

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig
Ymgynghoriad ar effaith argyfwng
Covid-19
CCERA(5) CP 15
Ymateb gan Ludivine Petetin

Welsh Parliament
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs
Committee
Consultation on the impact of the Covid-19
pandemic
CCERA(5) CP 15
Evidence from Ludivine Petetin

This evidence submission is based on an open access journal article that I wrote in April 2020 entitled [‘The COVID-19 Crisis: An Opportunity to Integrate Food Democracy into Post-Pandemic Food Systems’](#).¹

Issues around agri-food supply chains and food security

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted issues around the interconnectedness, intricacy and resilience of British and international agri-food supply chains. Disruptions across the agri-food supply chains during COVID-19 really impacted food availability in Wales and many food shelves were empty for quite a while, especially flour. Indeed, as the UK only produces 60% of the food it consumes,² it was particularly affected raising questions as to its food security levels. The shortcomings of the ‘just-in-time’ characteristics of the agri-food supply chain have indicated how closely connected all actors are and when one (or more) fails to deliver the others are negatively impacted.

In Wales, the local agri-food supply chain performed particularly well during the pandemic to ensure that the local population would have enough to eat. The resilience of local farmers, suppliers and shops should be highlighted. In and around Cardiff, butchers like Oriel Jones and Martin Player changed their business models to increase their online presence and add home deliveries – indicating the ability to quickly diversify. In the Meantime, fruit and vegetable box schemes, such as the Welsh Food Box Company and Paul’s Organic Vegetables, responded positively to the intensified local demand. The local population could count on its local shops and actors and primary producers to be fed. It is to be hoped that this momentum for local, sustainable and healthy food will remain post lockdown.

A global food crisis remains a possibility. Multiple factors ought to be mentioned here: nationwide or local lockdowns, the looming economic crisis, the ill health of agricultural workers, farmers, employees in meat and food processing plant, logistics, distribution and retail as well as temporary shutdowns, longer and deeper and the implementation of social distancing measures. These factors will impact on the availability of food in the short to medium term in the UK and worldwide and threaten food security.

¹ L. Petetin, ‘The COVID-19 Crisis: An Opportunity to Integrate Food Democracy into Post-Pandemic Food Systems’ (2020) 11 *European Journal of Risk Regulation* 326-336.

² Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) *et al*, *Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2018* (DEFRA *et al*, London, 2019) Table 14.1.

As a result, focusing purely on increasing productivity and yields to ‘feed the UK and the rest of the world’ could be embraced by the agri-food supply chain. The risk of going back to less environmentally friendly practices is a real threat. Rather than cutting environmental standards, now is the time to press for more sustainability, agroecology and agroforestry³ to achieve net-zero ambitions⁴ and to fully implement the Well-being of Future Generations 2015 and the Environment Act 2016.

COVID-19, food democracy and a green recovery

Brexit and COVID-19 indicate how critical it is to have agri-food supply chains that are operational. But they also provide opportunities to rethink agri-food systems in particular to increase the localness of the food supply chain – bearing in mind longer food supply chains and the road to a green recovery.

Redesigning agri-food systems based on a model of multilevel food governance grounded in agri-food democracy is crucial to enhance the reliability, locality and resilience of food systems post-pandemic. Four characteristics ought to be focused on or improved:

- i. *True information, genuine choice and alternative products being offered to consumers:* citizens are increasingly interested in supporting local, Welsh, sustainable and healthy food (often produced organically) – indicating a shift in consumption pattern. Food provenance is becoming a key aspect of citizens’ choice.
- ii. *Increased participation of local food producers in the formulation of farming of local and national sustainable agri-food policies:* combined with a top-down approach from local and national authorities. Welsh Government needs to increase engagement mechanisms with agri-food policy actors, especially regarding how they can input into the system.
- iii. *Good health, food safety, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection, improvement of the rights of farmers and agricultural workers and their opportunities:* shorter food supply chains often lead to fewer food miles, less packaging and processing and are therefore beneficial to the environment. Pathways to increase the involvement of the local population in supporting local producers and participating in the act of production itself to improve decency and social justice should also be explored.
- iv. *Restoration of faith and trust in the food system and its institutions:* building transparent food supply chains where a stronger and fairer role is carved out for the farmer and local producers and shops is crucial. Greater powers in contract formation should be given to the primary producer when formulating new business links.

A lack of holistic, multilevel policies

³ For more on agroecology and agriculture, please see <https://www.soilassociation.org/green-brexite/>.

⁴ Poux, P., & Aubert, P.M. (2018). [An agroecological Europe in 2050: Multifunctional agriculture for healthy eating - Findings from the Ten Years For Agroecology \(TYFA\) Modelling Exercise](#). Paris: IDDRI.

As a result of what has just been discussed, it is questionable as to whether the 'Sustainable Farming and our Land' document published in 2019 by the Welsh Government is still fit for purpose to cope with shocks faced by the agri-food supply chain post COVID-19. A holistic approach to the agri-food supply chain needs to be developed now – rather than siloed, piecemeal policies. Agricultural and food policies can no longer be kept apart and need to be based on multilevel approaches with a solid input from farmers and other local actors. Closer engagement with trade, health (including diet and alcohol consumption) and migration (for agricultural workers⁵) policies is also lacking – some areas are reserved but those who are devolved should be seen as complementary and designed together to create synergies.

Following the pandemic, the road to a green recovery is going to be difficult. Enhanced cooperation and coordination between the different levels of governments and governance within Wales and the rest of the UK will become even more central.

Increased links between different public policies are essential to enhance sustainable, joined-up, approaches to agri-food systems that lead to holistic, democratic agri-food policies supporting primary producers and local shops and actors. This democratic and multilevel emphasis on local, Welsh sustainable food production, employing local workers and encouraging the consumption of seasonal and healthy produce whilst maintaining food security and longer agri-food supply chains is ambitious but is the way forward.

⁵ L. Petetin, 'Cloud nine or down to earth? The implications of a no deal Brexit on agriculture', The UK in a Changing Europe, 15 August 2019, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/cloud-nine-or-down-to-earth-the-implications-of-a-no-deal-brexite-on-agriculture/>.