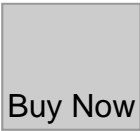




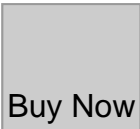
Mark Drakeford: Brexit votes to blame for farm subsidy changes

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[Mark Drakeford: Brexit votes to blame for farm subsidy changes](#)

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The first minister has blamed Brexit-voting farmers for Welsh ministers having to draw up their own farm subsidy proposals.

Mark Drakeford's government is consulting on plans for a scheme to replace EU-designed agricultural aid.

Farmers have held go-slow protests over the plans, which include requiring them to plant trees on 10% of land in exchange for cash.

The Welsh government says the changes would help tackle the climate crisis.

The Country, Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents landowners and rural businesses, said the first minister's comments "typify his longstanding contempt for rural Wales".

Plaid Cymru said Mr Drakeford's argument was "deeply regrettable" and suggested farmers were to blame for "everything that's going wrong right now".

Mr Drakeford, who is quitting his role at the top of government next month, made the comments in the Senedd on Tuesday.

Ministers are currently consulting on a Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), which will be the long-term, post-Brexit replacement for farming payments.

To qualify for the support, farmers will have to commit to planting 10% of their land with trees and earmark another 10% as wildlife habitat.

Many farmers argue the demands are not practical while running a business and fear they could be overwhelmed with paperwork.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJsGZL-zb54>

However, the Welsh government says farmers must adapt, and play their part in tackling climate change, if they are to receive public money.

'Nobody forced to plant trees'

During First Minister's Questions, leader of the Welsh Conservative Senedd group Andrew RT Davies said the scheme as it is currently designed "will devalue farms, cost jobs and devastate the ability to deliver food that the nation requires for the future".

Mr Drakeford responded: "I think it's important that I remind the leader of the opposition why we are in the position that we are in.

“It’s because farmers in Wales took his advice and voted to leave the European Union.”

“Believe me, we are in the position that we are in today because we have taken back control of farming support in Wales, as we were obliged to do,” he added.

“If farmers in Wales were still able to have access to the funds that were available through the European Union, they would be in a very different position than they are, having heard and followed his advice.”

Addressing concerns around the tree planting target, Mr Drakeford said: “Nobody is forced to plant trees in Wales”.

“We were determined to offer farmers the first chance in Wales to grow the trees that we will need, because we will need thousands and thousands more trees in Wales in an era of climate change.

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“Where, because of the topography of the land or other considerations, it isn’t possible to reach 10%, the [rural affairs] minister has already set out proposals so that farmers wouldn’t be expected to reach that.”

Victoria Bond, director of the CLA in Wales, said: “I would say to Mark Drakeford, this is not Brexit’s fault, this is your fault.

“By falsely blaming Brexit, Mr Drakeford is just seeking to avoid scrutiny of his own failure to competently design a workable scheme.

“We would strongly encourage the next first minister to reset the relationship with the countryside and to promise to govern for all in Wales and not just the industrial and urban parts.”

Analysis by Steffan Messenger, environment correspondent

It’s been widely reported that farmers were strong Brexit supporters, but we don’t actually know for sure that most Welsh farmers voted to leave the EU.

There’s been no detailed polling in Wales and all the major farming organisation here campaigned for the remain vote.

Back in 2016, the Farmers’ Union of Wales (FUW) for instance had warned that quitting the EU would be “a dangerous step into the unknown”.

Presentational grey line

James Evans, Conservative MS for the rural constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, told the first minister that people “are worried, they’re scared and they’re angry because of the uncertainty around their future”.

“Rural mental health charities are also being inundated with calls from people who need help and

support due to the huge pressures they're under because of unrelenting form filling, TB and a government here that seems to ignore their concerns."

In response, Mr Drakeford said: "When change happens, people are anxious, and people are worried, and people are indeed distressed."

"I understand that. That is why we go on having the conversations that we do."

He denied that the government had ignored farmers, claiming that ministers had held a "seven year conversation" with farmers and that amendments had been made to the proposed scheme already.

He also said he was "confident there will be further amendments to the scheme as a result of the consultation and conversations that are currently being held".

Plaid Cymru leader Rhun ap Iorwerth said: "It is deeply regrettable that the first minister believes it is appropriate to suggest that Welsh farmers are to blame for the challenges facing the sector.

"Follow that logic to its conclusion, then the people of Wales are to blame for everything that's going wrong right now."

Jeremy Clarkson, who has presented an Amazon Prime series on his farm in the Cotswolds, said Mr Drakeford should listen to farmers.

Writing on X, external, he said: "The defence mounted by Mr Drakeford over his farming policy in Wales makes no sense.

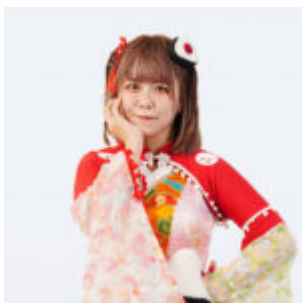
"Like him, I'm not a farmer but I try to learn about it by listening to people who are. He should do the same."

The consultation, external on the proposed scheme ends on 7 March.

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