

Rethinking Food in Wales

September 2017

What is your vision for the future of food in Wales and what needs to be done to achieve it?

1. Wales Environment Link (WEL) believes that sustainable management of Wales' food resources and environment will secure benefits for our communities, nature and the economy.
2. As well as products such as food and building materials, we need the natural environment, rich in wildlife, to provide services like clean water, healthy soils, flood alleviation, carbon sequestration, and the benefits to our wellbeing that contact with nature brings. In turn, these ecosystem services play a key role in supporting a prosperous rural economy.
3. Wales' first State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) has shown that Welsh ecosystems are not in a resilient state. Unsustainable (and in some cases a lack of) land and marine management practices, including food production practices, have gradually driven declines in marine and terrestrial biodiversity (including fish stocks), degraded our soils and continue to pollute our freshwaters and coastal areas. We need an approach to natural resource management that prevents further damage to the environment and restores healthy functionality.
4. Environmental stewardship by land managers is one key way to achieving this. In our sustainable land management vision for Wales, our vision is stated as "a Wales that manages its land sustainably, in ways that secure benefits for people, the environment and nature as well as an economic future for land managers, recognising the direct links between the health of the environment and the health of society¹".
5. Brexit offers a number of opportunities to rethink the future of food in Wales, with new policies on fisheries and agriculture being developed. It is critical that the UK Government and Welsh Government work together to ensure these policies increase the sustainability of our food production. Further detail on how sustainability can be enhanced is provided below.

¹ [A sustainable land management vision for Wales \(July 2017\)](#)

How can we rethink food so that we have:

Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards?

6. Increasingly, we understand that the way in which we manage our land for food production has wide-ranging and, at times, detrimental effects on other ecosystem services. Our vision is one that has nature at its heart because we understand the vitally important role that nature plays, both in enabling food production and by providing a range of other benefits which support and enrich our quality of life. This will ensure the full natural capital of our environment is balanced and optimised.

Ecosystem resilience

7. We believe that sustainable management practices must restore degraded ecosystems i.e combinations of nature and the natural resources they provide, as they are essential to human well-being, including the production of food and clean drinking water. Continued degradation puts all our futures at risk. There are some excellent [examples](#)² of nature-friendly farming in Wales, which show that high quality food production can be compatible with resilient ecosystems whilst being economically viable.
8. It is crucial for land managers and fishers to have incentives, guidance and training to make it easy for them to help nature, alongside producing sustainable commodities, including high quality food. We also need protections, in the form of strong legislation and policy, which make it unacceptable to harm nature. Resilient, functioning ecosystems are essential in supporting a prosperous rural economy.

Climate change

9. The production of food and other commodities, the recovery of nature, climate mitigation and adaptation are compatible. The land management sector will have a central and essential role in Wales' obligations under the Environment Act to reduce carbon emissions and reverse the loss of biodiversity. Our food system is a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions: we believe actions can be taken to minimise its emissions and play a central role in Wales' legal obligations to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. To achieve this, we need to reduce waste, transition to sustainable consumption and work along the whole supply chain. We also need to safeguard our natural carbon stores (soil, vegetation, blue carbon stores).

Sustainable fisheries

10. In order to realise the Wales Seafood Strategy vision of a "thriving, vibrant, safe, and sustainable seafood industry for Wales", it is critical that Welsh Government and UK Government work together to achieve this vision once the UK is no longer a member of the European Union. This means that the fisheries bill due in 2018 must ensure the following vital components of fisheries management for sustainable fishing and food production to be achieved:

² <http://www.highnaturevaluefarming.org.uk/casestudies-location/wales/>

- A legal requirement to fish below the fishing mortality associated with producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) by 2020 in order to restore stock biomass above the MSY level, and an ongoing commitment to apply the precautionary approach and ecosystem-based management. Fishing limits must also adhere to the best available scientific advice from ICES and other scientific organisations.
 - Allow for the creation and effective management of an Ecologically Coherent Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). These need to be well managed to achieve each MPA's conservation objectives, with fishing and other maritime activities restricted where they could be damaging. Through an ecologically coherent network, fisheries will in turn be enhanced.
 - Delivery of an effective discard ban which includes full documentation and control of total catches.
 - Mechanisms to work with neighbouring countries in order to achieve agreed policy objectives for managing shared fish stocks.
 - Measures to ensure compliance and high levels of confidence in the achievement of domestic and international objectives, including combatting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing.
 - Improvements in spatial management measures, gear selectivity and other technical measures, including those to protect vulnerable species and deep sea ecosystems.
 - Investment to underpin key operational systems such as data collection, monitoring and enforcement.
11. Development and implementation of new fisheries laws should also include clear processes for the engagement of stakeholders, involving scientists, NGOs and industry representatives with a wide range of perspectives, in line with the UK's international commitments under the Aarhus Convention.
12. It is also imperative that Wales's public bodies, including the Welsh Government, lead by example by ensuring that their procurement of fish is sustainably sourced. Such action will support the delivery of a Resilient and Globally Responsible Wales as a requirement under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. We refer you to the Marine Conservation Society's [Good Fish Guide](#), which comprises a ratings system that enables UK consumers to make the most sustainable seafood choices.

New markets to drive sustainable practices

13. In order for land and marine management practices to shift towards a longer-term, ecologically and economically sustainable system (capable of delivering for wider societal need), new economic approaches and mechanisms will be required, along with new market systems for the products of sustainable management. Current examples include the Payment for Ecosystems Services model³ and linking consumers more directly with food production through schemes like Community Supported Agriculture.⁴ Government, industry and corporate backing for these emerging market systems will help to prevent them from becoming marginalised and trivialised. The Welsh Government and public bodies should lead by example by prioritising procurement of sustainably sourced and produced food.

³ <http://ecosystemsknowledge.net/resources/tools-guidelines/pes>

⁴ <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/what-is-csa/>

14. It is important that land managers and fishers receive a fair share of the profit generated in the supply chain, creating more resilient food businesses. The development of sustainable/nature-friendly certification schemes can be a positive way to encourage sustainable practices that also support food producers in being paid a fair price for their produce, as it provides transparency about the true cost of food production. It is essential that certification schemes are independently audited to ensure the standards of certification are met, and sustainable objectives are achieved.

Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable?

15. Globally, enough food is produced to feed everyone, and yet billions are still malnourished: globally around 795 million are hungry⁵, with close to 2 billion suffering from micronutrient deficiency⁶ and 2.2 billion classified as being overweight or obese⁷. According to the 2016 Wales Health Survey 60% of Welsh adults are overweight with a quarter being classified as obese.
16. Food security is a complex issue - poverty, inequality, utilisation and lack of access to nutritious food, all play a role. Although there is no simple solution, it is clear that we need better, more joined up policies on food, food production and harvesting, resource management and public health. We need to focus our attention, not on producing more now, but improving access to good food, reducing food waste throughout the chain of production and safeguarding the natural resources on which production depends, so that we are able to meet the needs of future generations better.
17. Whilst future land and marine management should seek to provide and benefit from a diversity of sustainably produced commodities, food production should also seek to diversify (in approach and produce) where this helps contribute to sustainable development and well-being. For example, organic production can have benefits for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. Outside the organic sector, crop and livestock diversification is also important for sustainable, resilient food production.
18. Community food production has been growing in recent years, with 300 community food co-ops running across Wales⁸ from places such as schools, allotments, community centres, church halls, workplaces and many other different venues. They increase the value society places on food, promote wider understanding of production and deliver health and well-being benefits.
19. Community food production needs to be tied into the same ecological principles as more commercial farming, but with a greater focus on public understanding. Given the significant role that markets have in influencing land and marine management, it is vital to have informed consumers whose decisions about food and other commodities reward and drive sustainable production, including beyond Wales. As previously mentioned, the Community

⁵ World Hunger 2017 <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/>; FAO, The state of food insecurity in the world 2012. Rome: FAO, 2012, p8. www.fao.org/docrep/016/i3027e/i3027e00.htm

⁶ FAO (2011) Thompson, B. Amoroso, L. Combating Micronutrient Deficiencies: Food Based Approaches <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am027e/am027e.pdf>

⁷ N Eng J Med 2017, Health Effects of Overweight and Obesity in 195 Countries over 25 Years <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1614362>

⁸ <http://www.foodcoopsales.org.uk/>

Supported Agriculture model aims to support closer links between consumers and food producers, with the aim of sharing risks and rewards, and increasing consumer knowledge about food production.

20. Whilst WEL supports the idea of more local or community food growing, it is important to remember that “local” does not necessary equal “more sustainable”. Supporting local producers can be a positive step, but the method of food production in terms of energy use, pollution impacts, waste and impacts on wildlife are all important factors in the overall sustainability of food production.
21. There is still a lot of confusion as to what “local” means. It does not define how something is produced, as you can have a local intensive chicken farm alongside a local organic one. There is also no agreed definition as to what area constitutes local; for some it is a 5 mile radius and for others it equates to a region or even a national boundary. Wales can’t produce all the food it eats: some products like avocados, tropical fruit or even chocolate and coffee won’t grow in Wales, and communities all over the world rely on exporting food, whilst many Welsh producers rely on exporting their produce.
22. The Welsh Government should promote greater transparency and consult on a national definition on what is and is not meant by local food for Wales.

An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs?

23. Current land use policies prioritise some land uses over others e.g. providing support for cereals, but not horticulture, and for sheep, but not poultry. This has resulted in inequity of regulation and income as well as stifling innovation in some sectors. Our vision is to remove this artificial separation of land uses and replace it with a system that insists on the same requirements for sustainability from all land managers and the same opportunities for investment for all sectors. This will be fairer to land and marine managers and provide resilience for both environment and society.

An internationally renowned destination for food lovers?

24. Whilst this is not WEL’s area of expertise, we believe that an international reputation for good food in Wales should include a reputation for sustainably produced food, with high environmental and animal welfare standards. Marketing should promote this aspect of Welsh food.

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is a respected intermediary body connecting the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Our vision is a healthy, sustainably managed environment and countryside with safeguarded heritage in which the people of Wales and future generations can prosper.

This position statement represents the consensus view of a group of WEL members working in this specialist area. Members may also produce information individually in order to raise more detailed issues that are important to their particular organisation.



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