable production equivalent to just 5% of our “5 a day”. This need not be the case. [Research](#) shows that if just 2% of Welsh land were used to produce fruit & vegetables, we could produce enough for all of Wales' population's “5 a day”<sup>1</sup>. This can be achieved through:

- Ensuring capital grants and loans are available for horticultural machinery and infrastructure.
- Planning policies that support polytunnels, packing sheds and other key infrastructure.
- Incentivising livestock farmers to diversify into horticulture or make land available to growers.
- Ensuring future farm support schemes include small farms (fruit & veg farms tend to be smaller than livestock farms).

**Raise the bar on environmental standards:** Brexit must not be an excuse to abandon much needed environmental regulation. Rather, there must be an inexorable drive towards farming, forestry and land management that tackles the climate and ecological emergencies, and protects our soils. The next Senedd should take the opportunity to develop a rigorous sustainability criterion based on agroecology and progressively raise the bar.

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<sup>1</sup> Wheeler, A. 'A New Food Diplomacy: Participatory Action Research Findings of a Food System Approach to Public Health Nutrition', PhD Thesis, Prifysgol De Cymru/University of South Wales.

**Support more living working woodlands:** To help tackle the climate crisis, Wales must significantly increase forest cover with diverse well managed woodlands. Just 15% of Wales is currently forested and recent records on planting have been pitiful (just 80 hectares in 2017/18). Getting more trees in the ground is challenging and must be done with care to ensure the right tree is in the right place ensuring biodiversity, not monocultures. However, with enough support, working with farmers and land managers, forest cover in Wales could significantly increase. New forests can create new jobs but only with the right policies such as:

- Support for new entrants to primary and secondary timber processing.
- Invest in short supply chain infrastructure.
- Use public procurement to support local timber processors.
- Amend planning regulations to enable:
  - Permission for primary processing and storage on site.
  - Permission for temporary housing.
  - Better forestry-tied housing.

**Support agroforestry:** Debate often puts farming and forestry as alternative uses of land; however, if we use trees intelligently on farmland, then they can support food production by providing shelter belts etc. Using agroforestry means increase in woodland cover does not need to result in abandonment of livestock and there is scope for developing woodland pasture with sporadic planting with livestock.

**Give new entrants a chance:** For a vibrant, thriving, resilient agriculture sector it is essential that new entrants are supported. Access to land and capital are major barriers, but there are a number of measures that could address this, including:

- Loans for land trusts and starter farms. These would be used to buy land, which would then be subdivided into 'starter farms' with some shared infrastructure and leased to new entrants, enabling them to develop their businesses in a more sheltered situation.
- Incentivising and supporting retiring farmers to licence, lease or sell small plots to new entrants.
- Amending planning rules to make consent for multiple new dwellings for farm workers easier to obtain so both existing/retiring farmers and new entrants are able to live on their land.
- Low interest land purchase loans for new entrants.
- Start-up loans and grants for infrastructure.
- Support for on farm agroecological traineeships combining practical & classroom learning.

**Keep county farms:** County farms can provide an essential route to entry for new farmers and are a community asset. Councils should be required to consult the community before selling county farms and give them the opportunity to turn them into community run farms. If the community is not interested the council must still do everything they can to keep it in agricultural use.

**A food system commission to transition to agroecology:** The way we currently produce and consume food contributes to biodiversity decline and climate change, causes diet-related health problems and has led to a dependence on food banks and financial hardship for many farmers. Solutions must therefore be systemic, considering multiple challenges together. The first step to achieving this should be an independent, cross sector [Food System Commission](https://foodpolicyalliance.cymru/) (see <https://foodpolicyalliance.cymru/>) tasked with developing a roadmap to deliver a 'Food System Fit for Future Generations', aligned with the principles of [agroecology](http://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/en/) (see <http://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/en/>). Priorities should include healthy food for all; a net zero food system; farming for nature and climate; sustainable seafood and decent livelihoods for all who work to produce our food.