

Minutes of the Meeting

Senedd Cross-Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuels

Date: 10 June 2025

Location: Senedd, Cardiff

Chair: Luke Fletcher MS

Attendees:

In-person	Online
Luke Fletcher MS (Chair)	Eifiona Thomas Lane - Bangor University
Mark Isherwood MS	Paul Savage – South Caernarfon Creameries
Daniel Roberts – Cwmpas (Secretary)	Mike Smith – FirstMilk
Bethan Webber – Cwmpas	Sarah Germain - FareShare Cymru
Glenn Bowen – Cwmpas	Therese Angharad James
Dai Miles – Calon Wen	Lucie Taylor – Social Farms and Gardens
Holly Cookston-Williams – Down to Zero	Anita Cartwright
Katie Palmer – Welsh Veg in Schools	Alex Sims - Office of Jenny Rathbone MS
Martin Downes – Cwmpas	John Chown
Jon Parker – Food, Farming and Countryside Commission	Laura Griffiths – Harlech Foods
Wil Prichard – Clynderwen and Cardiganshire Farmers	David Roberts – Harlech Foods
Rhiannon Hardiman – Office of the Future Generations Commissioner	Daniel Wood
Rhiannon Edwards – RCTCBC	Phoebe Nicklin – Cynnal Cymru
	Karen Coombs – Welsh Government
	David Smith – Coops and Mutuels Wales
	Catherine Howell – Brecon Beacons NP
	Helga Dixon – Natural Resources Wales
	Samantha Minas – Social Firms Wales
	Rhys James – Caerphilly Council
	Don Thomas
	Gemma Roche-Clarke
	Cara Lewis – WLGA
	Judith Gregory
	Tom Okane
	Alex Cook
	Sarah Gould
	Siobhan Maderson

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Luke Fletcher MS opened the meeting, highlighting the central role of food in addressing key challenges in Wales. He emphasised the potential of co-operative models to deliver a positive and lasting impact in the food sector and wider economy.

2. Farmer Co-operatives: Lessons from a Proven Model

Speaker: Dai Miles, Director, Calon Wen

- Dai Miles presented the story of Calon Wen, a co-operative of 25 organic family farms established in 2000 with support from Cwmpas.
- Calon Wen has built a strong Welsh organic milk brand and supports all organic processing needs in Wales, while anchoring decision-making in local communities.

- Despite market and financial pressures, the co-operative has remained competitive, provided rural employment, and strengthened local economies.
 - Representatives from other major Welsh farmer co-operatives, including Clynderwen & Cardiganshire Farmers Ltd, FirstMilk, and South Caernarvonshire Creameries, also attended.
 - Discussion highlighted the strengths of farmer co-ops in pooling resources, managing risk, and retaining value locally through processing, branding, and direct sales.
 - Full presentation available on request.
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3. Community Growing: Local Solutions to Global Challenges

Speaker: Representative from *Down to Zero*

- Down to Zero is a community benefit society based in Rhondda Cynon Taf, supporting the transition to a low-carbon future through food production, agroforestry, and more.
 - Operates on two active sites in Pontyclun and Mountain Ash, co-delivering climate solutions with local people.
 - Their food hub, *Llysh Bocs*, distributes affordable, locally-grown produce, improving access to fresh food and supporting community food security.
 - The initiative supports biodiversity, tackles poverty and inequality, and fosters community resilience through participation and ownership.
 - Collaboration with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council was noted as an example of innovation and partnership working.
 - There was significant, productive discussion between Down to Zero, other community growing initiatives including a representative from Social Farms and Gardens, and the established farmer co-operatives. These discussions centred on the need to supply products that had demand from consumers, maximising the utility of land, developing supplier networks and financial sustainability.
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4. Welsh Veg in Schools Initiative

Speaker: Katie Palmer, Food Sense Wales

- Katie provided an update on the Welsh Veg in Schools initiative, which aims to increase the presence of Welsh-grown vegetables in school meals. The initiative contributes to food security and dietary health while supporting local growers.
- In his Future Generations Report, the Future Generations Commissioner urged all Welsh councils to commit to more children having more Welsh vegetables on their school dinners. Five additional councils have joined the programme, following the initial seven.
- Work is ongoing to establish a new co-operative entity to link growers with public procurement markets, reflecting the growing momentum behind co-operative food supply models.

5. Community-Led Food Innovation: Start Something Good Hackathons

Speaker: Martin Downes, Cwmpas

- Martin presented insights from the *Start Something Good Food Hackathons* held in Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf, and Caerphilly.
- These events brought together residents and organisations to develop grassroots-led food solutions. The sessions generated ideas in a collaborative way.
- Ideas included mentoring for volunteers, cooking and gardening hubs, food networks, an app for surplus food, and local food co-operatives.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of responsive support, peer learning, and strategic investment to scale these initiatives.
- Full presentation available on request.

6. Discussion, Key Themes and Closing Remarks

- The meeting underscored the democratic, collaborative nature of food co-operatives and their ability to deliver both social and economic value.
- Models presented offer solutions to urgent challenges including food poverty, public health, rural decline, and climate change.
- The work to develop these models was praised, but it was felt that it is important that this happens across Wales and that projects and efforts are joined-up and best practice is shared.
- A call was made for coordination between public bodies, large-scale farmer co-operatives, and grassroots growing initiatives to build a resilient, cohesive food system in Wales.

7. Next Steps

- Attendees were encouraged to continue cross-sector collaboration and explore opportunities for scaling co-operative and community-led models across Wales.
- Further discussions will be held at future meetings of the Cross-Party Group. Attendees and members will be informed of the next meeting date in due course.