

Welsh Government

Summary of Responses

Review of Agricultural Statistics Outputs

Date of issue: 30 October 2012

Review of Welsh Agricultural Statistics Outputs - Results

Summary

A user consultation was conducted to ask for views on the suite of outputs on agricultural statistics for Wales. These are mainly based around estimates for land, livestock and labour from the two annual agricultural surveys in June and December. However, they also link to a range of other sources such as financial information from the Farm Business Survey and a range of administrative sources for agricultural production and the various subsidy payments and grant schemes.

No set of outputs will ever be perfect and we recognise that improvements can always be made. In the consultation sought user views on what the priorities for change are. The consultation was an opportunity to gather views from not only from our regular users in Welsh Government and the agricultural sector but also from a wider range of users.

A key driver for this consultation was the recent assessment by the UK Statistics Authority of the agricultural outputs. Their report has a number of requirements for changes to the outputs. The report can be found at this [link](#)

The consultation ran from 30th March 2012 to 29th June 2012.

There were a total of nine responses and we would like to thank them all for taking to time to give their views. The body of this report summarises the responses and describes what action we will take over them. More detail on the comments from the respondents is attached in an annex.

Introduction

A summary of the background to the consultation is provided in this report.

The full background to the consultation is available in the consultation document:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/agriculture/?lang=en&status=closed>

A consultation was held, in accordance with the Officials Statistics Code of Practice, to allow users to comment on the proposed changes. The proposals in this consultation have already been agreed in principle by Welsh Government statistical and policy teams.

The consultation was open for a 12 week period from 30th March 2012 to 29th June 2012.

Methodology

The background document explaining the consultation and the response form were accessible via the Welsh Government consultations website.

Responses were received in Excel response forms or as e-mailed comments.

The questions used in the consultation are attached in the **Annex 2**.

All participants were given the opportunity to comment on any themes that were of particular relevance and not yet sufficiently covered in the outputs.

Results

Nine responses to the consultation were received – nine using the Excel response form and emailed as a return with one sent as a duplicate hard copy.

There was one response which commented on the outputs but did not provide any comments to the consultation questions therefore the anonymised comment has been added to **Annex 1** but not used in the analysis of these results.

The responses were provided by:

Organisation	Number of responses
Agricultural Unions	3
Other Agricultural organisation	2
Consultant/researcher/academic	1
Welsh Government Sponsored Body	1
Trade organisation	1
Anonymised response	1

Question 1 – Which of the following outputs do you use?

	Yes	No	No response	Total
Welsh Agricultural Statistics				
PDF	9	0	0	9
Spreadsheets	8	0	1	9
Farming Facts and Figures				
PDF	7	0	2	9
First Release for June				
PDF	8	0	1	9
Spreadsheets	4	1	4	9
First Release for December				
PDF	8	0	1	9
Spreadsheets	0	1	8	9
Agricultural Small Areas bulletin				
PDF	6	1	2	9
Spreadsheets	4	1	4	9

Most of the respondents used most of the outputs. The more technical Small Area bulletin had three non-users. For Welsh Agricultural Statistics and the June First Release, respondents mostly used both the text bulletin (PDF) and the spreadsheets with the data. The December First Release was only read in the PDF form.

Question 2 - For the outputs that you use please give a short summary of what you use them for:

Question 2 on the response form consisted of open questions. As there were very many responses and the length of the responses, we have annexed these into **Annex 1**.

The comments are considered in the “response to the consultation” section, below.

Question 3 – How well do the outputs currently meet your needs?

The table below shows the responses. The outputs were all rated as at least “medium” by all the respondents who used them. The pocket summary release “Farming Facts and Figures” scored well for our respondents.

Welsh Agricultural Statistics		Farming Facts and Figures	
Very well	2	Very well	4
Well	6	Well	4
Medium	1	Medium	
Poorly		Poorly	
Very poorly		Very poorly	
No opinion/not used		No opinion/not used	1
First Release for June		First Release for December	
Very well	2	Very well	2
Well	4	Well	4
Medium	2	Medium	2
Poorly		Poorly	
Very poorly		Very poorly	
No opinion/not used	1	No opinion/not used	1
Agricultural Small Areas			
Very well	1		
Well	2		
Medium	3		
Poorly			
Very poorly			
No opinion/not used	3		

Question 4 – How do you rate the priorities for change?

Readability		Technical documentation	
Very high	3	Very high	3
High	2	High	5
Medium	3	Medium	
Low		Low	
Very Low		Very Low	
No opinion/not used	1	No opinion/not used	1
Access to data		Links	
Very high	2	Very high	
High	4	High	4
Medium	3	Medium	3
Low		Low	
Very Low		Very Low	
No opinion/not used		No opinion/not used	2

The areas that we suggested for improvement in the existing outputs seem to be generally supported by the respondents. The open comments relating to this question are shown in Annex 2.

Question 5 – How do you rate the priority for suggested changes?

High level summary		Technical report	
Very high	3	Very high	
High	4	High	2
Medium	2	Medium	5
Low		Low	1
Very Low		Very Low	
No opinion/not used		No opinion/not used	1
Methodology report		Data quality	
Very high		Very high	3
High	3	High	4
Medium	5	Medium	1
Low		Low	
Very Low		Very Low	
No opinion/not used	1	No opinion/not used	1

This question was intended to look at whether there was support for new outputs in addition to the current one. Again, general support for the suggestions. The new high level summary seemed to be particularly popular. The open comments relating to this question are shown in Annex 2.

Welsh Government response to the consultation

The responses to the consultation came mainly from organisations in the agricultural sector. These are generally government, the farming unions and other sector bodies. Thus the responses are largely from people who already know a lot about agriculture and want the latest figures to help them in their work.

What we did not get in the responses were the non-agricultural users, members of the general public and so on. However, one of the farming unions did comment that they had taken views both from their officials and also from their farming members.

Thus we do not have reactions from people who we might expect to be particularly keen on extra explanation, commentary and agricultural background.

In reacting to the responses we need to keep in mind this potential bias.

The responses are largely positive. Users see the range of information published as important and want to see it maintained and improved. Users see the importance of having good information about the survey methodology and data quality. They understand the drive for more commentary and “value added”, but perhaps rate this less highly because they already understand the subject so well.

In general, the responses suggest that we need to keep working to improve the outputs. The emphasis is on evolution rather than root and branch change.

- Continue to improve the presentation and commentary of the published outputs. Each of the outputs has been revised with extended commentary to some extent. We need to continue this process. We will work with colleagues to review the outputs and learn from other statistical publication within Welsh Government. We will also work with agricultural statisticians in the other UK countries who produce similar outputs.
- We plan to introduce a reference document for methodology and data quality for the agricultural surveys. This will give the full descriptions. It will be referenced from all the other outputs which will have more reader-friendly summaries.
- We plan to try out a new high level summary output. This would be a high level summary of key agricultural issues targeted at a general readership (rather than necessarily agricultural specialists). In order to keep this reasonably short and readable, the issue will be what to leave out rather than what to include. We plan to try a first version of this in 2013 to gauge the response.
- Making more data available for users in a flexible way. In a traditional output there is a limit to how much information can be released without the output becoming unwieldy. The Welsh Government's flexible data access tool "StatsWales" is a way to release a range of datasets with long series and extended breakdowns. This is undergoing an upgrade in November so this is a good time to expand the amount of agricultural data that is available this way.
- Some specific areas were mentioned that users felt were under represented in the outputs. We need to follow up these specific comments to see what is, and is not, feasible.
- The farmers unions commented on the need to make better use of administrative data rather than impose burdens on farmers with surveys. There are a number of technical issues with this that need to be overcome to achieve this. However, this is also a goal for the Welsh Government and will be taken forward.
- The subject of geographical areas used to report agriculture was raised in the responses. At the same time this was also raised in discussion with Welsh local authorities in the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee. This is a general forum for Welsh Government and local authority statisticians and researchers. The geography we use is an area we need to look at. The key objective is to meet the National Statistics requirement to publish at the lowest level consistent with data quality and non-disclosure. It is not easy to get a geography that is simultaneously good for both agricultural reporting and for linking with other statistics on population, socio-economic matters and so on. The main problem is that most other geographies are concerned about people while agriculture takes place where the people are not. Therefore, compromise is inevitable.

Action plan

- The existing set of outputs will be produced to a similar timetable.
- As each output becomes due in the annual cycle we will take the opportunity to consider the commentary and presentation and improve where possible. We will use suggestions from other statisticians within Welsh Government and the agricultural statisticians in the other UK countries.
- We will produce a new regular bulletin that goes into the technical details about the survey methodology and the data quality issues for the June Agricultural Survey. In the first year we are planning to publish this by March 2013. Subsequently we would plan to publish this at the same time as the June Survey First Release in November each year.
- We will produce a new bulletin to give a high level summary of key agricultural trends in Wales. This is intended to be a regular bulletin, but the content needs to be developed with users. The first version will in part be an attempt to see what works and gauge its usefulness. We plan to have this new bulletin by September 2013.
- The new version of StatsWales goes live in November 2012. At the start we will put the Wales level aggregate estimates for all the main land, livestock and labour variables. This will be a consistent set of variables from 1998 up to 2011 (the 2012 estimates will be added as soon as available). Further datasets will be added giving summaries for regional, farm type and farm size summaries. These will give summaries over the period 2002 to 2011. We aim to have a full set of these summaries by the end of April 2013.

Annex 1

Open comments

We received seven responses with open comments. Six of these also completed the other questions and one just left a comment.

Respondent 1 – Welsh Government sponsored body

A methodology and technical/data quality report would be useful for contractors commissioned to carry out studies/project on behalf of CCW.

More information on the level and type of agricultural use/management of common land (covering 8% of Wales) would help to provide evidence of agricultural importance of common land in Wales.

There is a high correlation between Common land and statutory designations for the protection of nature conservation and landscape interests. At present it is difficult to assess changes in farm businesses in terms of within sector. Information on changing practices and breeds of animals and where they are kept would be useful.

Respondent 2 – farming union

The Union welcomes the principle of providing a high level summary, which will help both existing users continue to use the data, more effectively, as well as facilitating new users.

Members welcomed the move towards a clearer explanation of the methodology and technical detail associated with the statistical collection and dissemination.

As background to the answers provided above, please note that these responses are the result of feedback from FUW members across Wales, and predominately reflect a practical farmer perspective on the consultation questions. The opinions of those who work in the FUW staff policy team are also reflected, as this team undertakes data intelligence gathering work, on behalf of the members, and utilises the agricultural statistics data for this purpose.

The Union would like to take this consultation opportunity to ask Statistics for Wales to consider the value of using the data that farmers submit on their Single Application Form (SAF) more effectively, as members feel there is too much duplication between the data provided for the SAF and that required for the census, adding to the administrative burden of the business; this duplication adding a negative time/cost element to the business.

Respondent 3 – Academic

Defined areas in Welsh Agricultural Statistics do not always match to the geographical areas in which we are interested

Respondent 4 – sector body

AHDB MI uses some of the data from the publications to produce the Welsh Compendium/Little Book of Meat Facts for HCC. Some datasets are also used to update relevant parts of the Dairy Co website and as part of the UK cereals supply and demand work which AHDB MI undertakes.

It can be difficult to find information on the website and so improved navigation around it would be seen to be a priority.

AHDB MI produces its own technical account of the meaning of the data for the industry. The key thing is hence seen to be the reliability and robustness of the data.

Respondent 5 – farming union

Further information on how the surveys were run and on data quality issues would be useful.

Respondent 6 - Anonymised

- Would like to see information on the size of all farms/holding/production sites that are producing a primary product as well as assessment of their geographic area for all sectors, not just dairy and red meat but also eggs, poultry, edible horticulture, orchards and vineyards;
- What does specialist poultry mean? Perhaps provide more information about what each entry covers, for example where would egg production sites be included, in specialist poultry?
- If egg production sites are a problem and information is unavailable then perhaps you could link up with the statistics gathered by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency databases;
- We would like to see any mention of horticulture split into edible and ornamental;

Farming Facts and Figures Do the holdings detail just come from the holding number? If so, does that mean that egg/poultry/orchard/vineyards that do not have a holding number are not captured in this figure? We would like this expanded to include these producers;

- Farm Business Incomes - require a breakdown of more than just livestock and dairy. We would like to see breakdown into horticulture, poultry, eggs, vineyards etc.
- Breakdown of Welsh Agricultural production - would like this broke down into more sectors (eggs, poultry, edible horticulture, vineyards etc) even if the number is small;
- Agricultural land - what is included in the other under farm woodland and other. Suggest that an explanation is added in;

- Livestock numbers - would like to see poultry split between egg production and meat production;
Ideas in the Consultation

- Like the concept of the star rating system and would welcome that system being introduced.

Questions for future discussion

- We have recently been in discussions with your team about statistics, thank you for the statistics provided on exports. Would you also consider developing a system for gathering statistics on processing and consumption of food?

Respondent 7 - Anonymised

Please do not diminish the information in the Agricultural surveys. They are very valuable.

Annex 2

Consultation questionnaire

The questionnaire is given in the following pages.

Review of Agricultural Statistics Outputs - Consultation Response Form

We want to know your views about our proposals for changes to outputs. Please email this form to stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk or print it out and send a hard copy to: SD6, FREEPOST NAT 8910, Cardiff, CF10 3BR for us to receive by the 29th June 2012. Thank you

Start of consultation: 30th March 2012

End of consultation: 29th June 2012

If you have any queries regarding the consultation please contact Stuart Neil on 029 2082 6822 or email stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk

The Welsh Government intends to publish individual responses to this questionnaire with accompanying name and organisation or locality of its author as it is felt that this gives credibility to the consultation exercise. If you do not wish to be identified as the author of your response, please mark the following box:

Your details

Name

Location* * Local Authority in Wales, Country if outside Wales

Organisation (if applicable)* * If applicable, please also give the organisation you work for and your role in it

Role (if applicable)*

Questions about proposed changes
Please answer in the boxes provided below.

Please mark one box that best describes you:

Welsh Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consultant/researcher/academic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	School pupil	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agricultural Unions	<input type="checkbox"/>	College/University student	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of the public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other agricultural organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	

Question 1 Which of the following outputs do you use? Please mark all that apply

	Do you download the PDF document ?	Do you download any of the spreadsheets?
Welsh Agricultural Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farming Facts & Figures	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
First Release for June	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
First Release for December	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agricultural Small Areas Bulletin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 2

For the outputs that you use please give a short summary of what you use them for:

Question 3

How well do the outputs currently meet your needs? (Please mark one box for each output)

Very well Well Medium Poorly Very poorly No Opinion/
Not Used

Welsh Agricultural Statistics

<input type="checkbox"/>					
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Farming Facts & Figures

<input type="checkbox"/>					
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First Release for June

<input type="checkbox"/>					
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First Release for December

<input type="checkbox"/>					
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Agricultural Small Areas Bulletin

<input type="checkbox"/>					
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Any other comments for Question 3

Question 4

How do you rate the priorities for change? (please mark as appropriate)

Very High High Medium Low Very Low No Opinion/Not Used

1. Improve the readability of the outputs?

2. Improve access to data

3. Improve the technical documentation?

4. Improve links between the outputs?

Any other comments for Question 4

Question 5

How do you rate the priority for suggested changes? (please mark as appropriate)

Very High High Medium Low Very Low No Opinion/
Not Used

High level summary						
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Methodology Report						
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Technical Report						
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Data Quality						
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Any other comments for Question 5

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If you have any other comments or suggestions, please provide them below.

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Thank you for your response. Please send your completed form to stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk by 29th June 2012

Annex 3

Data to be published on StatsWales2

StatsWales:

www.statswales.wales.gov.uk

currently holds information across the section in the KAS.

For agriculture, it current holds the following information:

- Agricultural holdings
- Agricultural land use
- Grants and payments
- Labour
- Livestock
- Small holdings (not populated)

StatsWales2 is the new generation of StatsWales and will have greater functionality and will be able to support new datasets which were unable to be supported prior.

The new StatsWales2 site will be live end of November.

Through a gradual release of data and information, the Agricultural Statistics release will contain the following (in addition to existing StatsWales items):

The Statistics Agriculture 'Theme Page' will contain references to what is on (and what's new) on StatsWales2.

It will include the following data sets:

- Wales aggregate estimates for the main land, livestock and labour categories for each year since 1998.
- Summaries for the key categories by region; by farm type and by farm size for each year since 2002.
- Summaries of the number of sheep on a farm, showing the number of farms and the number of sheep on those farms, for each year since 2002. Similar summaries for other main livestock categories and also for the area of land on a farm.
- Long term time series for land use and numbers of sheep, cattle, poultry and pigs for each year fro 1867. These have previously appeared as charts in the June First Release.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Further data may be added if there is demand.