



The Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP
Secretary of State for Wales
The Wales Office
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Date: 3rd April 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

The Welsh Livestock sector is worth over £1.8bn annually to the economy of Wales, in addition, the sector is crucial in underpinning the wider food foundation sector worth £9.3 billion, employing 228,500 people, the equivalent to 17% of Wales' total workforce.

The 2001 UK Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) was estimated to have cost the public sector over £3 billion and the cost to the private sector estimated at over £5 billion (National Audit Office). Wales had 117 infected premises with a further 713 premises slaughtered as direct contacts, over 800,000 animals were culled because of the disease. FMD brought the Welsh agricultural industry to its knees, the impact and scars of the disease continue to run deep within Welsh farming and rural Wales.

With cases of FMD confirmed in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia in recent weeks the memories of 2001 come flooding back and send a chill down the spine of the Welsh farming community. As individual farming businesses we all have a responsibility to be vigilant and practice the highest standards of biosecurity on our farms. We also look to our Governments across the UK to be similarly vigilant and ensure the highest biosecurity standards are in operation at all ports of entry into GB. The incursion into GB of a notifiable disease could only happen via a biosecurity breach. We must operate a 'keep it out' policy when it comes to exotic animal disease, failure to do so will have a devastating impact not only for individual farm businesses but for the whole country.

According to the UK Government's 2025 National Risk Register, FMD and African Swine Fever (ASF) are two of the biggest threats to biosecurity, mostly due to illegal meat imports.

We welcome the prompt decisions made to ban all imports from areas of Europe currently affected by FMD but we firmly believe more must be done to minimise the risk through delivering a ban on all personal meat imports to the country and through increased border controls to stop illegal meat imports, with effective penalties in place for those who break the rules

In terms of personal meat imports we recognise that travellers are no longer allowed to bring any meat products from anywhere in the world into GB but there is an exception to this rule for meat that has come from the EU, EEA and EFTA. NFU Cymru believe a complete permanent ban of all personal imports is clearer to communicate and much easier to enforce.

Our primary concern, however, relates to the enforcement of our border control measures. Control measures are only effective if port health authorities, local authorities, Border Force and FSA have sufficient resource to implement and enforce them.

Since African Swine Fever (ASF) control measures were introduced in September 2022, following the delay in implementing the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM), a dedicated team, set up as part of Dover Port Health Authority (DPHA), have seized over 190 tonnes of illegally imported meat products at the Port of Dover. This is despite limited funding and operational capacity and only a small percentage of vehicles checked, it is believed that much more is entering the country to meet an increasing commercial demand in the UK.

The quantities recovered suggest this is often organised crime. Indeed, as an example, during one week in January alone the team at DPHA removed a total of 10 tonnes of illegal meat from the food chain.

Significantly, this is not only a Channel ports problem, we also learnt during March of a significant seizure in Northern Ireland, this is a real worry for us given Wales has three ferry ports with the island of Ireland.

Furthermore, if illegal Products of Animal Origin (POAO) are identified and confiscated, there are currently poor legal pathways and often insufficient resources to take further action.

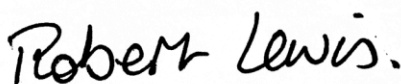
There is evidence to suggest illegally imported meat is coming through both personal and commercial import routes. As such we believe that the Border Target Operating Module (BTOM) in its current form, is not fit for purpose and is highly vulnerable to exploitation from organised crime. Our most significant concern with regards to biosecurity threats relates to our current commercial import controls. The BTOM, introduced to control and monitor commercial imports, does not appear to be functioning properly with very few physical inspections of POAO from the EU and rest-of-world taking place.

We have very serious concerns about the functionality of the BTOM. It adds additional cost and administrative burdens for legitimate importing business, while still being highly vulnerable to exploitation from organised crime. As an island, our natural border should be our greatest asset. In September 2023 ASF jumped 400km across the Baltic Sea to Sweden, from Latvia and Poland, demonstrating that the most likely route of transmission is human mediated. Sadly, our points of entry are vulnerable and present an unnecessary risk.

NFU Cymru is asking for a clear biosecurity and investment plan across UK Government and the Devolved Administrations to protect our nation from the devastating impact of exotic diseases on our shores. As Secretary of State for Wales, we ask that you now take these matters up with your Ministerial colleagues in UK Government as a matter of urgency. With the risk of disease incursion high our livestock farming families are concerned and worried that the current import controls do not match the threat to the nation's biosecurity.

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely



Rob Lewis
NFU Cymru Livestock Board Chair



Jonathan Wilkinson
NFU Cymru Dairy Board Chair