

Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuals
24th February 2015
12.15 – 13.30
The Media Briefing Room
Allotments and Community Supported Agriculture

Assembly Members Present

Mick Antoniw (Chair)

Mark Isherwood

Secretariat

Alex Bird (Chair, Co-operatives and Mutuals Wales)

Speakers

Cllr Gareth Holden (Cardiff CC, Gabalfa) Nikki Giles (Flintshire CSA), Gerald Miles (Caerhys CSA in Pembrokeshire)

Guests

Helen Cunningham (Office of Jenny Rathbone AM) John Charles (Allensbank Allotments) Alun Nutt (Torfaen Allotments) Steve Warbeys (Leckwith Allotments) Terry Cooper (Forest Farm Allotments) Howard Lewis (ChangeAGents) Karen Wilkie (Co-op Party) and 5 others

Mick Antoniw AM (Chair) opened the meeting at 12.30, welcomed the guests and introduced the speakers.

Gareth Holden spoke about his role as the Cardiff Champion for Allotments and Growers His focus over the last year has been on allotments. Cardiff Allotment Holders Association has been revitalised, and the Council is working to support the local management of allotments across the city. There are currently 26 sites, of which 8 are locally managed.

Not all groups have the capacity to self-manage, so the Council is working to develop 5 levels of self-management from which sites can choose.

Gareth is keen to bring together allotments, leisure gardens and community gardens across the city into one network.

He also laid out a programme for Welsh Government, which would be supportive of allotment development.

As much allotment produce is thrown away when there are surpluses, legislating to allow the sale of excess produce would be helpful, as would legislation to enable other categories of public land to be used, such as parks and highways land such as verges.

Nikki Giles spoke about the development of Flintshire CSA, and of CSAs across the UK. There are now around 200 CSAs in England, and 6 in Wales. They provide a steady income for the producer, who is supported by the volunteer members who also share the risk with them. Most are on rented land, and a few are on existing farms, which have set some land aside for the CSA. They are typically 5 to 100 acres, and can work on land that is difficult to farm with machinery as much of the work can be done manually. Most are organic, but not all, and of those that are organic, not all bother with certification, as the members know the provenance anyway.

The CSA Wales Network launched on Feb 14th, and is aiming to help the movement grow in Wales. CSAs need some funding on start-up to pay for the employed producer in the period before crops are harvested. They also need to purchase equipment.

Nikki suggested a loan system for start-up CSAs would be something the Welsh Government could consider.

Gerald Miles spoke about his experiences. His farm had been organic for about 15 years before the CSA started. He had produced milk, but the farm-gate price dropped from 29p to 13p per litre in 2003 and he took the difficult decision to sell his herd and stop dairy production. This was an emotional time, as the herd had been farm bred for two generations.

In 2009 he saw a presentation by Nick Reeve on CSAs, and with the help of the St. Davids Eco City Group the CSA was established with 12 members. It is now up to 54.

The CSA has brought community spirit back to the farm. With the increase in mechanisation and consequent reduction in labour required, farming today can be a lonely business, and this, together with the sense of responsibility on one persons shoulders, can lead to depression and worse.

The community now has a close relationship with the farmer, and vice versa, and so the consumer is much more aware of food and how it is produced. They have built a cob oven for baking bread and pizzas, and have regular monthly working parties to till, weed and harvest. They now have WWOOF volunteers as well as international volunteers via the UNA youth programme.

Questions an comments from the floor:-

Nikki Giles said access to land is a problem. Many Councils are selling their tenanted farms without offering them to the community

Mark Isherwood AM asked if the Chair could write to the Minister to see if CSAs could be included in Agri-Environmental schemes

Cllr Gareth Holden said that Cardiff CC are looking at demand for CSA schemes in the city, and any groups interested should contact him at the Council.

There being no further questions, **Mick Antoniwi AM** closed the meeting at 13.25 and thanked everyone for attending.