



FARM MEETING, 2 SEPTEMBER 2021

*Write-up transcript of group facilitator notes, flipchart 'voting' on ideas, Irene's notes of the plenary discussion. **Please be aware that this document presents the facilitators' summary notes of much more in-depth discussions.***

IDEAS DISCUSSION: GROUP NOTES

ESTHER'S GROUP

- Altruism is questionable – whose agenda are we answering? It seems all well and good to farm in the way we are told but if it is to be for the farmers benefit the approach will be different than if they were being altruistic.
- Organic farmers in Llanilar 2016 – British supermarket market, especially post Brexit seems to them to be the only way to make money was to sell to a British markets especially post Brexit
- Reintroduce curlew and working with WGCT – tried to work with Agri-environment schemes but they were not tailored to the individual farm they were too general – working with the WGCT meant they got a solution tailored specifically for their farm.
- Money is always the driver in decision making – organic system seems best way BUT ethos will always impact profitability.
- Holistic vision is driven by profit
- Glastir – questioned benefits to their farm business and have left – seemed negative
- Individual approach is the key. Working in large geographical areas doesn't work. Separate land holdings need different approaches.
- Glastir is not an agile system – need to be able to respond to pressures
- Bad press for agriculture – need to change the message
- Carbon is difficult to calculate.
- We in Wales have World renowned produce – and provide a vast carbon sink. Need to use science to prove West Wales is farming sustainably BUT sums have to add up.
- He who pays the piper calls the tune – farmers are never in control of own destiny.
- How we open conversations matters.
- Need to show how profitable farmers can benefit nature by changing the message.
- Better local supply chains.
- Co-op abattoir/creamery.
- Local produce/production has to be higher value have to communicate that with the end buyer.
- Need to look at wider community. Education is also key to ensure our young people came back BUT jobs have to be here to encourage them.
- We should have a West Wales vision. With ultra local impact/focus.
- Planning needs attention – 'corrupt system'
- Planning could be controlled more effectively at local level/Community Council within certain parameters, e.g. glamping pod – local agreement should be enough, with mitigation.
- We should provide a Controlled environment for visitors to teach people about nature. Self-funding – it would be a businesses that would have to pay for themselves.



DAFYDD's GROUP

- IDEA NO. 1 (free ecological surveys)
 - Who surveys? Landowner chooses. Comment made in group about 'trusted' surveyors. Some stated a reluctance to have high value habitats officially recorded because they'd lost similar habitats once management prescriptions became dictated because of designation (e.g. SSSI). Subsequently there was reluctance towards a scheme that provided its own ecologists, but enthusiasm towards the concept of funded surveys if done with agreement about who would undertake them and assured (contractual) confidentiality.
 - GWCT etc. possible trustee surveyors
 - Confidential assessment essential.
 - Use to prioritise appropriate, farmer-approved tree planting. Farmer to prioritise potential sites on-farm that suits management needs and farming system, purpose of survey is to assist in selecting/deselecting from this list and gaining approval where planting is deemed ecologically appropriate
 - Will Welsh Government accept it as valid assessment? Apparently, similar full surveys were rejected by WG as part of the Tir Gofal and Glastir assessment processes. Consequently, doubts were expressed about their relevance in informing future Wales-wide Government schemes.
 - Include historic practice and remembered ecology with farmer as source in assessments.
 - Revisit assessment following management change. Seen as essential for creating a growing evidence base of good and bad practice – "everything doesn't always work out the way you expect, even with the best intentions"
- IDEA NO. 2 (discovery routes)
 - How will it educate them?
 - Is it just access dressed up as education? Increasing access is a bad idea, use the existing plentiful access. Increasing access seen as negative, already plentiful access, especially with Right to Roam in the uplands. What was 'discovered' would need to be genuinely informative about management/agricultural practices (not just focused on e.g. the species of wildlife present). Non-intrusive information provision preferred (QR codes seen as a way of keeping signage small but offering a wealth of information that can be added to over time.
 - Needs to be made up of existing rights of way / access, not creating more.
 - Would signage work? QR codes telling a story. Highlight management/farming practice. Good idea.
- IDEA NO. 3 (trailing new things)
 - Focus on livestock, not trees. Plant trees in the right place where you can't graze.
 - Livestock genetics programme. Hardy breeds needed but need to outwinter in order to allow breed selection.
 - Managed burns trials.
- OTHER
 - Concern over potential duplication of prospective Welsh Government scheme – how can you know? Relevance in working towards smaller/more diverse funding pots however was seen as being very beneficial. more a comment on any/every project intervention that would form part of S2S's funded proposals. Reticence to take money for interventions now that may threaten e.g. 'additional' actions required for future WG scheme entry a few years down the line.



- Look at livestock reductions on lowland holdings (to historic levels). Collaboration between upland and lowland holdings to transfer livestock upland over summer. Get supermarket buy-in or public procurement for products of this system (like kilometre zero). A better animal can out-summer in uplands if it doesn't need to out-winter there. Increase resilience/sustainability of whole system. Conversation about historic livestock numbers seen as central to this. Reductions were seen as part of a system to increase the productivity of lowland holdings (allowing increased summer production of crops for human and animal consumption). 'Reductions' were also framed within the context of increasing grazing in the uplands, so the total Annual Livestock Units of a lowland holding would be (at least partially) reduced due to the transportation of some of their animals to the uplands for summer months.

STEVE's GROUP

- IDEA NO. 1
 - Current lack of data.
 - Traditional farming – problem of prescriptions. Conversations need to change at 'the top'.
 - Carbon off-setting is a waste of time.
 - Woodland can be grazed.
 - Ecosystems – but need to stop talking in a linear way.
 - Need baseline for carbon – need standards.
 - Biodiversity – carbon – complex systems – growing food. How do these get measured? Who measures? Local surveys with interpretation by/with user involved.
 - Manage nutrient cycles on the farm.
 - Must include soil.
 - Farm being surveyed already, but not being used to inform farming.
- Put more hedges in. Orchard trees in the hedges.
- More informing the public about farming and awareness about the impact of gardening, e.g. pesticides and herbicides.
- Fertiliser and herbicide on compost leads to impact on muck which affects use in horticulture.
- Welsh Government to support organic again.
- Prescriptions – a negative impact on biodiverse farming.
- On-farm information.
- 'Shock absorber' between farm and policy to allow flexibility – promote to good.
- Public awareness of the real cost.
- People on the ground – trust to make qualitative judgements.
- Wales – need support for horticultural systems.
- Unimproved land – create some splashes.



SIÂN's GROUP

- IDEA 1
 - Interest broadly from the group and the opportunities this would give for farms to celebrate what nature is there as well as work towards improving habitats if this was highlighted in this work.
 - There is a lack of data available at the moment so this would help to improve this and therefore help to tell the story
- IDEA NO. 2 (discovery routes)
 - Could form part of improving how we tell the story about nature positive farming better to the wider public
- IDEA NO. 3 (trailing new things)
 - Support for a resource which would pay for farm hands that learn Welsh during their work – this brings together community, nature, farming, culture. Possibly the idea of payment to cover half the salary. Could be something coordinated by the farming unions, or Cyswllt Ffermio
 - Interest in exploring rotational grazing on land holdings
 - Lots of interest in using renewable energy to help keep costs down – generating our own energy, hydro, solar. The main gap stopping this from happening is in help for co-ordinating this work, both from a technical knowledge perspective but also to coordinate across landholdings. Strong interest in the area selling itself as a Zero Carbon Land Use/Farming so this would support achieving this and also build farming clusters.
 - Net zero – how can cattle grazing help to achieve this, important that the figures and how this is calculated is accurate. Interest in inviting Prysor Williams (Bangor Uni) as a speaker, and – Dr Iwan Owens. Less Carbon normally means less input and costs which is good for farms.
- OTHER
 - Interest in exploring what are the gaps in national schemes that a project like these could fund
 - Interest in shaping policy locally, and in turn using this to inform national policy
 - Trees – interest in exploring what trees grow better, specific trees for specific uses, black locust tree mentioned as a possible opportunity
 - Importance of the cow – historically there were payments to keeping a cow. Discussion on the new GPS tracking electric collars and how these could be used by farmers wanting to explore new grazing patterns. Covering initial capital costs of collars would be popular. This also helps the farmer to keep a closer eye on the stock and their movements and inform future decisions.

PLENARY DISCUSSION

- Look at the whole farm system
- Look at methods of collaboration between lowland and upland farms. Free up more fertile lowland for crops. Feeling that uplands are under-grazed, so solving 2 problems at a time.
- Farmer knowledge of earlier farming systems and grazing systems – anecdotal historic data of the relationship between ecological and farming systems.
- Carbon – the science is really complicated – need some really serious science – we want to prove what West Wales is doing.
- Carbon – can we get to a position of trying to prove farmers are net zero? Showing the good stories of what farms do towards net zero.



- Lack of information to advise on hydro and wind power. These would help to keep costs down and support less use of fossil fuel. And helps to keep farmers in control of their costs.
- More 'real' information relevant to the farming unit.
- Supermarket/public procurement that buys into sustainable systems. Offers long-term security that enables change.
- Differentiate the story between good and bad farming.

VOTES

Idea	Number of votes
Use science to prove how the farming is sustainable, carbon science on farms	11
Carbon – farming's good story towards net zero	6
Collect farmers' knowledge about earlier farming/grazing systems and their relationship with species	5
Collaboration between upland and lowland farms for mutual benefit – freeing up lowland land for more crops, decreasing under-grazing in uplands	4
Promote story of good farming	4
Measure what's there on the land – confidential data – a baseline	3
Enable individual approaches (not a single approach across a large area)	3
Information/advice on hydro, wind power etc to support farms to use less fossil fuel, keep costs down	2
Plant trees in the RIGHT places	2
QR codes that can tell a story/highlight farming practice/land management	2
Resource to pay for farmhands to learn Welsh	1
Reintroduce curlews	1
Better local supply chains	1
Managed burns trials	1
Co-operative abattoir/creamery	1
Livestock genetics programme	
A West Wales vision with ultra-local impact/focus	