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FUW INITIATIVE LETS MINISTER SEE HOW FARM TO FORK WORKS LOCALLY



The Assembly minister for Welsh agriculture has seen at first-hand how farming contributes to the wider economy and employment in his own constituency as part of the Farmers' Union of Wales "Help Cut Food Miles...Buy The Welsh One" initiative.

FUW's Gwent county executive officer Glyn Davies invited Alun Davies, the newly appointed deputy

minister for agriculture, food, fisheries and European programmes, to visit Tillery Valley Foods, the Abertillery-based national provider of chilled and frozen prepared meals to the healthcare sector, local authorities and education.

The visit followed Tillery Valley Food's successful implementation of a sustainable procurement programme for Welsh lambs in 2010, sourcing directly from two local farms with the aim of reducing food miles and supporting local businesses.

To greatly reduce food miles the lambs are slaughtered at nearby Raglan but this vital link in the procurement chain is under threat due to the proposed increase in slaughtering charges.

The minister's tour of the Cwmtillery Industrial Estate factory was followed by a visit to one of the farms a few miles away - Hafodarthan Farm, Aberbeeg, Abertillery - run in partnership by FUW members Gwyn and Meryl Davies and their son Rhys.

"Tillery Valley Foods is a major employer in the area with over 350 people working at its site in Abertillery," said Glyn Davies.



"With 64% of its spend invested in businesses in Wales and adjoining regions, collaborative initiatives such as sustainable local sourcing that help to support both local businesses and the wider community are top of Tillery Valley's agenda.

"The company is also proactively helping to reduce the environmental impact of its operations and the minister's tour of the factory and food production area, followed by a visit to Hafodarthan Farm, enabled him to discover for himself the local and environmentally responsible sourcing of the lamb used by Tillery Valley Foods."

Gwyn Davies is the second generation at the farm and his son Rhys is looking to take over the farm from his father - after being made a partner in the business recently - provided he can obtain planning permission to build a new house on the farm.

The farm is situated above Abertillery and Brynithel and extends to 240 acres. There are 70 acres of reclaimed opencast mining area which is all now down to permanent pasture.

The land extends up to 1,200 ft above sea level and the family also owns a further 30 acres of lowland ground near Abergavenny. They run a closed herd of 30 suckler cows, mainly Aberdeen Angus x Limousin, which are then put to a Limousin bull with the stores being sold at 12-14 months old.

The current flock number is 500, 400 of which are Nelson South Wales Mountain ewes with 100 Charolais x Welsh ewes. The Charolais x Welsh ewes are all put to Texel rams with all lambs other than those kept for replacements being sold as fat.

The farm has been involved in environmental schemes for a number of years with a first woodlands scheme being entered into in 1999 and a further broadleaf woodland scheme being instigated in 2003.

It has won the Countryside Council for Wales' farm woodland scheme award. The farm is currently in the third year of Tir Gofal and it was one of the last farms to be approved for the Tir Gofal scheme.

Gwyn Davies believes there are not enough young people entering farming and his son is one of very few examples in the area where there is someone to carry on the family business.