Hybu Cig Cymru
Meat Promotion Wales

Our Ref: GH/OR/KH/Cons.

4 February 2020

The Committee on Climate Change – Call for Evidence
151 Buckingham Palace Rd
London
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Email: communications@theccc.org.uk

Dear Sirs

Call for evidence on Welsh climate targets to inform advice on UK's Sixth Carbon Budget

Hybu Cig Cymru - Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) is the statutory industry-led levy organisation responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of Welsh lamb, beef and pork. It undertakes promotional campaigns at home and abroad, is involved in research and development which benefits the efficiency and sustainability of the whole red meat supply chain, as well as collating and analysing market intelligence.

Agricultural production accounts for nearly 90 percent of the land use in Wales and provides vital economic activity whilst supporting rural community cohesion, safeguarding Wales' extensive natural resources and providing additional cultural and well-being benefits. Welsh agriculture is therefore vital for Wales and it needs to be supported in achieving its full potential of growing Wales' GVA and creating further jobs whilst sustainably managing natural resources. As such, any large-scale changes in land use could, if unmanaged, have a significant negative impact on Welsh rural communities.

There are many practical and economic ways to achieve net zero emissions from agriculture while maintaining current levels of food production. It should be noted that agriculture is one of the very few industries that has the ability to sequester carbon. This can be maximised, and production maintained, through well managed soils and efficient crop and plant growing cycles. This when combined with the natural and managed trees and hedgerows that can be seen in rural areas can provide a valuable resource that can sequester and store carbon.

Practical on-farm techniques such as improved animal health and welfare, increased use of animals with high genetic potential and better use and management of grassland and forage can all lower the carbon footprint that is associated with agriculture and food production in the UK.

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Over the last decade there has been significant investment in new technologies and farming practices that could aid the sector in achieving net zero status, some of which would be in early research stage whilst others would be at a commercial level. Examples of these would be advancements in machinery that is used to manage soils and crops to ensure that any additional inputs used on the land is targeted, and GPS technologies.

There has also been development into how farmers can manipulate ruminants' diets to deliver emissions saving and reduce nitrogen excretion. While some of these technologies and techniques may not have reached the commercial market yet, there are other options available such as the use of high sugar grasses and novel additives. There are grass varieties that can reduce the amount of methane sheep emit such as grasses high in water-soluble carbohydrates, plant extracts such as garlic and new varieties of cereals such as high lipid content oats.[1]

It should also be noted that there is no simplistic connection between consumption of meat and dairy products in the UK and numbers of livestock, as some have sought to argue. For instance, domestic consumption of lamb has declined steadily for 50 years, but trends in livestock numbers have fluctuated entirely independently, depending on support policies and export markets.

Any move to a blanket message to reduce consumption would also be difficult to justify from a health perspective. Most adults eat less than the UK Government's recommended level of 70g red meat per day, and well below the 100g per day figure mentioned in other international reports. Among some groups in society, deficiencies in certain nutrients in which red meat is rich (B vitamins, iron and zinc) is a growing problem.

In relation to Welsh carbon targets, HCC would want the Committee to pay particular attention to the following considerations:

1. **The conclusions of the IPCC *Climate Change and Land* report, particularly insofar as it relates to the balance between sustainable agriculture and forestry**

   Some previous policy responses to climate change in the UK have focused on calls for afforestation, and the reduction in the amount of land used for agriculture. The IPCC makes a series of strongly-evidenced observations which are relevant to this, in relation to the climate mitigation potential of afforestation and the food security implications of taking land out of production from a broader global standpoint.

   The IPCC report's Summary for Policymakers argues for a balanced approach dependent on local circumstances, noting as follows:

   "While land can make a valuable contribution to climate change mitigation, there are limits to the deployment of land-based mitigation measures such as bioenergy crops or afforestation. Widespread use at the scale of several millions of km^2 globally could increase risks for desertification, land degradation, food security and sustainable

[1] https://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/pdfs/the-effect-of-sheep-genetic-improvement-programmes-on-methane-emissions26032012172555.pdf p.5

development. Applied on a limited share of total land, land-based mitigation measures that displace other land uses have fewer adverse side-effects and can have positive co-benefits for adaptation, desertification, land degradation or food security."

The report also notes that afforestation would take many years to have a net positive impact on carbon capture, and the IPCC authors' press statement when the report was published states clearly that

"Land must remain productive to maintain food security as the population increases and the negative impacts of climate change on vegetation increase. This means there are limits to the contribution of land to addressing climate change, for instance through the cultivation of energy crops and afforestation. It also takes time for trees and soils to store carbon effectively."

There are opportunities for increased forest cover in the UK through planting and also the restoration of peatlands, however this should only be introduced following feasibility studies on the potential impact on agricultural incomes and subsequently rural communities. Before selecting potential areas for planting, consideration should be given to the scope for other enterprises to use the land, i.e. farmers are more likely to engage with this activity should the land be unsuited to other more productive and/or profitable activities.

2. Related to the point above, the need to take a global perspective on food production

The IPCC report is again explicit that sustainable types of food production, including livestock farming, are vital to finding a solution to climate change that bears in mind global food security.

Debra Roberts, the co-chair of the IPCC working group, is quoted in the press statement as saying that *"Balanced diets featuring plant-based foods, such as coarse grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, and animal-sourced food produced sustainably in low greenhouse gas emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation to and limiting climate change."*

Many UK livestock production systems, particularly largely extensive beef and lamb production, mostly grass-fed on land which has few other commercially-viable uses, could be argued to be among the more sustainable systems worldwide.

There must be concern therefore that any reduction of the capacity of livestock agriculture in the UK could merely 'export' the problem of emissions to countries where production is less sustainable. A reduction in UK-agricultural GHG emissions can be achieved without 'offshoring' emissions through ensuring that production levels within the UK remain stable whilst improving on-farm and processing efficiency. Utilising practical on-farm techniques would ensure that consumers have access to high quality food products that were produced in low-GHG emitting systems. This would avoid the reliance on imported, potentially inferior, product where there is little UK control on production methods and techniques.

Any new research comparing the overall net impact of different agricultural systems in the UK across the world, including carbon sequestration and water use, should be carefully considered.

3. New research on the GHG potential of methane

Research by Michelle Cain, Myles Allen and others at Oxford University has highlighted that the main GHG emission of livestock agriculture, methane, is a short-lived pollutant. There are moves therefore to update calculations of 'carbon equivalents' when assessing the relative impact of different GHGs into single measures.

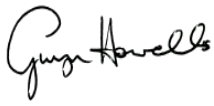
There is a discussion on whether the old Global Warming Potential (GWP) is fit for purpose, and whether new metrics such as GWP* or GWP-we give a more accurate assessment.

4. Research on food waste

International reports such as the IPCC place a great emphasis on reducing food waste. Research in the UK by WRAP and others has indicated that a major source of food waste lies in the retail sector and in consumer behaviour (both at home and in catering – through plate waste). It would be therefore fruitful to examine attitudinal change in this area as a priority.

We hope that these comments are useful in your deliberations and would appreciate being kept informed of any further developments in this area.

Yours faithfully



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