

Summary:

Food Policy Alliance Cymru (FPAC) believes that the Welsh food economy is an urgent priority for examination by the committee in its first 6 months of work. Local food production benefits the economy and plays an important role in building a resilient and diverse food system for Wales. It also sustains and revives communities and provides opportunity to link new economic activity to other policy goals in which food plays a central role.

Context:

When it comes to systems that have to change to create a regenerative future, food is ground zero. In Wales this is a transition in which important green shoots have already emerged, a massive amount of work and research has been done and there is a substantial bank of intellectual and experiential capital to draw from. The current context of the nature and climate emergencies, the spiralling costs and suffering caused by diet related disease and food inequality leave us at a crossroads that is globally recognised.

Understanding of the value of a more localised food supply based on higher quality, more nutritious, sustainably grown produce is now even more urgent, given the fact that agriculture contributes around 16% of Wales' total greenhouse gas emissions¹ and that widening health inequalities as a result of low incomes, poor diets and access to nutritious food have led to a situation where the local authority area with the highest prevalence of obesity (Merthyr Tydfil) has 20.7% of children that are obese - more than double that of the local authority areas with the lowest prevalence (Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire). Meanwhile those working in food sector are significantly more likely to be food insecure than those working in other sectors due to low pay, often leading them to use the very foodbanks that their employers so proudly support. In terms of food security, ruptures in the existing food supply chain such as those we are currently witnessing due to a shortage of lorry drivers, demonstrate how vulnerable we now are to shocks in the global food system.

We appreciate that a diverse and resilient food system requires a mix of domestic production and opportunities for trade. However, the question for us in Wales is do we have the confidence, creativity and will to make the radical changes that are urgently needed to the existing system in order to be truly transformative, build resilience and avoid food-as-usual practices? To do this we need to acknowledge and understand the reality of the current food system which is that what appears cheap actually creates vast unsustainable costs elsewhere in terms of damage to the environment and food being one of the biggest drivers of NHS spending as a result of escalating diet related disease.

As experienced practitioners in all aspects of the food system from the farm to the plate we believe that the answer to that is most definitely yes and the time to act is now.

¹ About 21-37% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are attributable to the food system according to the IPCC report on Climate Change. These are from agriculture and land use, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail and consumption.

Relevance to the Committee:

The economic potential is exciting and compelling. In Wales, what we eat and what we produce as food are two very different things. The modern food system has become highly reliant on intensity and the concentration of production, with geographical specialisation increasingly being the norm. In general, we source food from where it is (superficially at least) cheapest. The great majority of the value of our primary production is realised elsewhere. In Wales we retain as little as 8% of the eventual value of our agricultural produce as those financial premiums are realised elsewhere in the supply chain by processors, wholesalers and retailers outside of the nation. Over many years this has had a profound impact, particularly in the rural economy with the loss of economic activity and jobs with serious knock-on impacts for communities in terms of inequality, social cohesion and the Welsh language. The economic benefits to our communities of changing that picture would be transformational in terms of relocalising economic activity, bringing life back to communities where we have seen these deleterious effects.

It is vital that we accompany measures intended to steer farmers away from practices damaging to the environment with a coherent vision of an economic context to underpin that change and in that respect we would ask that the committee specifically examines the role of Welsh Government in the following:

1. Public procurement and routes to market

The committee will be aware of the substantial work going on across Wales in respect of the foundational economy and the potential to generate and democratise wealth at a local level. Public spending is an essential element in this effort and has the potential to be transformative in the food system by directing spending in ways that address policy objectives on climate, biodiversity, health and education partly at least through prioritising social value in the procurement process. Driving economic activity through public contracts presents the chance to underpin investment, stimulate both more diverse primary production (in horticulture for example) and drive added value secondary production in the local economy. In helping to underwrite risk and give confidence in this way the same supply chains, building local infrastructure (food hubs, food partnerships, food processing, community supported agriculture etc.) and cooperative working models that emerge can facilitate shorter supply routes to the public and bring new opportunities in the private sector marketplace.

2. Secondary production and retention of value

The need to realise and retain value within Wales and its communities is a pressing issue. Increasingly access to processing in meat (especially abattoirs) and dairy is a barrier to establishing local supply chains, creativity and enterprise in local food production with control of this part of the food chain resting in fewer and fewer hands. The solution to this lies in cooperation and community owned infrastructure with Welsh Government playing a key role in facilitation and economic support.

3. Growing Horticulture

We have an enormous opportunity to grow the horticulture sector in Wales. Currently Wales only produces one quarter of a portion of Veg per person per day on 0.2% of land, but there is potential to produce 5 portions per day. The evidence (including some shining examples in Wales) is that market gardening can create significant employment opportunities from relatively small areas of land and is the economic backbone of relocalising the food chain in both rural and urban areas.

4. Community Food Strategy

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to a Community Food Strategy which FPAC welcomes as a vital opportunity to coordinate food policy across all areas of government including health, education, climate change and the economy – an approach we are seeing

successfully unfold in Wales through an evolving network of Sustainable Food Partnerships². It is our view that the substantial transformations in the food system we need to make our food supply more resilient and to meet the challenges in all these areas also offer enormous opportunities to transform local economies from the ground up and make a real difference in addressing structural inequalities in Welsh communities.

5. Agriculture (Wales) Bill

The Legislative Programme confirmed that the Government plans to bring an agriculture bill to the Senedd in this Senedd year. This critical piece of legislation will shape our landscapes, ecosystems and rural communities for many years to come. We see ecological resilience, food production and the long-term viability of farming in Wales as interdependent. For example, a healthy environment underpins food production itself. Crucially, the Agriculture Bill must respond to the triple challenge of delivering high quality sustainable affordable food whilst restoring nature and getting to carbon net zero. Given the wide scope of the Bill, we strongly recommend that the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee not only makes scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill a key priority for 2021/22 but that it also strongly considers additional joint scrutiny of the Bill with the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee. Scrutiny of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme, which is likely to be the main vehicle for agricultural support following the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme and associated agri-environment schemes should also feature prominently within both Committees' work programme.

We're grateful for the opportunity to make this submission and hope that the committee shares our view on the need to prioritise food in its considerations. We look forward to further engagement with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs in dynamic efforts to change the way Wales produces and consumes its food for the better.

About Food Policy Alliance Cymru:

Food Policy Alliance Cymru is a coalition of organisations and stakeholders building and promoting a collective vision for the Welsh food system. Through collaboration, engagement and research the Alliance aims to:

- Co-produce a vision for a food system in Wales that connects production, supply and consumption and gives equal consideration to the health and wellbeing of people and nature.
- Advocate for policy change to address the climate and ecological emergencies, the public health crisis and the rise in food insecurity.
- Ensure Wales is linked to UK policy, research opportunities and the broader Global system.

The Following member organisations of FPAC have contributed to this response:

- [Food Sense Wales](#)
- [Food, Faming and Countryside Commission](#)
- [Landworkers Alliance Cymru](#)
- [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#)
- [Social Farms & Gardens](#)
- [Sustainable Food Places](#)
- [Urban Agriculture consortium](#)
- [WWF Cymru](#)

² There are 8 areas across Wales that have or are developing cross sector Sustainable Food Partnerships supported by Food Sense Wales and the Sustainable Food Places Network. Food Cardiff has recently been awarded Silver Sustainable Food Places status – one of only 4 places in the UK

- Simon Wright, Wright's Food Emporium and one of the founding member of the Wales Independent Restaurant Collective (WIRC)

You can also read the Manifesto that Food Policy Alliance Cymru prepared before the 2021 Senedd Elections [here](#).