Sustainable Farming Scheme

The issue

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) is the Welsh Government's replacement for the Basic Payment Scheme, the legacy EU agricultural support scheme. Soil Association Cymru welcomes the SFS – we think it has potential to accelerate the uptake of farming systems that work with nature in a way that underpins their productivity and resilience. The remaining design of the scheme and its implementation will be crucial to ensure the SFS supports existing nature-friendly farmers and delivers benefits for nature, climate and people.

Why it matters to Wales

Farming sits at the heart of life in rural Wales. It shapes our landscapes, supports communities, and provides food for Wales and beyond. The SFS is a once-in-a-generation chance to reform how public money supports farming to be more resilient in the face of increasing environmental and economic challenges and to deliver the societal needs of the 21st century. Instead of payments based on agricultural land use, the scheme must reward farmers for the environmental and social benefits they provide, from healthy soils, livestock and thriving wildlife to clean water and climate action.

Done well, the SFS could help spread nature-friendly practices including the greater integration of trees within farm systems, and farming practices that promote soil health - including organic farming - to cut emissions and reduce reliance on chemicals. We want to see the scheme reward those farmers who already lead the way on this, whilst also helping others to take the first steps. We want a step change in farm advice, taking a whole-farm approach that helps farmers unlock synergies between food production and environmental delivery, alongside fair payments and supply chain initiatives to make the transition work.

Alignment with Welsh policy context

We support the SFS as a delivery mechanism for the **Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023**, and **Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026** and the **Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015**. The SFS must align with Wales' climate, biodiversity, and woodland targets and strategies, and integrate with the Community Food Strategy and the strategic vision for the Food and Drink Industry. The SFS must remain under Senedd scrutiny throughout transition.

Our perspective

We support a public money for public goods approach grounded in:

- Fair rewards for existing environmental delivery
- Ambitious woodland and habitat restoration targets
- Stronger support for organic and agroecological farming
- Investment in training, advice, and peer-to-peer learning
- Transparent KPIs and soil/carbon data reporting

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What we're doing about it

Soil Association Cymru has provided written responses to Welsh Government SFS-related consultations since 2020. Our Head of Policy Cymru Andrew Tuddenham has been a member of all SFS Ministerial groups that were established in 2024, also representing Wales Environment Link on the Ministerial Roundtable and Carbon Sequestration Evidence Review Panel. He has provided written and oral evidence to Senedd committee enquiries into the SFS and related policy since 2024. The Soil Association is also leading a partnership project funded by Welsh government to identify positive animal welfare actions for potential inclusion in the Optional Layer of SFS.

What we want Welsh policy makers to do:

- **Set measurable SFS targets:** Double farm woodland area by 2050; zero loss of ancient woodland; 75% in good or improving condition by 2030.
- **Allocate funding effectively:** Allocate at least 50% of the budget to Optional/Collaborative actions by 2029; ensure a fair Universal payment.
- **Invest in advice and training:** Establish national farm advice standards and integrate organic certification into CPD.
- **Ensure transparency and accountability:** Publish soil and KPI data; standardise carbon calculator methods; avoid metrics that overlook broader outcomes.
- **Guarantee stakeholder input:** The Ministerial SFS Roundtable process has been crucial to the development of the scheme and an equivalent process of stakeholder engagement should be continued to help guide the scheme through the Transition Period.
- **Integrate into related policy:** While the SFS is positioned as a key delivery mechanism for Wales' climate, biodiversity, and woodland strategies, the scheme currently lacks defined targets for nature, and its expected contribution to nature and climate targets is unquantified. Likewise, join-up between the SFS and the strategic vision for the Food and Drink Industry and proposed National Food Strategy are needed.

Evidence/references

- Summary of Soil Association Cymru's response to the Sustainable Farming Scheme: Keeping farmers farming Consultation
- Welsh Government announces Sustainable Farming Scheme
- Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme Announcements by Soil Association & TFA

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