

Welsh Government

Consultation Document

The future of agricultural statistical data collection methods in Wales

Date of issue: **22 March 2013**

Action required: Responses by **24 May 2013**

Overview Reviewing the current methods for data collection in Wales and what we need to do in the future, do we look at new methods, do we carry on as before; can we merge/drop/streamline existing surveys -how can Agricultural Statistics work smarter for the future?

How to respond You can respond to the consultation by accessing the Excel sheet or its PDF equivalent. For the Excel version, please complete and 'Save As' a copy for yourself on your computer and print out and e-mail back to stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk or post a hard copy of either the Excel or PDF version to:

Richard Hughes
Agricultural & Rural Affairs Statistics
Freepost NAT 8910
Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS)
Welsh Government
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3BR

Further information and related documents **Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.**

[UK Statistics Authority assessment report](#)

[National Statistics Review of Sheep Numbers at December in England](#)

Contact details For further information:

Richard Hughes
Survey Support Manager
Agricultural & Rural Affairs Statistics
Freepost NAT 8910
Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS)
Welsh Government
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3BR

email: stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk

telephone: 0845 010 2244

Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

Background

As with the recent consultation for the '[Review of Agricultural Statistics Outputs](#)', which reviewed the suite of outputs on agricultural statistics in Wales; we wish to concentrate on the main sources of data collection – the two main surveys run in **June** and **December** each year as is done in other United Kingdom Agricultural Statistical Departments, although we do carry out ad-hoc surveys as and when required.

The Welsh Government collects the majority of its agriculture data from the June survey of Agriculture and Horticulture and the December survey of Agriculture undertaken to meet EU regulations 1165/2008 (cattle, pigs and sheep) and 543/2009 (crops and land).

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in England also run surveys for and on behalf of the Welsh Government. An example of this is the Sheep and Goats Inventory (SAG) – a compulsory exercise required under EU Regulation 1505/2006.

The June survey has been running every year since 1867.

The December Survey has been running since 1951.

These have always been done as a paper based Survey or Census.

Until 1995, the June exercise was a full census of all registered farms. Since 1996 it has been run as a sample **Survey** and every tenth year (2010 was the latest), it is run as a **Census** (within certain selection criteria) to meet the EU Farm Structure Survey regulation 1166/2008.

Response to the Survey is compulsory in accordance with the Agricultural Statistics Act 1979, (Section 1 (1)) which was subject to the National Assembly of Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999 SI.672.

We also run surveys where there is an obligation to meet either existing primary or secondary legislation or a European Union legal requirement to do so for Wales on behalf of the United Kingdom.

We also run ad-hoc surveys when there is a requirement to do so.

Reasons for the consultation

Not having any data collection (from surveys and/or administrative sources) is not an option as we have to fulfil our statutory requirements;

- We need to further consider the burden of paperwork to our customers and provide value for money for future surveys especially in view of 'Working Smarter'.
- We also have to consider funding options onwards from the 2013-2014 financial years (FY) and our obligations to run statutory surveys for Europe to strike a balance of what we *need* to collect and what we *have* to collect.
- In terms of future funding, it will give us the opportunity to look at options to progress to alternative methods of data collection, such as online Survey forms, telephone surveys and alternative sources of data.
- Also, to reduce the burden of paperwork to their customers, DEFRA have now replaced their annual December Survey of Agriculture by ending the paper based collection by using data from the annual Sheep and Goats (SAG) Inventory (a statutory EU requirement) after a [National Statistics Review of Sheep Numbers at December in England](#). Other data for the December Survey will come from administrative sources and/or telephone surveys.

Proposals for change

The purpose of this consultation is to seek users' views on proposals regarding the future of agricultural statistical data collection methods in Wales.

Your contributions will help us to understand the impact these changes could have on individuals and organisation that not only use the statistical outputs, but the raw data collection that we currently undertake and how this could be changed, improved (or not).

However, it is useful to reiterate that the Welsh Government is obliged to carry out a collection of data that meets statutory (both UK and EU) legislation *therefore not doing any type of collection is not an option.*

We are putting forward **two** proposals, most of which are relevant for all the present collection models and affect both current and future developments:

1. Agricultural and Rural Affairs Statistics currently use paper forms to collect the majority of their published statistical information, and will need to continue doing so in the short-term; however we are proposing to look at the current methods of data collection and assess and explore alternative data sources and methods to reduce the burden of paperwork We would welcome views and consideration of alternative approaches.

These include:

- Whether to continue with paper forms, sent out either at fixed times of the year, or a specific date/range for ad-hoc surveys—effectively 'business as usual' whilst meeting all of our legal and statutory obligations.
 - Consider options for new methods of data collection, for example, online forms, telephone surveys, etc.
2. **Discontinuing the Wales December Survey of Agriculture (including questions for crops, fertilisers and hay/silage) and investigate options for undertaking the SAG Inventory as well as other data sources in lieu of the December Survey.**
 - a telephone survey to farmers with pigs (that meet the sampling thresholds) will still be required to meet EU legislation);
 - Merging the December Survey of Agriculture with the SAG Inventory would reduce the burden of paperwork for our customers.
 - Use of Welsh SAG data as an administrative statistical data source (currently no statistical use is made of the collected Welsh SAG data).

What outcomes do we expect?

If the proposals in the consultation are agreed, we will implement changes through a number of phases and continuously review all items:

- **The current paper forms system would continue as is currently the case and be reviewed periodically; *NB there will always be a need for some sort of paper based collection for our customers i.e. ad-hoc surveys;***
- **There will be feedback on potential future online provision and how this would and could be delivered;**
- **The December Survey of Agriculture in 2012 would be the last paper based collection as we would be looking to move to administrative data sources as the data would be available elsewhere;**
- **There would still be an output i.e. results from the December Survey will continue to be published i.e. sheep and pigs and cattle figures for Wales;**
- **Fertiliser data will be made available from the British Survey of Fertiliser Practice however, whilst the data is much more detailed, it is only published on an E&W or a GB level, however the Welsh Government will seek to ensure that Wales data is published in the future;**
- **Autumn and winter crops data will be made available from the Home Grown Cereals Authority;**
- **Hay, silage and ensiled crops data is not currently available from any other administrative sources so we need to scope the current use of this element within our outputs, however there is no legal requirement for us to collect this information.**

Proposal 1

Agricultural and Rural Affairs Statistics currently use paper forms to collect the majority of their published statistical information, and will need to continue doing so in the short-term; however we are proposing to look at the current methods of data collection and assess and explore alternative data sources and methods to reduce the burden of paperwork We would welcome views and consideration of alternative approaches

Background

- The "[Working Smarter](#)" report included 74 recommendations to the Welsh Government on how to deliver better regulation within an appropriate framework, improved customer service for the farmers and a sector with increased profitability from a business perspective.
- The Welsh Government's detailed response to the recommendations contained in the report is [here](#).
- We have to collect the current information either under UK or EU legislation but as we have to pay for direct costs from 2014 onwards; the Welsh Government wish to make sure we are making the most for value for money and any future submissions would require this.
- Collecting data from administrative sources is an option, but administrative sources *cannot* supply all information. A good example is the comments we receive asking us to get information from the Single Application Form (SAF) form (used for payments) rather than sending people Survey forms.
 - The SAF form has limited information on some subjects and a wealth of information on others. For example, it asks for sheep numbers but we also need lambs and ages of flock for EU requirements.

What specific changes are we proposing?

- ***This is the current situation with surveys – all are paper based, but we need to collect the information – the question is if it's the best method and do we continue with 'business as usual' or adapt?***
- ***There may be a case of continuing with the paper collection until such a point that all sources of information are available administratively or there is an alternative collection method i.e. online.***

- ***There will always be some sort of paper based collection for e.g. ad-hoc surveys.***
- ***We also have to consider other options, such as using SAF data, online forms, conducting telephone surveys and alternative sources of administrative data (should they be robust enough to use, etc).***

The evidence for change

- Feedback from our customers and a marked decrease in response rates (e.g. why can we not get the information from SAF, I'm not filling this in as it's already on SAF etc) - has affected the performance of current data collection.
- It is currently the quickest method of collection but compared to using administrative data sources and online surveys (with a greater sample size and response rate) it is also not necessarily most cost effective.
- Non response affects results and there are associated direct costs with postage, printing, personalisation despatch, (reminder cards for non response cost money for example).

Specific consultation questions;

- Do you agree with a proposal to continue as before with paper based collections? If No, which other methods do you think could be used and implemented?
- Do you think that that ad-hoc surveys are best undertaken via a paper based collection?
- Do you think that we should make the annual Surveys available online? If Yes, please explain why you think this and how it would benefit you. If No, please state your reasons.
- Do you use any data from our outputs? If yes, which data and what do you use this data for?
- These forms supply most of the information published in our Statistical Releases, headlines, publications and bulletins. If there were no data collection, this could potentially affect these outputs - what impact would not having any data collection (and therefore no outputs) have on your work? Please provide reasons and examples.
- Are there any items of data that are not collected that you would like to see collected? If yes, please provide reasons and potential uses?

Proposal 2

Discontinuing the Wales December Survey of Agriculture (including questions for crops, fertilisers and hay/silage) and investigate options for undertaking the SAG Inventory and other sources in lieu of the Survey.

Background

- The Welsh Government is obliged to ensure the Wales element of the UK SAG Inventory is being actioned. DEFRA currently undertake all logistics from the SAG forms for and on behalf of the Welsh Government.

What specific changes are we proposing?

- ***Discontinuing the current Wales December Survey of Agriculture and using the SAG Inventory in lieu of the December Survey;***
 - ***The current EU December Survey legislation states only information for sheep, cattle and pigs are required.***
 - ***Cattle data comes direct from CTS (BCMS).***
 - ***Pig numbers are small enough that a telephone survey will suffice.***
 - ***The crops and fertiliser data collected on the current December Survey of Agriculture is published elsewhere with the British Survey of Fertiliser Practice and the Home Grown Cereals Authority (HGCA). Whilst Welsh level data is not currently available for fertilisers, the Welsh Government will seek to ensure that Wales data is published in the future***
 - ***Hay and silage is not available elsewhere as an administrative source but there is no legal basis to collect the data.***
- ***Use of Welsh SAG data as an administrative statistical data source after proper validation and evaluation***
 - ***Currently no statistical use is made of the collected Welsh SAG data.***

The evidence for change

- To reduce the burden of paperwork to their customers, DEFRA have now merged their annual Sheep and Goats (SAG) Inventory with their annual December Survey of Agriculture after a [National Statistics Review of Sheep Numbers at December in England](#).
- A similar review is being carried out in Wales by Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS); however, logistically, to run two surveys, a month apart, asking the same/similar questions may not demonstrate best practice.
- The December Survey normally goes out to 5,000 respondents; the SAG will nominally go to c.16, 000 recipients.
 - The SAG Inventory normally gets a 70% response rate – 11,200 responses.
 - The December Survey will get a 60% response rate - 3,000 forms

Therefore the scope of data from the responses will be much more representative than the current December Survey.

- Data for cattle is already collected directly from CTS (BCMS).
- The outputs will continue to be published; however there will be signposting to the alternative data sources provided by DEFRA and the HGCA for fertilisers and crops.
- Currently, there are no alternative data sources to the hay, silage and ensiled crops but this consultation will hopefully gauge the usage of this data. Further to this, there is no legal basis for the collection of the data.

Specific consultation questions;

- Do you agree with discontinuing the current Wales December Survey of Agriculture and using the SAG Inventory data in lieu of the December Survey data? - If yes, please explain why you agree with this.
- Do you think your work will be affected by ending the current series of the December Survey of Agriculture? If yes, please state why
- Crops and fertilisers administrative data is available from sources other than the December Survey – where you aware of this? If No, do you require any further information?
- Do you use data from the hay and silage questions off the December Survey form? If Yes, will the ending of the series affect you? Please explain how.