

Lesley Griffiths MS
Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd

10th March 2022

Dear Minister,

The impacts of the invasion of Ukraine on Welsh food security and farming

I am writing to you in the context of the shocking, ongoing acts of aggression against Ukraine and the resulting impact upon global food production. This is clearly a tragic situation and all of us stand in solidarity and support for the people of Ukraine.

Russia and Ukraine together account for 29% of global wheat exports, 19% of world maize exports, and 80% of world sunflower oil exports¹. Ukraine and Russia are also significant exporters of key fertilizers or key components to fertilizer.

Currently there is no global shortage of wheat, with stocks at 37% of annual usage, despite poor harvests in North America last year. The Food and Agriculture Organisation predicts average or above-average yields of wheat, as well as of total cereals, this year. However, no-one knows at this stage how the conflict will affect exports.

It appears the UK is not dependent on food imports from either Ukraine or Russia, including wheat as we grow most of our own, and the majority of what we import comes from countries such as Germany, France and Canada. But although we are not reliant on Ukraine or Russia for the commodity, the rising cost of wheat will likely trigger higher food prices here. In addition to flour and bread prices rising, the cost of meat, dairy and eggs could also go up due to the amount of wheat and corn the UK buys in for animal feed.

Rising fuel prices are also likely to impact on food prices, including as the costs of transporting food increases. Reduced availability of fertilisers may also impact UK/Welsh farmers, potentially reducing future yields and increasing food costs. Therefore, while we might not experience immediate food shortages, people's ability to buy food in Wales may be affected, as a result we could see increased food poverty.

What does this mean for food and farming in Wales?

1. As it appears Welsh farming doesn't produce the commodities at risk, we are not in a position to help plug the gap. Therefore, calls to direct financial support at maintaining/incentivising production in Wales would, if implemented, most likely result in more foods that aren't directly at risk (red meat and dairy) being produced.
2. Incentivising production in Wales may in fact contribute to reduced food security more widely as it would require more grains to be fed to an increased number of livestock, instead of being consumed directly by people. About two-thirds of the EU cereal harvest is already used for animal feed (or biofuel).
3. Further intensification of Welsh farming would almost certainly have a detrimental impact on nature and the wider environment, including increasing GHG emissions. Both the [State of Our Natural Resources Report \(2020\)](#) and the [State of Nature \(2019\)](#) highlight that unsustainable farming is already one of the main reasons why nature and the ecosystems it creates are in trouble.

¹ US Department of Agriculture data

4. Threats to supplies of imported feeds and fertilisers, which are increasingly expensive and often unsustainably produced, clearly expose the fragility of Welsh farming. Solutions that seek to maintain the status quo or lead to further intensification will not help improve food security, given they would require even greater inputs. **However, we believe there are actions farming in Wales can take to become more efficient, sustainable and resilient.** These include:
- Producing food based on the natural productive capacity of land, by adopting farming practises that work with nature and the environment such as agroecology and organic farming. Not only would this reduce or eliminate the need for expensive and unsustainable imported feed and fertilisers, research shows it is also the most profitable way of farming.²
 - Managing land in ways that restore nature and the ecosystems and natural resources nature creates to maintain our capacity to produce food and provide society with essential environmental goods. Recent research shows that providing farmers with an income for this management approach (as proposed by Welsh Government) increases farm business resilience, unlike direct income support payments, which have the opposite effect.³
 - Producing more of what we eat in Wales, i.e., farming that is better aligned to domestic food needs and markets. Currently Welsh farming produces a lot of a limited number of foods – mainly red meat and dairy, in fact we produce 9 times the amount of lamb that we eat. It is clear that Wales needs to develop and implement a Sustainable Food Plan (as part of a wider Sustainable Land Use Strategy) that fully considers the needs and opportunities for producing and marketing more of our own food in harmony with nature.

It was already widely recognised that our food system was unsustainable, and the real lesson of this crisis is that we must act now to improve the resilience of our food and farming systems. More than ever, we must shift towards environmentally friendly farming practices, which provide the only path to ensure long-term food security, food sovereignty, and the overall sustainability of food systems in the face of global shocks including the nature and climate emergency, pandemics and in this case, war.

Therefore, despite calls to the counter, we encourage you to hold to the vision in Sustainable Farming and our Land and continue to support nature-friendly, climate-friendly farming in Wales. We would be more than happy to discuss these issues with you directly.

Regards



Arfon Williams
Head of Land and Sea Policy
RSPB Cymru

² Clark C, Scanlon B, Hart K, (October 2019). Less is more: Improving profitability and the natural environment in hill and other marginal farming systems. A Report funded by the RSPB, the National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308521X20308702>