



Julie Hollins
Sustainable Farming Branch
Countryside Policy Division
Welsh Assembly Government

By email: 10th October 2008

To: Julie.hollins@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Ms Hollins

Re: Support for Young Entrants to Farming Strategy

Thank you for providing us, the Welsh Association of National Park Authorities (WANPA) with the opportunity to respond to your consultation on the *Support for Young Entrants to Farming Strategy*.

The three independent National Park Authorities collaborate as WANPA. They work together in partnership, and with other external organisations, to promote the interests of Wales' three National Parks.

The National Parks have two statutory purposes in the 1995 Environment Act:-

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park by the public.

In fulfilling these purposes, the National Park Authority has a duty to:-

- Seek to foster the economic and social well being of the local communities within the National Parks.

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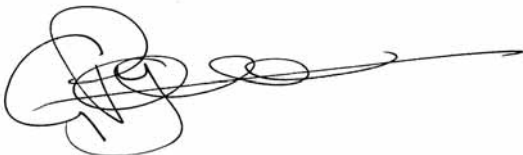


We support the context and challenges set out in the consultation paper and welcome the chance to contribute to Government policy. The Welsh Assembly Government's *Policy Statement for National Parks and National Park Authorities* states, " (National Parks) are places that experiment with new approaches in sustainable development and environmental conservation, providing exemplars of best practice for wider Wales, and helping to shape and lead future rural policy and practice." ¹

To this end, and in common with other recent responses to agriculture/rural affairs consultations, we believe that sustainable farms and farm businesses within the NPs are crucial to the fulfilment of your strategy and to the evolving conservation of these protected landscapes, without a doubt, they are among Wales' most important farms.

The following response has been worked upon and agreed between agricultural liaison officers working for the three National Park Authorities. Should you have any questions, please contact me in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Pycroft
Welsh Policy Officer, WANPA

Response produced by

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In conjunction with:

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¹ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/depc/ecm/countryside-coastal-access/national-parks/NPpolicystatement-e.pdf?lang=en>

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Rural Development Plan 2007-2013

Consultation on options for strategy to support young entrants to farming
Part 1

Response to Questions

- 1) The initiatives provide a good opportunity for young farmers and those wanting to enter the industry to become involved and inclusive in decisions taken at strategic and policy levels which have a direct impact on their futures.

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) has strived to include local young farmers groups in its liaison panels, Park plan, sustainable development fund and agri-environment schemes, and welcomes the step taken by the Welsh Assembly Government which could set a further example to stakeholders and associated agencies/bodies, of the importance of inclusion of rural young people in development and delivery of any policy/scheme.

WAG should also consider allowing a shadowing role for the members put forward to allow for a deputy that will allow consistent understanding of the subject that they are associated with.

With more representatives it would prove a less daunting experience for young people to sit with their peers and participate, a shadowing or deputy role associated to the principal attendee will build confidence of individuals in the subject, process and people involved.

- 2) From the experience gained from the SNPA it appears that the biggest constraint on young people attending meetings is time and financial limitations. More rural young people seek additional income to working on holdings. Availability of time and the financial burden of lost wages and travelling is a limiting factor for young people in particular given the isolation of several individuals, public transport infrastructure and the low income received in rural Wales.

Where young farmers are invited to attend for the first time, briefing packs and background information should be more available to allow them to be incorporated easier to the groups and develop their understanding and role within such groups, in turn could lead to faster and better contribution.

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- 3) Policymakers and facilitators should bear in mind the 3 principles of sustainability set down by WAG, and consider how they wish to see any policy/scheme operating in 10-15 years time and if it will be feasible if they fail to retain/attract young people into the industry now.

Policies need to be sustainable in a people perspective for the labour and skills element possessed.

If young people are not currently involved, they should be raising the question of 'why not'?

Farming Unions and Young Farmer bodies should proof documents and policies for inclusion of Young Farmers.

- 4) The change and involvement of young people in the rural affairs agenda is greatly welcomed, and should be allowed time to bed in and develop.

Consideration should be given to the democratic structure of the YFC and the way in which views and representation filter through the organisation thus ample time should be provided for consultation responses or selection of representation for various groups / papers as most youth organisation operate on a voluntary basis.

Part 2

- 1) Previous Farming Connect facilitator roles proved valuable information points that can answer specific individual questions and provide referral to specific/specialist further advice. National Parks advocate a 'one stop shop' for rural business as was the case in previous Farming Connect work, and provide information and guidance.

Facilitator services can provide fast, tailored answers and services to individuals, gives a point of contact for young people to return to, and develop a working relationship which will boost their confidence.

Technology transfer days have the capacity to reach many groups provided that they are attractive and well planned and timed.

All services should be backed up with an informative, easy to use and updated

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website with referral documents, sources and contact points.

- 2) Requirement to be an established farmer, holding number or part of a farming business require extensive business plans that are laborious to generate. Many aspects require substantial match funding which can be a limiting factor for young people.

Several key countryside skills are often overlooked in particular those that are labour intensive come across as “un-sexy”. National Park Authorities have attempted to highlight the value of these skills and crafts through various awards, wider acknowledgment would support these efforts. Similarly the old ATB awards credited land based skills developed by individuals.

Time availability can also be a limiting factor. Some grant programmes have included 3 days training which could have been compressed to 1 day making better use of time and reducing administration and delivery cost, and a higher uptake level.

- 3) This element should be addressed by the education authorities and higher education faculties.
- 4) Young entrants are frequently dependant on older generations and thus the influence that they have, their worries and fears will feature in succession planning e.g. death duties, taxation, legislation, trust funds, marriage agreements are all elements that they might wish further advice and guidance upon.

Packs should also contain contact points for information – local facilitators, mentors, planning advice assistance / guidance on creating and developing business plans, how to create, what to include etc.

- 5) Thorough understanding of basic underlying rules and codes of practice that govern the industry and technical competence should underpin a understanding of the market driven economy and its needs, development of communal actions and co-operating, conservation objectives, climate change obligations on production and their mitigation.
- 6) Care should be taken not to discredit those with no formal qualifications, or the very experienced individuals who have gained skills by prior learning. The education sector would be the best positioned to advise on accreditation.

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- 7) Main advantages of a Young Farmer group together would be the vigour and entrepreneurship displayed and eagerness to proceed with projects and working around barriers, however knowledge and guidance from older members acting as sounding boards can also be a great advantage having experience on their side. Provided that the older members are not pessimistic/negative in their approach mixed groups can work efficiently and effectively.
- 8) YFC promote opportunities for members to travel and some competitions provide valuable experiences for their members. More could possibly be made by the WAG to stimulate links with EU member states to encourage more exchanges where young people are exposed to good working experiences eg. renewable energy production in Austria and Germany where young farmers would learn and could be develop innovative ideas later in life.

25% of Wales carries protected landscape designation, it provides a substantial tool to develop opportunities for young people based on the environment.

A mentor role could also be developed in the industry where mentors could be provided for the YF's which could have a positive impact on both parties.

- 9) 550 hours is an achievable limit in a 3 year period, although concern arises for those parties who fail the threshold and what penalties they will face, and those individuals who exploit the system with no intention of striving to reach 550 hours. Clear guidelines are required on these issues. Active partners in businesses should also be eligible provided that they can display that they are actively involved in the business.
- 10) Retirement planning for older generations should be part of the planning options, or advice and guidelines specific for older generations to make decisions that impact in their life choices i.e. retire, sell property, taxation and financial advice to allow easier decision making on issues that they might be unwilling / uneasy to think of without advice.

Part 3

- 11) The main barrier to young entrants is profitability of the industry and capital cost of establishment. Capital is difficult to attain (more so at present), and for new entrants to be able to compete against established units.

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Long term planning in current climate is also difficult due to constant changes in support mechanism and availability of gaining access to agri environment schemes makes it difficult for business plans to be drawn up for young people approaching lending institutions or land owners. A clear and long term vision and support from the WAG would ease this element somewhat.

Further issues arise with local authorities having to sell small agricultural holdings due to financial settlements losing valuable starter holdings and opportunities for young entrants, or where local authorities have retained their assets, that they do not have a mechanism to progress tenants to larger holdings after a specific period / availability to release the smaller units for new tenants.

- 12) Joint ventures offer a good option, reducing the capital cost of entering into agriculture, but will not suit all, success is largely dependant on the relationship struck between parties – has the potential to be a bad experience. A lack of knowledge in the field of setting up fair, robust agreements also deters many from proceeding.

Similarly joint ventures could be developed further with agri environment schemes and land managers which could provide an opportunity for you people to enter the industry.

Very little other opportunities are available for new entrants with diminishing numbers of small scale holdings that can be stocked and used as starter blocks and allow people to progress to larger holdings.

- 13) Flyers with most frequently asked questions and referral details for more information. General topical articles in 'Gwlad'. Facilitator presentations to Union meetings to get older generation thinking of inheritance tax, death duties, succession or share farming etc.

The older generation of framers are concerned about the future and relinquishing control of assets and business that have been hard and costly to develop or passed down for generations. They are concerned that the wrong decision by a younger member could be very costly to the business.

- 14) Clear structure and readily available guidance should be available with full legal obligations and responsibilities set out so that all parties are aware of what is to be

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expected.

- 15) Managing National Parks is labour intensive, and requires young people to carry out the works. A scaling back of entitlements and payments for those over 65 years unless entering into an agreement with a young farmer or bringing in an active young farmer to the business would provide incentives for farm business to assess their structure and future management.

Future entitlements or subsidies should not be allowed to become assets for individuals, thus de-capitalising support.

- 16) Starter holdings such as local authority farms are essential as some of the smaller units provide an opportunity for young entrants to stock the farms and get on the production scale that allows them to build assets, experience and confidence before moving on.

Several local authorities have sold off these assets claiming that they are uneconomic, however a 10 acre holding could allow a new entrant to enter the industry developing its horticulture or specialist agricultural produce, whilst gaining external income from employment it retains young people in rural areas and safeguards rural fabric.

Age, experience, understanding and business plans are essential criteria along with an understanding that they are expected to progress to larger holdings if they become available by the authority as to free up the smaller tenanted farms to be available for new entrants.

- 17) Care should be taken with this element, that it could lead to misuse of the system by established units to gain advantage and faster entry to the schemes, however, it could act as a catalyst to change the management of holdings and bring in young people into the business structure, and provides an opportunity for young people to develop new skills.
- 18) Young entrants require an opportunity and not preferential treatment. Higher payment rates for young farmers would not be a good idea as it distorts the market place and would cause unfairness and could stimulate some unscrupulous individuals to try and exploit the system. In addition, it does not provide the proper foundation to business skills development.

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- 19) As has been displayed in the past by the SNPA and Rhaglen Tir Eryri that part farm schemes can be very popular, easy to administer and very effective in delivery, providing a means for capital investment onto holdings. It could allow young people a taster of agri-environment schemes without the initial cost (in some cases), would allow young people to gain more experience and opportunity to carry out some works themselves and allows units some freedom to develop entrepreneurial aspects if they wish to do so.

Part farm schemes should be allowed to be transferred easier to whole farm schemes if desired for maximum environmental benefit.

Part farm schemes should be audited to safeguard that fragile habitat / species are included in the plans, to prevent key features being omitted from plans and to maximise environmental protection.

- 20) Despite the current financial climate, access to borrowing is still available through various avenues, however ability to service loans could be deemed more difficult due to income timing, increased costs, and low incomes derived from additional employment in rural Wales.
- 21) Interest rate relief could be more beneficial to young farmers, it would carry the requirement for business plans, careful financial planning to be followed. Only successful business plans would be granted borrowing facility and would eliminate excessive/greed driven applications.

Guaranteed acceptance into the plans should not be available, as this too will limit opportunist/excessive bids, as the borrowing would have to be serviceable if assistance was not available.

- 22) Would allow investment to be faster in the business promoting/allowing growth and development.

Stringent rules and criteria need to be set up and in place and an assessment panel and process to regulate applications.

- 23) In a rural development principle this is a good idea, however there are concerns that there are some situations and locations where innovations and entrepreneurship are

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not available to new entrants due to physical and market constraints limits what can be achieved on the holding. New entrants into such circumstances will be placed at a disadvantage of attaining assistance.

It is these holdings and opportunities often host some of the most favourable environmental, cultural and historic goods in the countryside, and require management today and to the future.

Skills and labour are required and drawing young farmers to these locations is difficult.

- 24) Care should be taken not to discriminate against young farmers who wish to develop a business they are part of, or the development of a stand alone business. Most young people enter the industry in partnerships, and these too should be fostered provided that they are actively involved in the business.

An alternative would be to give young entrants applying as sole traders greater proportion or % of assistance.

- 25) No response.
26) No response.

