

Shock and dismay as support is withdrawn for nature-friendly organic farmers in Wales

Dear First Minister

We – businesses, food producers and farming and environmental organisations – urge you to reconsider your government's plans to abandon support for organic farming in Wales.

A withdrawal of support for organic farming will have serious economic and environmental consequences in Wales. The decision poses an existential risk to the Welsh food and farming sector's ability to deliver to our climate, nature and food security obligations. It is likely to precipitate a mass exodus of organic farmers, inflicting long lasting damage on the sector.

Scientists and economists agree that organic farming is a highly effective system for delivering public benefits - climate, nature and social. On average organic farms hold 50% more wildlife than non-organic. Organic agriculture emits less greenhouse gases per hectare by not relying on fossil fuel derived fertilisers and chemical pesticides.

For more than 40 years Wales has led the UK in the development of the organic food and farming movement. Wales now stands out among the UK nations in terms of the proportion of land area certified as organic, cared for by farmers who are firmly committed to the principles of Sustainable Land Management and standing ready to deliver more.

Welsh Government has played a key role in supporting the growth of this sector in Wales and can be proud of those achievements. But decades of investment in healthy soils, nature-rich farms and pioneering food businesses now looks set to be squandered if there is no support for organic, starting with the Interim Agri-environment Scheme in 2024.

We are shocked that Welsh Government looks set to reject a globally recognised and scientifically evidenced beacon of sustainable farming. Such a decision would undermine Wales's credentials internationally as an environmentally sustainable country at a time when other nations are investing heavily in supporting their own organic supply chains and would be more than happy to supply our markets. Organic certification is an internationally recognised benchmark and as such, a passport to value added export markets; throwing that away also throws away that opportunity for Welsh quality exports.

Public support for organic remains strong even as the sector is under acute pressure from the cost-of-living crisis and escalating farm costs. The recent announcement regarding the Interim Agri-environment Scheme prompted widespread frustration and deep disappointment amongst producers and processors.

We urge you to commit budget to organic support in the new schemes; this provides an overwhelmingly clear return on investment for Wales. To withdraw support now could become an error of historic proportions and a massive political misjudgement, placing Wales's pioneering organic farmers and growers at a disadvantage within the UK and elsewhere.

The Welsh Organic Forum calls for an urgent meeting on this matter. We offer to work with Rural Affairs Minister Lesley Griffiths and her team, as we have in the past, to find a way through this to secure a future for organic that we can all continue to be proud of.

The following businesses and organisations agree on this important issue:

Iestyn Tudur-Jones - General Manager, Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers Ltd
Caroline Sherrott - Senior Certification Manager, Soil Association Certification
Steven Jacobs - Business Development Manager, Organic Farmers & Growers
Cristina Dimetto - Managing Director, Organic Trade Board
Alan Prior - Managing Director, Rachel's Organic
Laurence Harris and Dr Tom Harris - Daioni Organic and Ffosyficer Farms
Leisia Tudor - Lamb Agriculture Manager, Dunbia
Lord Newborough - Farm and Business Owner, Rhug Estate
Patrick Holden – Founder & CEO, Sustainable Food Trust
Hywel Morgan - Chair, Nature Friendly Farming Network in Wales
Holly Tomlinson - Welsh Policy Coordinator, Landworkers Alliance
Gary Mitchell - Joint Wales Manager, Social Farms and Gardens
Jimmy Woodrow - CEO, Pasture for Life
Alun Prichard - Director, RSPB Cymru
Rachel Sharp Director - Wildlife Trusts Wales
Gareth Clubb - Director, WWF Cymru
Lhosa Daly – Director, National Trust Cymru