

Welsh Government

Consultation Document

Review of Agricultural Statistics Outputs

Date of issue: **30 March 2012**

Action required: Responses by **29 June 2012**

Overview Reviewing the regular statistical outputs on agriculture in Wales following the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority. Asking users what they use, what they use it for, how satisfied they are with it and about their priorities for change.

How to respond You can respond to the consultation by accessing the Excel sheet. Please complete and 'Save As' a copy for yourself on your computer and e-mail back to stats.agric@wales.gsi.gov.uk or post a hard copy of to:

Stuart Neil
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Knowledge and Analytical Services
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Further information and related documents **Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.**

The latest versions of the statistical outputs can be found at the following links:

- [Welsh Agricultural Statistics](#)
- [Farming Facts and Figures](#)
- [First Release for the June Agricultural Survey](#)
- [First Release for the December Agricultural Survey](#)
- [Agricultural Small Areas Bulletin](#)

[UK Statistics Authority assessment report](#)

Contact details For further information:

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Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

Background

We are reviewing 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.

Reasons for the consultation

No set of outputs will ever be perfect and we recognise that improvements can always be made. In the consultation we would like to get your views on what the priorities for change are. The consultation is 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 consulting now is 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](#).

Where are we now?

Current outputs

The current outputs are as follows (including links to the latest versions).

- [Welsh Agricultural Statistics](#). A large compendium of agricultural statistics. It includes detailed information from the annual June Agricultural Survey with regional breakdowns and summaries by the number of animals or area of land on a farm. Also collates production and subsidy payments data. This has a large number of large tables of data and limited explanation or commentary. It is available as both a PDF for printing out and as Excel spreadsheets.
- [Farming Facts and Figures](#). This is a pocket guide to Welsh agriculture statistics designed as a handy reminder of key statistics to be carried around as a hard copy. It is available as a paper document and also on the website.
- [First Release for June](#). This shows Wales level estimates from the latest survey and also a run of recent years for comparison. It is produced before the more detailed analyses in Welsh Agricultural Statistics, Farming Facts and Figures and the Small Area bulletin are available. It is based largely on tables of data although the latest edition (for June 2011 estimates) has tried to expand the description and commentary. It is available as a PDF and spreadsheets on the website.
- [First Release for December](#). This is similar to the June Survey First Release. Again, the release for December 2011 estimates has tried to expand the description and commentary.

- [Agricultural Small Areas Bulletin](#). This bulletin is targeted at researchers who need to use the data at a disaggregated level. It has two components. Firstly a document about the data quality issues for the June Agricultural Survey and how these affect how the estimates can sensibly be used. Secondly an Excel spreadsheet with estimates from the June Survey at regional and sub-regional level. The regions are based on Welsh local authorities with some authorities grouped to reduce quality issues. The lower level data use the 235 “Agricultural Small Areas” in Wales. At this level of data many cells in the table need to be suppressed because of quality and disclosure issues.

How people use the outputs

We want to take the opportunity to ask about how people use our outputs to help us match what we produce with users needs. The questionnaire asks some general questions about who you are and how you use the results. This is an opportunity for us to find out more about users, particularly those outside our usual contacts in government and the agricultural sector.

This is important in practice because not all users want the same thing. Understanding the different needs of users will help us tailor the outputs rather than forcing everything into a one size fits all approach.

Proposals for change

To meet the requirements of the UK Statistic Authority [report](#), and from our experience of working with users, we believe that there are four key areas we need to develop.

- Improve the readability of the outputs. The current outputs have large amounts of data in tables which the reader needs to work on to extract the information they want. The new outputs should aim to help the readers to see what the overall patterns are and, where possible, add value by giving commentary to explain what we think may be causing the patterns. The latest First Releases for the June and December surveys have tried to make a start on this. We would be interested to hear if users found the changes useful (or otherwise).
- Improve access to the data at an appropriate level of disaggregation. For those users who want to use the data in more detail we need to make it easier to get to the data they want. June survey estimates can be reported in many flexible ways. Are there particular summary groups – geographic areas, farm types or size and so on – that are of particular interest to you?
- Improve the technical documentation. Showing how the surveys were run and considering the data quality issues. This is to allow users to see how far the survey estimates are fit for whatever purpose they have in mind. We need to make sure that each output has an appropriate level of technical detail – enough to understand the strengths and weaknesses but not too much so that users are overwhelmed. For those that need the full detail this should also be available. Is the current level of detail on these issues about right for you as a user? Would it be helpful to you to have separate technical documentation with summaries in the main outputs that link to them?

- Improve links between the outputs. To allow users to see the overview of what is available but quickly find the specific things that they want at the level of detail they want.

In the questionnaire we ask you to say what priority you would put on these changes. We would also welcome comments on other things that you think need doing,

Suggested changes

From the issue discussed above we have some suggestions of changes that could be made. The questionnaire asks what you think about these suggestions and how useful they might be to you.

- A high level summary report on key agricultural trends. This would be aimed at a general audience so would be presented graphically with accompanying commentary explaining the trends. It would be largely based on the data that are currently in our outputs but focusing on the overall trends, rather than presenting large tables of data. There would be links to the full published data for those who want to go into more depth. To keep the report manageable, we would see it as concentrating on the land, livestock and labour data from the June Agricultural Survey together with farm income data from the Farm Business Survey.
- A methodology report containing details about how the surveys are run, the sample selected and the estimates produced. This will necessarily be a technical document and not aimed at the general user. In our other outputs we will continue to put short summaries for the non-technical user, with links for those who want to delve deeper.
- A similarly technical report on data quality in the survey. Most of this information is currently in the Agricultural Small Areas Bulletin (and we admit this is not necessarily the most obvious place to look for it). A separate report, with summaries and links in the other outputs, should make it easier for users to find the level of detail they want.
- Reporting data quality in the main outputs. The technical data quality report gives detail about the reliability of the results and the implications for how they should be used. Something more summary and accessible is needed for general users. We would like to go beyond the usual confidence intervals because this only looks at uncertainty from sampling and ignores all the non-sampling error. Alongside confidence interval we float the idea of a more subjective “star rating” assessment. This would bring together, subjectively, all the aspects of data quality and to rate them from five stars as the most reliable to one star least. We are looking for your views on whether this seems like a helpful approach or not.

This list is not exhaustive. Please feel free to comment on any themes that are of particular relevance to you and are not yet sufficiently covered in the outputs.

The questionnaire

To gather your responses to this consultation we have a questionnaire for you to complete. This is available electronically but also as a hard copy if requested. The questionnaire will look at six key areas.

- Who you are
- What you use
- What you use it for
- Your general satisfaction with the outputs
- How you rate the priorities for changes
- How you rate the suggested changes

What happens to the results?

We will publish two reports on this consultation. The first will have a summary of the responses with our reaction to them and a proposed action plan. The second will be a detailed list of the comments received – excluding those where the respondent has asked to remain anonymous.