



Janet Finch-Saunders MS|AS

Aelod Senedd Cymru dros Aberconwy
Member of the Welsh Parliament for Aberconwy



Lesley Griffiths MS,
Minister for Environment, Energy, and Rural Affairs,
Welsh Government,
By Email

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URGENT

Re: All Wales NVZ

Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1SN.

Janet.Finch-Saunders@Senedd.Wales

Dear Minister, Lesley,

I hope that this letter finds you and your team well at this difficult time for Wales, and especially Welsh farmers.

In addition to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, Welsh farmers are now having to contend with The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

Last month saw Mind Your Head week, during which I asked you to undertake an urgent review of current signposting methods for mental health support. As such, I am confident that you will be acutely aware of the fact that:

- Approximately 88% of young farmers now rate poor mental health as the biggest hidden problem faced by farmers today, up from 82% in 2018;
- Statistics show that there were 102 suicides registered in England and Wales in those working in farming and agricultural related trades in 2019;
- Across Wales residents joined the #Run1000 challenge to inspire rural communities to take to the countryside to help improve their mental health;
- In kitchens across Wales, families and farmers participated in the virtual breakfast week, raising vital funds for the DPJ Foundation.

Clearly the agricultural sector is trying its best to help tackle the serious mental health problem in rural Wales. It is with all honesty that I write to highlight my concern that your Regulations will have a detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing.

I know that you are in receipt of correspondence which highlights the devastating effect the Regulations are already having:

- Calls and correspondence from concerned farmers are increasing by the day, and I know that NFU Cymru is encountering the same trend;
- As farmers have begun to discuss the regulations with consultants or bank managers, the realisation of the impact is becoming clear: true desperation for the long term viability of their businesses, family home, and rural communities;
- There are farmers without capital reserves for investment, even if there was good grant support. Do you honestly think that it is proportionate for a farmer to go into debt when there has been no agricultural pollution incident on the farm?

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- Tenant farmers on local authority holdings looking unlikely to secure council support for additional capital expenditure. Will they have to quit farming or have you come to an arrangement with all local authorities in Wales that they will cover the cost of their tenants complying with your Regulations?
- Many dairy farmers are already carrying considerable debt following the turbulence the sector has seen over recent years, including last year with the price of milk for some falling to 19p, causing huge concern that the cost of the Regulations to business will push farms to close;
- And numerous farming families in Wales which invest every single penny back into their business are having to contemplate closure. In fact, I know many who take hardly any income at all, dedicating their lives to the family farm. In some instances, after generations have succeeded to care for the land and livestock, your Regulations are set to pull the rug from underneath them and bring complete instability to a sector and businesses which are very vulnerable.

As a farmer and agricultural expert I greatly admire put it to you: “You have made a grave, grave error of judgement in announcing regulations throughout Wales”.

I know that we do not see eye to eye on this and a number of other matters, but I genuinely believe that you would not deliberately intend to cause huge distress to rural communities nor the potential collapse of farms across Wales. Nonetheless, they are set to be some of the consequences of your Regulations and actions. Indeed, whilst your Explanatory Memorandum (EM) notes that ‘The proposal is expected to have a positive impact on public health more generally’, this contradicts the feedback I am receiving and even elsewhere in the EM where it is warned that:

‘There may be some negative consequences for health due to the cost implications for farm businesses, which has the potential to contribute to the detrimental economic conditions affecting health of individuals. The potential negative impact of additional regulatory requirements on mental well-being, particularly where other economic or health challenges already exist, is also recognised’.

I implore you to issue a statement withdrawing the Regulations, provide a copy of any Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment that has been undertaken in relation to the legislation, and clarify why you are pursuing measures despite the clear evidence that there is and will be a negative impact on mental wellbeing.

Kind regards,

Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS

