
Mary Gregory, Deputy Director for Regulation

Glyn Jones
Chief Statistician
Welsh Government
(by email)

27 March 2019

Dear Glyn

STATISTICS FROM THE WELSH SURVEY OF AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE

As you are aware, we recently completed a compliance check of the Welsh Government's statistics from the [Welsh Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture](#). I am pleased to confirm the continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics and would encourage your team to address the areas below. Our Agriculture and Environment Domain Lead, Job de Roij, will continue to engage with the agriculture statistics team on progress over the coming months.

We initiated this review to better understand the state of agriculture statistics in Wales and due to the time elapsed since the previous assessment. To gain a perspective across the Devolved Administrations, we also carried out reviews of statistics from the Scottish June Agricultural Census, produced by the Scottish Government, and statistics from the Northern Ireland June Agricultural Census, produced by the Department for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

We found many examples of good practice, reflecting the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value of these statistics. Information on data quality is clear, comprehensive and transparent, helping users understand the strengths and limitations of the survey and administrative data sources and the methods. The bulletin includes a good summary of the survey sampling process which explains the sampling frame and how the sample is drawn. It also provides a useful overview of the cattle administrative data source (the Cattle Tracing System (CTS)) which discusses limitations such as the lack of comparability between survey and administrative data. The description of the methods covers all steps of the estimation process, including imputation, and uses simple language throughout to communicate key terms and concepts effectively to a wide audience.

We welcome the team's ongoing work to document the quality assurance arrangements of the cattle administrative data (from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS)) and are pleased that the team has found our [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data toolkit](#) proportionate and helpful. We encourage the team to share this information with users to help them better understand how the data are collected and processed and to reassure them about the data quality. We suggest sharing insight and best practice with the Scottish Government and DAERA, who are also working on administrative data quality reports for their June Agricultural Censuses.

The bulletin gives a comprehensive overview of the farming sector in Wales. The commentary is clear, coherent and insightful and provides contextual information that helps users interpret the statistics; for instance, it considers long-term trends and discusses drivers for changes. The bulletin includes links to related Welsh Government agriculture statistics and statistics from the English, Scottish and Northern Irish June Agricultural Census, helping users understand their coherence and comparability.

We welcome the bulletin's focus on the key messages and issues that are most relevant for farmers and policy officials, the two main groups of users of these statistics. Generally, the information on users and engagement with users outside Welsh Government is clear and informative. We were also pleased to hear that your team is considering new ways to engage with a

wider, non-expert audience. For instance, it told us it is considering developing a new output aimed at the general user who might want to know the main information about statistics in Wales, which would meet a different user need. We look forward to seeing the outcome of this work.

Our main concern is the falling survey response rate: for the June 2018 survey the response rate was 40%. The team is acutely aware of this situation and has been transparent with users about the changes. For example, the bulletin discusses the impact on data quality and potential drivers for the falling response rate, such as non-response from large livestock farms. The team should consider solutions to improve the response rate to ensure that the quality of the data and statistics continue to meet user needs. To achieve this, we encourage the team to work closely with communications colleagues and to engage with farmers through a wide range of channels.

We identified several ways in which the value of the statistics could be enhanced. For instance, there is scope for shortening the report. In addition, an emphasis on long-term trends means that the narrative tends to be similar from one year to the next. We recognise that the agricultural sector in Wales is reasonably stable and that, in general, long-term trends add context, but a better balance between commentary on short-term and long-term trends might be more engaging for users. To support users' interpretation of the statistics some of the data visualisations could be improved, so that they convey messages more effectively. We encourage you to look at the Government Statistical Service (GSS) [Good Practice Team's guidance](#) on this topic. And, to help users understand the policy context, it might be useful to highlight what policies the data and statistics inform, at the Wales level, UK level and international (EU) level.

We encourage your team to continue to collaborate with statisticians in DAERA, the Scottish Government and Defra, to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to producing statistics from the June Agricultural Census across the UK.

Please let me know if there is any aspect of this letter that you wish to discuss.

I am copying this letter to: Stuart Neil, Lead Agriculture and Rural Affairs Statistician; and John Bleasdale, Agriculture and Rural Affairs Statistics.

Yours sincerely



Mary Gregory
Deputy Director for Regulation