

# **Agriculture and Rural Development Committee Inquiry into Rural Economic Diversification**

## **Response on behalf of the Three Welsh National Park Authorities Snowdonia, Pembrokeshire Coast and Brecon Beacons**

### **A. MARKETING & ADDING VALUE**

*How can the Assembly and other public bodies help to improve the marketing of Rural Wales and its products? What more could be done to help develop distinctive products and services with high added value, branding and collective and niche marketing?*

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#### **Response, with particular reference to primary agricultural products**

##### **Rural Wales – What is it and its products?**

Before marketing and adding value can be considered the National Park Authorities believe that a true and honest assessment is needed of what is, and what is expected from, Rural Wales and its products and what the strengths and attributes of the region are. To simplify Rural Wales, its character and products, is heavily influenced by a comparatively warm wet climate providing an ability to grow cheap and plentiful grass which dictates the primary agricultural products from the region – meat, milk and wool. The National Park Authorities believe that any strategies should play to these strengths. Specific to the National Parks, which account for 20% of Wales, the primary products are derived from systems which utilize Wales' semi-improved and unimproved pastures which are also of national or international importance in landscape and /or scientific terms. They are areas which are cherished by the public and deemed to be of high environmental values. The primary products from the National Parks have environmental factors incorporated into their production; however in the market place no differentiation is made of this to enable primary producers to achieve a higher market share and to add value to product by virtue of their environmental values.

The National Park Authorities believe that the marketing and adding value activity should be consistent with the desired objectives of the Parks and promote their purposes.

##### **Distinctive Products**

The National Parks and their products are very distinctive. The name Snowdonia is very familiar to the public (W.T.B. Survey). If the example of Welsh Mountain Lamb is taken, that in itself is a distinctive product but the marketing opportunities by associating the name of a National Park are much greater than say the name Cambrian Mountains. In order to be distinctive it needs to be quantified. If the establishment of a niche product is to be based on the environmental qualities of an area, standards need to be set which are meaningful to the area and which are transparent to the customer. The use of the name "Snowdonia", "Brecon" or "Pembrokeshire Coast" to market a primary product is key but must relate to that particular geographical area and its environmental values. Unfortunately examples exist of marketing primary products which have no association with the actual area itself, which subsequently deprives producers from within those areas of marketing and adding value opportunities.

Not all producers appreciate that their products can be defined as "distinctive" due to attitudes of conventional markets, and "up-stream" sectors do not encourage such activity. For example, mountain lamb is perceived by sectors of the conventional meat trade to be a troublesome commodity compared to lowland lamb.

The National Park Authorities believe that all agencies should protect regional distinctive products much in the same way as is proposed for "Welsh Lamb" by the Assembly. In addition we would argue that meaningful and measurable environmental criteria should be an integral part of production systems.

Examples do exist on the Continent which provide marketing opportunities based on environmental values of products from protected landscapes – lessons can be learnt.

## **Branding**

The National Park Authorities support the work of the Agri-Food Directorate in developing a Welsh brand image. However we would welcome a policy statement from the Agri-Food Directorate on issues of branding and niche opportunities, especially in the protected landscapes of Wales (National Parks). The three National Parks are anxious to play a significant role in this provided that meaningful environmental standards can be incorporated.

## **Adding Value**

The National Park Authorities believe that there is much potential in adding value to primary products by virtue of meaningful environmental standards. We believe that there are customers willing to source products with high natural environmental standards, but only if the opportunity is available to them in the market place.

If adding value involves processing this should occur within the geographical area of the primary product– this would add also to the socio-economic activity of that area.

## **Collective Marketing**

This is one of the weaknesses that faces Rural Wales, especially the farming industry. The National Park Authorities believe that there is a strategic role for the Agri-Food Directorate, particularly with distinctive and niche products. The National Park Authorities have a role at the local level. There are number of upstream issues with potential to frustrate collective action – slaughtering and processing facilities, skill shortages, lack of capital investment and access to markets are amongst these.

Again actions on the Continent could provide blue prints for Rural Wales. From a protected landscape perspective all the Regional Parks of France market their "distinctive products" under a common emblem.

## **B. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

*How can service provision and employment opportunities be improved through rural community development initiatives? How can the Assembly and other public bodies assist and encourage such development and ensure that the resulting economic benefits are captured?*

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Alongside their obligation to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the parks, and to promote understanding and enjoyment of them, the National Park Authorities also have a duty to foster the economic and social well being of local communities within the Park, in partnership with local authorities and other public bodies.

National parks seek to develop the existing strengths of the local economy and community in an environmentally acceptable way so that social and economic benefits remain in the locality rather than being dissipated further afield.

They are also the planning authorities for the whole area of each park, and therefore have a significant role and responsibilities in relation to development proposals.

They have an interest and experience in working with local communities in a sustainable way, and have already been recognised as ‘test beds’ in developing best practice approach to sustainability by the Assembly by the allocation of resources to the new Environment Development Fund (EDF/ CAE).

This report represents some corporate comments on key issues on behalf of the three Welsh Parks. This report seeks to outline the factors that will assist local service provision and employment opportunities in the rural economy, considering the five points noted below.

- Local solutions to local needs
- Community capacity and skills development
- Recognising and adding value to local products
- Legislative change
- Continued resources and commitment

Appendix A gives examples of good practice in rural community development within the three Welsh Parks.

Firstly the barriers to development need to be explored before going on to consider the possible solutions.

### **Barriers to development**

- Local solutions to local needs - A climate of public apathy and reliance on a 'nanny state' has prevailed in rural (as well as urban) communities over the past twenty years or so, and it will take time, effort and resources to reverse this trend.

People should be encouraged to become involved in the decision making process where their voices and opinions are sought and utilised. Only then can local solutions to local needs be found.

- Community capacity and skills development - People cannot be expected to take a 'leap of faith' without having the skills and confidence to do so. Without appropriate training that will not only provide new skills but will also build individual and community confidence, the real issues facing the rural economy cannot be tackled. Training would enhance the employment chances of local people and retain their skills to benefit their local area.
- Recognising and adding value to local products - Rural communities must realise the potential of the product/ services in their area. All too often this product is overlooked or ignored, whereas when recognised the potential for development may be enormous, e.g. green or cultural tourism; local high quality foodstuffs; processing of primary products.
- Legislative change - In some cases legislation actually works against the development of the rural economy. For example the economic value of adding value to local products and targeting and selling to a local market is tremendous but at present legislation goes against promoting local purchasing.

### **How can things be improved**

- Local solutions to local needs - public apathy must be overcome. By engaging people/ communities in assessing their needs, what service provision is lacking and what employment opportunities there are. This can be done by using a variety of community participation

techniques e.g. Community visioning, planning for the future, planning for real etc. which will provide local solutions to local problems.

National Park officers can play a key role in encouraging this kind of exercise on every level.

- Community capacity and skills development - A high percentage of communities will not have all the appropriate skills to develop a project and many will not have the confidence to do so. Communities need the support of experienced officers and organisations to 'hand hold', give advice and support especially at the beginning of any project.

These skills are transferable and it must be ensured that members of the community have access to training and are given the opportunity to do things for themselves. By empowering communities, building partnerships and seeking sustainable solutions, service provision and employment opportunities will be improved.

As well as having experience of community development and capacity building the National Parks have had some experience as training providers. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park in particular have had a good experience so far with New Deal and there is scope to provide practical placements for local people based on management of the National Parks' natural resources and in the field of recreation.

- Recognising and adding value to local products - Rural communities must realise the potential of what is available to them, be this through promoting/branding and adding value to local produce or utilising the primary resources that are available. However providing local solutions isn't always easy and it is very important that people are given access to good practice elsewhere in the UK and the wider world.

Entrepreneurial skills can be taught through pulling together local entrepreneurs, local people and ideas from elsewhere - this can help stimulate ideas, build confidence and develop new and innovative projects.

- Legislative change - The Assembly should lobby to change legislation so that local purchasing considerations (as well as environmental purchasing) are able to be taken into account in public sector procurement as well as value for money and fit for purpose considerations.
- Continued resources and commitment - Community development does not come cheap and it does not happen overnight. In order to facilitate change within rural communities it must be recognised that resources and commitment are needed on every level.

When a community within a park identifies a need it should be given the resources (in terms of support and funding) to develop and follow through projects in accordance with National Park purposes and policy. This will not only satisfy the need but will also encourage further

development.

All projects should be effectively monitored. For example the Community Development Foundation's 'percentage meter' gains a consensus on quality of life indicators in communities and measures them.

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## Appendix A

### Examples of good practice from the three Welsh National Parks:

- **Local solutions to local needs**

Trawsfynydd is a village of about 900 people at the heart of the Snowdonia National Park. Recently Traws-newid, a community co-operative was set up following a community appraisal process which highlighted the economic, environmental and social needs and aspirations of the residents of Trawsfynydd. It is a community led initiative set up develop sustainable projects by utilising local products, e.g. the lake; cultural heritage. The National Park encourages and supports such community initiatives and uses Trawsfynydd as a model for future developments within the Park.

Brecon Beacons have set up the Beacons Forum - a constituted public, voluntary and private forum of over 100 organisations and individuals meeting quarterly to share ideas, enthusiasms and expertise and to jointly decide and design new quality of life projects.

The Pembrokeshire Coast have worked closely with local Community Groups and Councils, organising seminars, publishing targeted newsletters ("Park Post" and Park Life") providing opportunities for involvement and debate, and promoting greater community awareness and ownership.

- **Community capacity and skills development**

In the Brecon Beacons National Park, a new local Trust is being helped to expand informal educational facilities on a local farm, to create indoor classroom and education programmes much in demand by local rural schools and other groups, for learning about agriculture, food and sustainability.

Through EDF Snowdonia has supported a series of seminars run by the local voluntary council and aimed at community and voluntary groups. These seminars aim to raise awareness of the principles of sustainability, as well as provide information and skills on funding issues, IT, energy efficiency, community transport etc.

Brecon Beacons used ‘planning for real exercises’ to develop their local plan by encouraging consensus and involving communities in the decision making process. 30 ‘planning for real’ exercises were carried out in strategic locations to cover all the communities within the Park.

Pembrokeshire Coast organised a workshop for individual objectors and community groups wishing to challenge the Authority’s draft Local Plan, in order to provide them with the necessary skills and advice to help them better access the Inquiry process, and thus to enable meaningful community participation in this important public consultation stage.

- **Recognising and adding value to local products**

In the Brecon Beacons National Park the Leader II officer worked with local producers to instigate a highly successful Farmers Market and to establish a steering committee. This has been subsequently helped to source funding for a Co-ordinator to both organise the Markets and expand both their service provision and economic benefit to producers.

Through EDF Snowdonia have supported ‘Cynnyrch Eryri’, a local farmers co-operative by providing funding towards a marketing officer. By adding value to the product this officer will be instrumental in promoting Welsh mountain lamb to local retailers and to a wider audience.

The Pembrokeshire Coast has supported the County Council’s Local Food Initiative, and worked closely with the Project Officer to promote greater awareness and involvement in events, organising competition and supporting producers as part of a co-ordinated campaign.

- **Continued resources and commitment**

Through the Environment Development Fund (EDF) the National Parks in Wales have been given the opportunity to encourage and support innovative projects that will improve the quality of life in local communities. It is expected that this will lead to:

- Community partnerships that are strong and self sustaining beyond the lifetime of EDF,
- An increased confidence at the local level,
- An increased understanding of the interrelationship between community development and the local economy and environment and
- The greater local use of local resources for local profit whether these resources are physical resources or local people themselves.

- Good projects that will be examples of good practice from which others can learn.

Through the Building Sustainable Communities programme Pembrokeshire Coast National Park seeks to address the future development of Pembrokeshire through a Joint UDP being prepared by PCNPA and Pembrokeshire County Council. Whilst the majority of development will be targeted towards the larger towns it is also recognised that the rural areas require some growth to maintain or improve the services and facilities available. By grouping a number of hamlets and villages together, collectively the range of facilities will be able to meet the needs of the community. In permitting an appropriate level of development it is hoped to encourage providers of local services to maintain or enhance service provision.