

Canolfan Organig Cymru
Sefydliad y Gwyddorau Biolegol,
Amgylcheddol a Gwledig
Prifysgol Aberystwyth
Campws Gogerddan, Aberystwyth SY23 3EE



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Organic Centre Wales

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Written evidence on agricultural policy to the National Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee

Organic Centre Wales 17 April 2015

About Organic Centre Wales

Based at Aberystwyth University, the Organic Centre Wales (OCW) was established in 2000 as a focal point for the dissemination of information on organic food and farming to producers and other interested parties in Wales. It has since extended its focus to public education, public procurement, policy and strategy development, thus providing support to the whole of the organic community in Wales.

OCW is run by a partnership of three organisations actively involved in organic farming research and knowledge transfer in Wales: ADAS, The Organic Research Centre Elm Farm and Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences at Aberystwyth University. OCW core staff are responsible for the co-ordination of the different areas of activity, with the partners responsible for much of the delivery of services to producers and others.

OCW funding comes from the Welsh Government (WG) together with funds from the European Union EAFRD which provides the Better Organic Business Links Supply Chain Efficiencies project for the organic sector.

Organic Centre Wales welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee and to present oral evidence in the Senedd

Introduction

This evidence identifies the seven areas of agricultural policy we consider priorities for the organic sector in Wales. We have drawn on:

- Stakeholder workshops to identify priorities and future direction for the organic sector in Wales
- Ongoing dialogue with organic food and farming businesses in Wales as part of the Better Organic Business Links Project
- Our experience advising the Welsh Government on organic policy development over the last 15 years.



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Priorities

A clear policy framework for organic production and marketing in Wales

We welcome the new Glastir Organic Scheme, which provides financial support to organic producers and those in conversion in recognition of the environmental benefits that organic systems deliver. However we would welcome a more strategic approach backed by a new Organic Action Plan to:

- Set a clear vision and direction for the organic sector in Wales
- Identify clear priorities and actions
- Make links between Glastir Organic and wider food, environment and other policies, agendas and strategies including: the Welsh Government Rural Development Plan 2014 – 2020; Action Plan for the Food and Drink Industry 2014-2020; HCC Strategic action plan; sustainable production, healthy living and poverty alleviation
- Establish a clear structure for the implementation of the plan, for example reinstating the role of an organic sector manager in the Welsh Government
- Assist farmers in adapting to any changes to the EU organic regulations currently in negotiation, as well as to take advantage of new opportunities such as group certification for small producers.

Grow and develop the market for organic products from Wales

In a policy context the organic market will leverage investment in good husbandry/environmental delivery. It is not a policy goal its own right but is absolutely central to the success and growth of the sector and therefore the attainment of policy goals. Key priorities are:

- Continued support for a public information campaign on the benefits of organic food and farming
- A special emphasis on the beef/sheep sector, including more active promotion of organic red meat by HCC.
- Diversification of the markets, and the routes to market for organic products, including: Export markets, independent retailers, internet sales and direct marketing
- A public procurement policy that places a strong emphasis on sustainable and ethical production systems, including and especially organic, which contribute to meeting the sustainable procurement goals of the Welsh Government. It should build on the success of the Food for Life Catering Mark, to which many Welsh Institutions including Flintshire CC school meals services, most of our universities and the National Assembly of Wales have already committed. The Mark offers Bronze, Silver



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and Gold level accreditation to establish a pathway that encourages procurement of increasing proportions of ingredients that are produced organically, ethically and locally.

Development of Wales' infrastructure in the context of food and farming businesses

- Addressing the lack of value-adding processing facilities in Wales. The availability of local, organically certified registered slaughtering, cutting and packing facilities is a major barrier to the development of red meat and poultry enterprises and a significant barrier to the diversification of markets as described above. Poor transport infrastructure and a scaling up/ centralising of processing facilities are significant reasons for this.

Support programmes for organic producers and supply chain businesses

- The continuation of support structures and programmes such as Organic Centre Wales and Farming Connect are essential if the aims outlined in this submission are to be achieved.
- While Farming Connect has significantly benefited organic producers, the reintroduction of a programme/ strand that addresses the specific needs of organic farmers is a priority
- Support to organic supply chain businesses, currently provided through the Better Organic Business Links project, should be continued.

A strong research and development programme

- There are significant opportunities to support R&D programmes, particularly through Horizon 2020 and EIP groups
- The active participation of producers at every stage of the R&D cycle will ensure the allocation of scarce resources is prioritised effectively. Businesses that are actively involved in the process will be well placed to identify commercial opportunities and work with partners to fund the research and development required to bring products to market. Key areas include
 - Increasing efficiency of organic production systems
 - Enhancing the environmental benefits that organic systems deliver
 - Enhancing the delivery of eco-systems services
 - Identifying the potential contribution of Agro-ecological approaches to sustainability and food security



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- Increased emphasis on mixed farming systems and the benefits for agricultural diversification, production system and financial resilience, nutrient cycling and resource use efficiency.

Supporting small producers

- The contribution of small producers, typically but not exclusively mixed production systems including horticulture and poultry, is not fully recognized at present. Although small in physical area, many run significant businesses (a 3Ha market garden can turnover at least as much as a 100 Ha upland farm). They deliver many of the Welsh Government's key objectives; reduced reliance on subsidies, sustainable production, crop diversification, rural employment and increased value added through direct sales.
- The criteria used to exclude those for whom agriculture is not a significant part of their livelihoods from receiving subsidies need to change from physical size of the holding to alternative measures such as turnover. This approach is being proposed in the draft EU Regulation, although the current proposal to restrict size to a maximum of €15,000 per annum turnover may be too restrictive, and €25,000 pa may be more realistic

Strengthening links between food producers and communities

- Reconnecting farmers and growers with communities has many advantages including:
 - Public understanding of food and farming
 - Supporting the delivery of the Welsh Government Foundation Phase of the statutory curriculum for 3 to 7 year olds.
 - Supporting growing in schools and colleges.
 - Supporting short supply chains between primary producers and customers.
 - Improving the resilience of farmers and growers through direct sales.
 - Developing local food systems and entrepreneurial activity
 - Social cohesion
 - Healthy and outdoor activity
 - Improved understanding of the need for public support for food producers
- This can be achieved through a range of actions including:
 - Promoting Community Supported Agriculture
 - Involving producers in community growing/ allotment projects
 - Funding school visits to farms
 - Reviewing school education on food and farming

