Plaid Cymru recognises the importance of a thriving farming sector to Wales, not only for the production of high quality food and the management of the environment, but also for its basis as the cornerstone of the rural economy and its importance in maintaining the social fabric of rural Wales.

We also recognise that farming in Wales has its challenges, and the low market prices across all farming sectors coupled with recent drops in farm incomes, underline the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy to ensure long term food security which is vital to predominantly livestock farming areas in Wales.

The current situation convinces us that direct payments are as important as ever in helping to compensate farmers for market uncertainties, to help manage price volatility and to reward high standards of farming, so that the key objectives of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are met.

Recent changes to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the transition from a historic to an area based payment scheme means that farming will be facing particularly challenging times as the new regime beds in.

There has been a great deal of confusion and change during the last few years and in order to minimise the disruption on farmers over the transition period, we will work with industry to ensure that the support through the basic payment scheme and the Rural Development Plan will be focussed on delivering our vision of a productive, profitable and progressive farming industry in Wales.

Looking to the future, the fifth Assembly period will cover both a possible midterm review and negotiations for the next CAP and Plaid Cymru will ensure that Wales will be leading the way to help develop and influence the discussions over any proposed changes within this period and for the next CAP post 2020. This will ensure that we maximise the benefits to Wales before the proposals become enshrined in law.

We will also ensure that the internal review process starts early enough to allow the Welsh Government to effectively negotiate and shape the most important policies for Wales.
In order to deliver our vision of a thriving, profitable farming industry, we need an effective, focussed Rural Development Plan.

Plaid Cymru opposed the maximum 15% transfer of funds from Pillar One to Pillar Two which took over a quarter of a billion pounds directly out of Wales’s rural economy and meant that farmers in Wales have been modulated more than any other country in Europe.

We believe that as farmers have invested into the RDP, it is vital that they benefit from a range of programmes and measures which will build capacity and resilience in the industry and which will help the industry reduce its reliance on direct payments, in light of likely reductions to future CAP budgets.

We support the detailed proposals developed by a number of industry partners including the Unions, CLA, Levy Boards and YFC for how the RDP could be used to deliver support back to farmers in order to encourage real change at farm level.

We will work with stakeholders to develop and implement key strategic initiatives which will deliver for the red meat and dairy sectors and which will directly benefit large numbers of farmers whilst also delivering transformational change to the wider industry.

Key to this will be encouraging farmers to provide data which can provide a baseline to the current situation whilst also being used to track and assess the effectiveness of policy interventions at individual, sector and national level. We believe it is vital that RDP schemes and measures have a real impact on farm viability and should be focussed on positive outcomes, where performance is regularly measured and monitored to provide real baseline data from which future measures can be developed.

Farming Connect provides an important programme of support for farmers in Wales and we will ensure that all elements of the service will be aligned with the key strategic initiatives so that resources are used effectively to deliver an efficient, motivated farming sector in Wales, where sustainability, profitability and efficiency are the key drivers for change.

Plaid Cymru believes that improving the efficiency and profitability of farming is key to delivering many of the sustainability objectives under climate change mitigation, both in terms of reducing greenhouse gasses through adoption of new technologies and measures and in playing a significant part in maintaining and managing carbon sinks such as woodlands and wetlands.

Farmers are custodians of the countryside and the sustainability of agriculture is also reliant on the effective management and protection of water, soil and biodiversity. We will work with the industry and others to develop innovative ways in which RDP funded agri-environment measures such as Glastir can help deliver public benefits and look at ways in which to encourage greater co-working between farmers and conservation bodies to deliver practical, realistic and positive benefits to environmental management in Wales.

We believe that all farmers should have access to agri-environmental schemes to encourage and reward positive environmental management and protection. In order to encourage even greater participation, we will ensure that a part farm scheme, open to all farmers and involving minimum bureaucracy is made available.
We recognise that farmers in Wales operate to extremely high standards of animal welfare and this is demonstrated by the number of farmers participating in farm assurance schemes which require higher standards of welfare and husbandry.

We also recognise that budgetary cuts at a UK level have had a significant effect on the approach to endemic disease control surveillance and import controls.

We will lobby the Westminster Government to implement tougher biosecurity border controls to reduce the risk of imported diseases and we will work with partners across the British Isles and Europe to prevent the spread of invasive alien flora and fauna species, which will include the development of early threat warnings.

We will work with the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Steering Group to look at opportunities for implementing specific endemic disease eradication measures under the Rural Development Plan and seek early implementation of practical alternatives to the whole farm six day standstill rule.

Bovine TB continues to have a devastating effect on farming in Wales and remains one of the biggest threats to our cattle herd. We believe that there needs to be a holistic approach to eradicating this disease and that any increased burdens on the movement and testing regime must be matched by a range of policy measures which deal with all vectors of the disease.

Plaid recognises the need for a toolkit of measures to deal with the disease based on local need and disease status and we know that controlling the disease within the wildlife population has to go hand in hand with animal testing and movement restrictions.

The suspension of the badger vaccination trials, within the intensive action area has highlighted how vulnerable a single approach to disease control within the wildlife population can be.

We will commit to using the most effective measures to control and eradicate bTB and to ensure clean areas remain disease free. We will also ensure that testing and movement restrictions remain proportionate to the disease status of an area and will work with stakeholders to ensure that there are toolkits of measures in place which reflect the area’s disease status.
Wales’ electronic sheep movement recording and reporting system, EID Cymru, was launched on 1st January 2016. Whilst we believe that the system has the potential to deliver a number of benefits to both individual farmers and the wider sheep sector in terms of improved animal traceability and data recording opportunities, a number of barriers such as the availability of broadband in rural areas and the need for paper based systems to satisfy certain legislative requirements, need to be addressed.

In Government, we will work closely with stakeholders to ensure the system is fit for purpose, useable for farmers and reduces red-tape for all concerned.

Since Gareth Williams was originally appointed to undertake his review in 2011, the programme has achieved a number of successes. However there remains a number of concerns about the slow progress in achieving genuine simplification for livestock identification and movement controls and the current system remains confusing for farmers and administrators alike.

Plaid undertakes to ensure that the full package of 74 measures proposed by Gareth Williams in his report of January 2012 have been fully implemented and because we recognise the importance of ensuring that regulations and legislation do not result in undue bureaucracy and paperwork will undertake another working smarter review to ensure that recent legislation has been proportionate and fair and does not unnecessarily increase red tape and gold plating.
The future of farming

The future of a vibrant farming industry in Wales is dependent on the influx of new, highly trained individuals into the industry. New blood brings new ideas and innovation into the sector and promotes the foundation of sustainable, profitable and resilient farm businesses in Wales.

Whilst the economic fortunes of farming in Wales had made it a less attractive option for young people over recent years, this trend is now turning and we believe that it is vital to put policies in place which will facilitate progression within the industry whilst also attracting and retaining high calibre people who are rewarded for skills, qualifications and progression through a structured career path.

Increasingly, new entrants are entrepreneurial, spotting business opportunities and different ways of doing things, and we will look to support and encourage this innovation.

In order to deliver on our vision of a vibrant, profitable farming sector in Wales, we believe that there needs to be a multi-faceted approach to delivery based on the following priority areas:
• Succession and joint ventures
• County Council holdings
• The tenanted sector
• Improving education and skills development

Succession and joint ventures

In Government we will work with stakeholders to progress the recommendations of “The Next Generation into Farming” report, including championing and facilitating the Joint Opportunities Platform to help create a network of training, information and mentoring services to help new entrants looking for a route into the industry and those wishing to wind down.

As well as attracting new talent to the farming industry and supporting new enterprises, we will ensure that any long-term food and farming strategies focus on addressing succession and the need to encourage new blood into the industry.

One of the key ways of encouraging new blood into farming is through addressing the concerns of the older generation and helping to break down the barriers to creating opportunities for new entrants.

We will look at the ways in which Rural Development Plan resources can provide access to advice and guidance on some of the many concerns that farmers may have on handing over to new blood and we will build upon the current resources on succession available under Farming Connect.

We believe that joint venture farming offers significant opportunities to help address some of these issues and we will seek to promote and encourage a range of joint equity and flexible business sharing schemes to enable a gradual handover of businesses, particularly where there is no natural successor.

Access to finance remains a problem to new entrants into farming and we will investigate ways of encouraging more investment opportunities.
We believe that the first principle of County Council smallholdings should be a ‘first step’ on the ladder for new or young entrants. To this end, tenants should be encouraged to move onwards and upwards in order to release these farmsteads to the next generation of farmers.

Over recent years there has been increasing concern about the number of council holdings that have been ‘lost’ to new entrants through sell-offs and amalgamations. We believe that the decline in the County Council farm network has meant the loss of a major asset to encouraging people into the industry.

Whilst, ideally, we would like to see local authorities reinvesting in council-owned holdings, we would strongly encourage remaining holdings to be retained and enhanced at a local level through identifying the ways in which their management could be streamlined across Wales.

We believe that there is also scope to engage with major landowners in Wales to look at opportunities for start-up holdings to be made available for new entrants in those areas which no longer have council-owned holdings.

We will therefore work with local authorities, landowners, colleges and the range of young people’s organisations to examine the potential for a Wales-wide network of starter holdings.

The major strength of the council holding network is its ability to provide start-up facilities of land and buildings at a competitive rent to enable starters to build up capital and experience.

The system was seen as a start-up opportunity, and tenants recognised the holdings as a first step to larger and more permanent holdings. In latter years, there has been a tendency to view these holdings on a more long-term basis and this, coupled with the decline in overall stock and open competition for tenancy has meant fewer opportunities for new entrants.

In order to ensure that new entrants are given every opportunity to tender successfully for a council tenancy, we believe that priority must be given to young entrants. This, coupled with more focused advice to be made available through Farming Connect, in terms of business planning, tenancy advice etc., could help facilitate more new entrants into the industry.

We do not advocate a formal length of tenancy to encourage tenants to move on to the ‘next step’, believing that this will depend on the farm itself, the enterprise, and a range of other factors. But we will consider ways in which agreements should be subject to regular reviews, and consideration on whether some sort of exit strategy could be written in to successive business plans.
The Tenanted sector represents a significant percentage of all farmed land in Wales (based on grazing agreements, FBTs and other letting arrangements) and tenant farmers are important producers of high-quality products.

The tenanted sector could provide important opportunities for new entrants in Wales and we believe that landowners should be encouraged to let out more land for longer periods for farming because tenancy arrangements can offer an important route for getting people into the industry.

Creating more opportunities to rent productive land would help overcome a shortage of opportunities for newcomers to get into farming, whilst increasing longer-term tenancies would give more tenant farmers the security they needed to help build up their business.

We will work with stakeholders and the Westminster Government to look at ways in which we can improve the opportunities for the tenanted sector in Wales.

If we are to encourage young people to take up a career within the agricultural industry, we must break down the perception that farming is an unrewarding, low paid, manual labour sector. More effort will therefore be needed to highlight the high tech, innovative nature of the modern farming sector and the range of career opportunities available.

Business and management skills are essential to those entering the sector and are vital to continuing professional development. Mentoring can also have an important role in training and development and can help new entrants to build successful businesses and develop their business capability.

To this end we will look to work with the Agricultural Advisory Panel, set up under the Agricultural Sector (Wales) Act 2014, to identify the most effective ways in which to promote career progression and skills development within the industry and we will also seek to engage with schools and the career service to encourage a more positive view of farming as a career choice.

In order to encourage children to understand where their food comes from and to address some of the perceptions about the industry we will also seek to ensure that agriculture is firmly embedded within the National Curriculum, in Science, Geography and other relevant subjects. We will also look carefully at how cooking, nutrition and food preparation skills can help children relate to how and where their food comes from.
In order to meet the demands of our predominantly livestock based farming industry in Wales, we remain committed to supporting the establishment of a course accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in Wales.

Whilst Aberystwyth is leading the way in establishing its Veterinary Biosciences degree, which could pave the way for a future Veterinary degree, we will work with Aberystwyth and the RCVS to identify ways in which we could facilitate this process.

Plaid Cymru recognises that the Wales Federation of Young Farmers’ Clubs provides hugely valuable services, experiences and opportunities to young people in often very marginalised communities in rural Wales.

A Plaid Cymru Government will be committed to working with the organisation to ensure its longer term sustainability, giving it solid foundations that will allow it to further develop and grow.
Farming and the food chain

The horsemeat scandal highlighted how complicated our food systems have become and demonstrated the need for transparency on the way food processors and manufacturers can label their products. Although there have been some changes at a European level on labelling requirements, we will work with others to ensure that there is greater clarity of provenance on labels which clearly identify where an animal was born, reared and slaughtered.

We want to see food produced, processed and sold locally and support the shortening of the food chain, not only to reduce ‘food miles’ but to maximise the market returns to farmers. This localisation of the food chain can also help to reduce pollution, support local farms, processing facilities and farmers’ markets.

Reducing the amount of food waste is critical if we are to meet international targets on climate change, limiting greenhouse gas emissions, and meeting obligations under the European Landfill Directive to reduce biodegradable waste going to landfill.

We will consider introducing a Food Waste Bill, requiring large food retailers and food manufacturers to take steps to reduce food waste, including donating surplus food to charities for distribution. We will also seek ways of encouraging waste initiatives throughout the supply chain to create efficiencies to the benefit of both the environment and consumers.

Whilst we know that there has been some progress in encouraging the public sector to procure fresh, locally sourced food, we will increase procurement of Welsh produce in Wales ensuring more Welsh contracts for Welsh companies.

We will strive to deliver a functioning food chain which is transparent, sustainable and works for consumers, producers and processors to expand the demand for Welsh food and drink for the benefit of the environment, farming and economy in Wales.

Welsh food and farming is one of the cornerstones of the Welsh economy, which delivers £5.8billion to our economy. The Food and Drink Action plan has set an ambitious target to see a growth in the food and farming sector of 30% in terms of turnover to £6.7billion by 2020.
However, farming is currently having to contend with considerable challenges and dairy farmers in particular are facing severe price pressures. Farmers continue to receive very low prices for milk and this situation is set to continue for the foreseeable future due to a range of factors including international tensions, problems in the Chinese market and overproduction in some countries following the end of quotas.

We recognise that the problems facing the industry are complex, but we are committed to looking for solutions which will help the industry be more resilient to volatility. It is also important to educate consumers about the real price of producing quality food, and to put pressure on the supermarkets to deal fairly with farmers and dairy suppliers.

In order to examine the ways in which we can help the industry we will look at the merits of adopting a Bord Bia approach based on the Irish state agency which promotes the sales of Irish food and horticulture both abroad and in Ireland itself. It acts as a link between Irish producers and their customers worldwide. For that purpose it has several overseas offices around the world. Bord Bia is mostly known for its certification of Irish food products.

It works for both small and large producers; for small producers by promoting and certifying farmers markets, and for bigger producers by offering a great range of international marketing services.

This approach could be considered as part of our broader proposals to establish a new Wales Development Agency for the 21st Century.

A Plaid Cymru government will designate 2018 as the Year of Welsh Food and Drink. The initiative will aim to promote Wales’ quality produce in a sustained and intensive year-long campaign to encourage customers in the UK and abroad to buy more Welsh products.

The year-long drive will include showcase events, procurement initiatives and promotional campaigns both at home and abroad. This will serve to galvanise Wales’s brand as a producer of top quality produce and open doors for Welsh producers overseas while also driving growth in domestic consumption.

The celebration will involve focussed support for food and drink producers, procurement initiatives to drive up the level of local produce purchased by public bodies in Wales, a programme of events to celebrate Welsh food and drink including support to develop and grow food fairs and farmers’ markets.
Protected landscapes, planning and access

We will ensure that legislation and policies which impact on planning and the planning system are developed in a way which improves the ability of farms and rural businesses to modernise and develop sustainably, to avoid the stagnation of rural areas.

We will review the impact of legislation to ensure that there are no unintended consequences on the ability of rural businesses to develop sustainably within reasonable guidelines and that those in designated areas such as National Parks are also supported to improve their businesses.

We recognise that many of our cherished landscapes, which are loved by visitors and inhabitants, have been shaped by generations of farmers.

We recognise the importance of protected landscapes to tourism and recreation and believe that there are significant opportunities for meeting our health and wellbeing aspirations through encouraging the responsible management of these areas.

We believe that priority should be given to improving and modernising the existing public rights of way network so that it meets the demands of people who generally seek safe, accessible and clearly waymarked paths.

We will work with the local access fora to consider the way forward in encouraging improvements to existing networks based on demand and also encourage landowners and access users to work together to deliver positive access opportunities through partnership, but we will not introduce open access to all land in Wales.

Organic Farming

Plaid recognises the importance of the organic sector to Wales and recognises that there are a number of barriers affecting uptake at the current time. To this end we will work with Organic Centre Wales to develop a new Organic Action Plan to deliver a more strategic focus for the sector. We will also look at ways in which we can help farmers adapt to changes to the new EU organic regulations in addition to helping identify new opportunities such as group certification for small producers.

We are against the growth of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Wales and support a GMO-free British Isles and Europe on the precautionary principle. We have concerns about the impact of cross-pollination if the UK Government pushes ahead with plans to introduce GMO-crops in England. We will ensure that we are fully involved in discussions with the Westminster Government on the likely impacts to Wales, particularly where proposals are close to Welsh borders.
Woodland is an important sector to Wales; woodland-based industries are worth over £400 million per annum to the Welsh economy and employs over 9,000 people. The majority of wood is processed in Welsh saw mills, but the market is dominated by imports.

Woodlands are also significant for water regulation, soil protection, air quality and carbon sinks, as well as providing shelter, landscape features and habitats for biodiversity. We know that targeted planting on floodplains and riparian areas, or integrating woodland planting with other land uses has a number of positive benefits such as reducing flood risk and protecting soils, in addition to providing on-farm timber or biomass for heating, shelter for livestock and habitats for wildlife.

We want a thriving forestry industry, and we want to increase demand for Welsh wood products that are both locally and sustainably produced. There are currently large areas of unmanaged woodlands in Wales and we will seek to encourage the sustainable production of usable timber, especially for renewable energy and to support the development of small and local businesses.

Woodland also provides opportunities for recreation, leisure and tourism. We will look at ways in which the public estate can provide opportunities for people to use these public areas whilst supporting jobs and economic activity which channel the benefits into the local communities.

The climate change strategy for Wales recommended ambitious planting targets to increase the planting of new woodland by 2030, as part of a range of land use measures to support carbon sequestration and to mitigate carbon emissions.

We recognise that increased planting will also play a part in reducing our reliance on imported timber in the future whilst providing employment and environmental benefits. We will work with stakeholders to ensure that the Glastir Woodland scheme balances the need for biodiversity with economic production to encourage increased planting rates, we will also review the available measures under the RDP to identify ways in which to encourage more planting in Wales.