# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Future of agriculture and land management**  |
| **DATE**  | **21 March 2018** |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths AM, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs** |

For decades, the management of our land has been shaped by the European Union. This has greatly influenced the structure and performance of our agriculture sector.

Brexit brings significant and swift changes. The combination of leaving the Common Agricultural Policy and new trading arrangements mean simply maintaining the status quo is untenable.

This matters greatly to Wales. The vast majority of our land is owned and managed by farmers, foresters and environmental bodies. Farming is a vital part of the rural economy. It is the social anchor of communities and land managers are the custodians of the land that underpins our natural environment.

The great challenge of Brexit is to ensure its impact does not undermine the true value land management provides to Wales. The great opportunity is to put in place new Welsh policy to help it adjust to future market forces and thrive in a global marketplace.

The case for devolution is stronger than ever. The composition of our farming sector is very different to the rest of the UK, particularly to England. Our landscape is more varied, our rural communities are a much greater share of the population and our agriculture is more integrated into the fabric of our culture, especially the Welsh language. We have a once in a generation chance to redesign our policies in a manner consistent with Wales’ unique integrated approach, delivering for our economy, society and natural environment.

I am grateful for the help and energy of all Welsh stakeholders who have come together at my Ministerial Brexit Roundtable. Drawing on those discussions, I have composed five core principles for the future of our land and the people who manage it.

Firstly, we must keep our land managers on the land. I believe strongly this is what is best for our land, our communities and our rural economy.

Secondly, food production remains vital. Food is core to Welsh farming values and is emblematic of our nation. We already have a thriving food and drink industry and this is the time to advance it.

Where sustainable and economic production is possible, we will provide targeted support to help our farmers compete in a global marketplace. This will mean a focus on quality, our Welsh brand and considering the whole supply chain.

We need not choose between food production and public goods. Whilst food production itself is not a public good, there is no reason why the same farm cannot produce both.

We need our system of support to have a foundation that is robust to future changes in the market environment. Therefore, my third principle is our new policy should centre on Welsh land delivering public goods for all the people of Wales.

The diversity and richness of the Welsh land means we have no shortage of public goods to provide. Our land is our nation’s biggest asset. It provides clean water, clean air, flood management, habitats for rare species, the list goes on. We must also look beyond the environment, most notably how landscapes underpin our Welsh brand, so vital for food and tourism.

Fourth, every land manager must have the opportunity to access support. They must be able to continue to make a living from the land. However, I will be asking land managers to do different things in return for support – there can be no universal, automatic payment. This is vital for putting the industry on a secure footing.

Finally, we need to ensure our agricultural sector can be prosperous and resilient in a post-Brexit future, whatever that may be. Whilst the Basic Payment Scheme provides important support for many of our farmers, it will not help us withstand the changes brought by Brexit. We need to provide support in a different way.

These principles will form the basis of future Welsh Government policy. They imply significant change and there must be a well-planned and multi-year transition. I am confident our land managers can adapt and it is the role of Government to provide time and support.

This is why I have launched a new phase of intensive stakeholder engagement to work collaboratively on the details. Through my Roundtable, I will establish new working groups to consider how best to deliver the principles. These groups will support Welsh Government to bring forward initial proposals for reform by summer recess.