

Organic Centre Wales Producer Conference 2009: Adapt and Survive

15 October 2009, Aberystwyth

Workshop report

Open Forum Workshop

Present: Gary Haggarty, Kay Davies, Sian Hughes, Maria Richards and Spencer Conlon, Welsh Assembly Government

The morning open forum workshop gave producers an opportunity to question the Welsh Assembly Government staff team about agri-environment schemes and the Single Farm Payment.

The questions and answers were:

Q. Could we have further clarification on the Higher Tier Glastir Payment?

A. It is not possible to put a figure on what the higher tier payments will be until interest in the entry level scheme uptake is clearer. Glastir is about the tax payer buying services from farmers and farmers have to describe what environmental goods they can deliver. Farmers will enter into a contract to enable them to continually deliver those services.

Q. Glastir is a 5 yr commitment; what happens if I have to withdraw before the end of the 5 yrs?

A. As with the Organic Farming Scheme, it will be possible to transfer the contract to the person taking over the land. Due to changes as to how money is paid out where there is dual use of land, it will be the person who has day to day management responsibility that will receive the payment.

Q. Who receives the Organic Farming Conversion Scheme payments on rented land?

A. It will be the tenant as it is he who has day to day management responsibility. Owing to changes to dual land use, it will be the tenant that will receive all monies, not only the OFCS but also the Single Farm Payment. The transition will be phased in over a period of time for other schemes, to be completed by 2013.

Q. If Glastir proves to be unpopular, what will happen to the underspend?

A. It is not possible to be specific at present.

Q. With there no longer being specific Organic Maintenance Payments within Glastir, won't this be another reason for established organic farmers to exit the sector?

A. The Assembly has shown its commitment to the organic sector by reopening the conversion scheme and by automatically awarding 50% points towards entry into Glastir.

Q. For what services provided by farmers will Glastir be paying?

A. It isn't possible to be specific at the moment

Q. With future modulation and other changes to farmers payments; will money be redirected into Glastir?

A. No

Q. What effect will Glastir have on food production?

A. Most of the preparatory work done on Glastir has been on its financial effects

Q. How bureaucratic will the new agri-environment scheme be?

A. Since the Minister announced her commitment to reduce red tape, all new schemes must satisfy the new criterion.

Q. Has the organic perspective and voice weakened within the Policy Unit?

A. There has been a change of stance at EU level.

Q. Are the Assembly offering carbon trading options?

A. Not at present.

Other comments worth recording are:

- Farmers cannot plan at present with this amount of uncertainty; it isn't possible to agree on farm business tenancies or plan future investments.
- Changes to dual use of land will be unfair on young farmers as it will result in higher rents.
- When landowners receive a good single farm payment, it allows them to offer their land to young farmers at low rents, thereby making an entry into farming possible for the younger generation.
- No ongoing maintenance payments while still encouraging new converts will result in the exit of established organic farmers.
- If I lose my Tir Mynydd and Organic Farming Scheme payments, I will not be able to afford to be an organic farmer in the future
- Agri-environment payments are about rewarding good environmental practices and at present there is an undervaluing of the benefits of organic farming
- The Assembly has invested in organic farming, it must be careful that it doesn't throw that investment away
- Organic farmers have adapted more than other farmers; what more can they do?
- There is the principle that the polluter must pay yet the present system rewards the polluter and penalises the organic farmer who has a poorer single farm payment, has to pay for certification and today we have been asked to pay to promote our produce.
- Farmers must also remember that the Assembly has committed £2 million pound into the supply chain efficiency project which will help improve the returns for all involved within the organic sector
- Conventional farmers select and apply some good organic practice and are paid for delivering environmental good; why not reward a farming system that has an holistic approach.
- The WAG is fairer on its organic farmers than are the other governments within the UK