



## Farming and Rural Life

Eighty per cent of Wales is rural, with 60% of rural areas described as 'deep rural' – more than 30 minutes' drive from essential services such as a shop, post office, bank or school. Approximately 35% of the Welsh population lives in rural areas<sup>1</sup>, which is a higher proportion than any region of England.

### Agriculture

Farming is the foundation of rural life in Wales. Three per cent<sup>2</sup> of the total workforce in Wales is employed in agriculture – three times higher than in the UK as a whole. But this is precarious: more than half of the 69,000 people employed on farms – including farm owners – work on a part-time or casual basis<sup>3</sup>.

The price of a pint of milk in the supermarket bears no relation to the cost of its production on the farm. Dairy farmers are losing huge amounts on milk production. Meanwhile, the price of lamb is subject to constant fluctuation, and cheap New Zealand lamb appears in the shops.

Incidence of bovine TB in Carmarthenshire is reported to be at an all-time high. The Welsh Government's drive to vaccinate badgers to halt

the spread of TB is in the middle of a five-year trial, but many farmers believe it is not working. In contrast, it appears that TB is in decline in areas such as Gloucestershire where badger culls have taken place. Suspected TB in the herd means lengthy restrictions on the movement of cattle, whilst compensation for lost animals does not cover the cost of replacement – and threatens the existence of entire blood-lines of stock.

The Welsh Government, like other UK administrations, has moved to a system of 'basic payment' to farmers. Huge amounts of paperwork are required, and the Government is carrying out stringent checks to ensure there is no fraud. The normal payment date to farmers is 1 December each year, but in 2015 many experienced delays. Contractors and suppliers are accustomed to waiting until December for their bills to be settled, but any further delay has a devastating knock-on effect on local businesses and communities.

### Threats to community life

Close-knit rural Welsh communities are being eroded by the need to move away in search of work, whilst the incidence of second or holiday homes throughout rural Wales is amongst the

highest in the UK. Gwynedd has the highest percentage of holiday homes of any British local authority area, with 10% of its population being second-home owners whose main address is elsewhere<sup>4</sup>.

The Welsh language is a key part of life in rural areas. In Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Anglesey more than 40% of the population is Welsh-speaking. In approximately half of that area – Gwynedd and Anglesey – up to 65% of people speak Welsh<sup>5</sup>.

The greatest threat to rural life is the loss of young people and families, due to lack of employment. Whole villages are turning into either dormitory commuter settlements – if they are close enough to towns or transport links – or ‘holiday villages’. There are often no village shops, and primary schools are being merged. To develop alternative economic activities, super-fast broadband is essential, but despite promises from BT and the Welsh Government, existing rural broadband barely meets normal speeds.

### European Union membership

The Welsh Assembly election takes place as debate intensifies around the forthcoming referendum on UK membership of the European Union. This is a matter of grave concern to many Welsh farmers. The vast majority of exports are to EU countries, and many people feel that a future outside the EU would be even more precarious.

### Questions for candidates

1. What can you do to support Welsh farmers so that lamb produced in Wales can be priced competitively with lamb imported from the other side of the world?
2. Are you in favour of vaccinating or culling badgers to tackle bovine TB?
3. People like to retire in rural Wales because of the idyllic scenery and friendly communities. But how will they manage as they grow older, with no local shops, services or transport?
4. Should we stay in the EU? What will happen if we leave?

You can see more about these issues in a video on the Cytûn website, [www.cytun.org.uk/elections2016](http://www.cytun.org.uk/elections2016).

### References

- 1 Office of National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis*, November 2013 [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_337939.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_337939.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 2 Statistics for Wales, *Workplace Employment by Industry in Wales 2001 to 2014*, October 2015 <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/151027-workplace-employment-industry-2001-2014-en.pdf> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 3 Statistics for Wales, *Welsh Agricultural Statistics 2014*, 2015, p. 43, table 3.1 <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/151028-welsh-agricultural-statistics-2014-ency.pdf> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 4 Statistics for Wales, *2011 Census: Second Address Estimates for Local and Unitary Authorities in England and Wales*, October 2012 <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2012/121031-census-2011-second-address-estimates-local-unitary-authorities-england-wales-en.pdf> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 5 Statistics for Wales, *2011 Census: First Results on the Welsh Language*, December 2012 <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2012/121211sb1182012en.pdf> (viewed 13 January 2016)

