

Rural Development Sub-Committee

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Paper for the Welsh Assembly Government

Rural Development Sub-Committee

Inquiry into Food Production and Promotion in Wales

Issues associated with marketing, promotion and the labelling of food in Wales.

1. Pembrokeshire County Council has a long standing experience in this area, and our comments are based on observations gained from our involvement of developing the product at local level. We are one of the only local authorities recognising the importance of agriculture and the added value food sector as requiring a dedicated food team. The first food officer was employed 10 years ago. Although we have concentrated at the local level we have an excellent working relationship regionally with neighbouring counties, and the south west agri-food area, as well as nationally with WAG's FFMD.

2. We fully recognise the excellent work begun by the former WDA and its Welsh food promotion, and are very pleased that after coming into WAG, there is still a highly focused direction in supporting Welsh food and agriculture. This is bringing economic benefit to the sector while at the same time being very successful in raising the profile of Welsh food to the consumer. WAG has been successful in keeping up the momentum and there is strength in the consistency of this approach.

3. Our experience in Pembrokeshire started after establishing a food officer in 1998. This post has resulted in successes such as providing a trade directory of the counties food and drink producers, distributors and wholesalers, in hard copy and on line, to give easier access to sourcing local food for the retail and hospitality providers in the area. Raising awareness and opening up new markets to the producer. Establishing the Pembrokeshire Produce Identification mark, which gives an easily identifiable branding for consumers to be able to buy locally produced Pembrokeshire food and drink, choose local food from menus and buy local produce within shops. This was as a result of visitors and consumers saying they would like to choose local produce as part of their visitor experience in the area, but were finding it hard to do so. This is used by hospitality providers, retailers and producers on their branding, after verification by PCC public protection department and the food officer for authenticity and meeting all regulatory standards. We also produce a Pembrokeshire Food guide and Pembrokeshire Art and craft guide for visitors. There is also much work in areas of direct sales including the well renowned, Haverfordwest Farmers Market, a growth in Farm Shops, and just launching Pembrokeshire Produce Direct, an on line ordering and local delivery service giving easier access to local food for the public. We are also very involved in promoting local procurement and marketing our use of local food to parents in school catering; as well as in food tourism, recognising the increased interest in local food as part of the overall holiday experience.

4. We recognise the strength in working with the regional agri-food partnership and enjoy a buoyant working relationship that has benefited producers locally as well as our own work in PCC to promote and market local food. Some examples would be working together on procurement workshops, trade events, and festivals such as Pembrokeshire fish Week. This partnership also enables us to promote support mechanisms to assist producers in their own marketing and promotion, such as working with 'True Marketing', Food Centre Wales and Design Wales. These support mechanisms go hand in hand assisting food producers to get maximum benefit from attending trade shows, meet the buyer events etc, put on or supported by WAG. The profile of Welsh food at the larger national and international trade events has had a significant growth over the last ten years. We are looking to build on our regional working partnerships with a funding application to provide a food business support officer in each county of the region to assist in capacity building of food producers looking to increase their business nationally and globally and promote more across region trade.

5. We recognise that support in the food sector has distinct local, regional and national levels of partnership working. Our local partners include Pembrokeshire Tourism, PCNP, PLANED and the industry itself.

6. Pembrokeshire has a large local market, our county population has 120 thousand, rising to 4 million tourists each year. We have well established producers who see their products as local, feeding the increased interest on provenance, ethical production and the local experience. The Pembrokeshire Brand is very important locally. Marketing of this is part of our destination product offer. There are now increasing links to partner our food with activity or events as part of our marketing. Examples include kayaking or a boat trip for a beach BBQ or a riverside bistro for crab lunch. We welcome the new food tourism strategy, and have always felt that food and tourism are natural partners in promotion and marketing of Wales. Although there is still along way to go in the consistency and quality of our food offer, it has come on incredibly due to the work of WAG, former WDA and partners since it was described as a culinary desert. The change in attitudes of the hospitality industry to recognising the marketing value of using Welsh, the more local the better, ingredients on their menus, to meet the trend and consumer tastes, is increasing, with some excellent examples of good practise both on a local as well as national level. The true Taste awards have greatly assisted this area in raising the profile, especially of the smaller specialised product.

7. On the True Taste as a brand, although this has helped to get excellent PR for both producers and Wales it self, regarding our food and drink, there is still not an established recognition of the brand by the general consumer. Some of this may be due to the fact that the majority of the over all winning products are highly specialised, or from small producers, rather than products that are easily sourced by the supermarkets or larger outlets. The recent profile of some of our Welsh chefs has also been advantageous in marketing Welsh food and drink. Chefs such as Bryn Williams, are now gaining celebrity status and are useful PR ambassadors. The increased interest in food cookery programmes, has fuelled consumer interest in food, seasonality and provenance. This interest is also helping raise the

profile of our food events, such as Abergavenny, Pembrokeshire fish Week and Conway Feast.

8. We also recognise the importance of the regional activity in food and drink promotion and marketing. We have built up an excellent working network beyond Pembrokeshire and its borders, of which the regional agri- food partnerships have been of great assistance. This partnership working , has helped add another layer of activity which has wider benefits to the producer, and in the marketing and promotion of our regional produce. This brings in economy of scale and we can use the regions as building blocks for the national assembly to put together activity nationally. This important bottom up approach , is more beneficial and sustainable rather than a top down. It also allows producers to build up a rap or, a working relationship with all support bodies and grow in capacity where desired.

9. Facilities such as the food centres , play an important part in providing a service to producers to explore and take on research and development allowing them to take up opportunities for new products or product ranges to meet customer needs, and fill market gaps. This helps promote Wales as an innovative producing country, and supplier of quality produce.

10. Counties and regions in Wales can assist in promoting the food in their locality but the role of promoting and marketing the Welsh food brand is the role of WAG. There is a steady increase in consumers purchasing Welsh foods, the 2008 figures of 77% is the highest percentage seen over the five years of the omnibus research. This can be due largely to the activity of the WAG departments especially FFMDD. There is also an increase in the desire to buy food that is 'locally produced' and this is were local and regional promotion and branding is important.

11. Numerically Tourism is important in different parts of Wales. May be there needs to be clarity on what are the different markets, and how activities can best be coordinated. There needs to good communication between WAG and local authorities and similar bodies, so that they can consider in what areas it is best to work together.

12. Food is a cross cutting theme, linking health and social well being, education and environmental issues. These also present increasing opportunities for Welsh food and drink.

13. There is al lot of market intelligence at primary producer level, but do we have enough market research on consumer needs and expectations, which could assist us improving the product offer and the over all profile of welsh food and drink in the retail and hospitality sector, especially if we want to become a quality food tourism destination. There is also a lack of intelligence of what the hospitality sector needs and if there are problems when sourcing local produce, which could provide opportunities for producers as well as assist in establishing better consistency of offer, distribution and supply. Is the current situation that the market is ahead of the product offer?. We need to raise the quality of the offer to meet or exceed customer expectations, which will promote the Welsh food brand to be a leader. This is something that PCC are keen to achieve and feel WAG has a large role in helping us achieve this. The need to put investment in the tourism infrastructure is an on going one. The challenges of the credit crunch, represents an opportunity for the hospitality sector to respond with a value for money quality offer. We need to gear up our grants to support the quality offer all round as well as the food itself especially with food and tourism being marketed as one.

14. On the promotion front, there is a perception that the amount of positive PR in respect of businesses ,new innovations, achievements nationally and regionally, awards etc is now more restricted by the political channel since WDA has become part of WAG in food development. The amount of good news storied based on business have largely reduced, the PR is focused on the WAG agenda.

15. Labelling. We have some experience of using a local 'label, with the Pembrokeshire Produce mark, which has been added voluntarily on some businesses own branding, both producers and hospitality providers, who see it as a promotional opportunity. We recognise that this is advantageous locally for visitors in the area who see this as part of the local tourism offer and to assist in the growing want by consumers to 'buy local'. However we also recognise that outside the county, the Pembrokeshire brand has much less marketing benefits. This will be similar for regional branding. Asking producers to use a Welsh brand on labelling, needs to be up to the businesses, but we would also encourage our businesses to look at regional and national opportunities. There is a place for all. Nationally a Welsh branding can be beneficial to promote Welsh food, but we also need to be aware that in some areas a Welsh brand can have the opposite effect. Research into True Taste flagged up that in some areas of the midlands, sales went down when products were branded under a Welsh label. There is also the issue of how we monitor or verify products using such a brand labelling to ensure quality of offer and consistency.

16. Labelling to assist in nutritional improvement through better information of leading to more informed choices in purchasing, can be helpful. We believe in educating our children in nutrition and healthy eating. Our event Grow it Cook it Eat it is about informing youngsters on healthy eating and in this sense we would support labelling which can assist these messages.