# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Future Farm Support – update on actions** |
| **DATE**  | **03 May 2024** |
| **BY** | **Huw Irranca-Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs** |

We have had a seven-year conversation to design a future farming support scheme that works for Wales. I am committed to keep listening to and, working with, farmers and all stakeholders to develop a Scheme that will help deliver against our ambition for Wales to be a world leader in sustainable farming.

Everyone I have met since taking on the role of Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs agrees that producing safe, high-quality food in Wales is vital to our future. Farming provides much more than the food we eat. A prosperous industry is vital to support our farmers to produce food sustainably and provide a wealth of environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Our future farm support needs to deliver multiple outcomes for all of Wales but must have farmers at the heart of it. This has food production and continued high standards of animal health and welfare as the cornerstone, along with improving environmental performance, responding to the climate emergency, and enhancing on-farm biodiversity. These cannot be tackled in isolation.

I have listened to the issues raised by the farmers, farming unions and other stakeholders I’ve met with so far, and whilst the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) consultation responses continue to be analysed, I want to move forward to ensure we address our commitments. I have met with Plaid Cymru’s Designated Member and will maintain regular dialogue in support of the Cooperation Agreement.

I will be updating Senedd Members on 14 May on the latest developments regarding SFS and how I propose to make progress. My commitment is to do this in partnership, to explore the issues that I have heard about and to address them so that we can move forward with a scheme that supports our common ambition for Welsh farmers to be world leaders in sustainable farming. Economies across the world are having to confront tough decisions to ensure that the action needed to protect the future of our planet is taken in a way that delivers a just transition for communities everywhere. Rural Wales boasts some of the World’s best produce with farmers who care for and sustain landscapes and communities that inspire and nurture people here and visitors from across the globe. This is why changes to the support we provide to secure the future of farming in Wales are the subject of such passion. The emphasis I place on dialogue and listening is based on a recognition of the impact the decisions we take collectively have on Wales as a whole and on the welfare of future generations.

This is why today I am announcing the creation of a SFS Ministerial Roundtable which will be made up of farmers, representative organisations such as the Farming Unions, and other stakeholders with an interest in achieving a sustainable agricultural industry in Wales.

The Roundtable, which I will chair, will review the key programme outputs and critical steps leading to the development of a revised Scheme, in advance of a final decision by Welsh Ministers. This will consider evidence such as the consultation analysis, updated economic assessment, and outputs from a supporting SFS officials’ group and other task and finish groups.

The intention is to work at pace to identify areas of agreement and place the emphasis on matters where more work is required. I expect to have the first meeting of the Roundtable in May and my priority is to listen to the issues raised and to find a way forward which hopefully works for all.

With this in mind, one of the first tasks of the SFS Ministerial Roundtable will be to look at any further and alternative proposals to achieve additional carbon sequestration within the SFS. The Farming Unions and other stakeholders believe the Scheme should look beyond the existing Actions, such as additional tree planting, which this group will now consider.

I expect the group of partners undertaking this work with us to focus on the evidence associated with actions to support additional carbon sequestration and the scale of opportunity in Wales. This exercise will be considered by the SFS Ministerial Roundtable and ultimately support the decisions I will be making on the Scheme’s introduction. I will look to publish a summary of the evidence provided by the evidence sub-group as part of my commitment to an open and inclusive approach on this important and deeply emotive issue.

The announcement today is critical in demonstrating the steps we will take to work in partnership to finalise a Scheme that works long-term. Together we can create a future where our farmers produce the very best of Welsh food to the highest standards, while safeguarding our precious environment, underpinning our rural communities and addressing the urgency of the climate and nature emergency.