

Food Poverty Alliance Wales (FPAW) submission to Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee consultation 'Rethinking food in Wales'

Introduction

The Food Poverty Alliance Wales (FPAW) was set up in response to the outcomes of a Food Poverty Think Tank hosted by the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales in April 2015. The Alliance follows the principal that “food poverty in Wales is unacceptable”. Food poverty means the inability to afford, or have access to foods which make up a socially and culturally acceptable healthy diet.

Access to nutritious and healthy food is a fundamental part of life. Yet, increasingly, for many people in the UK, providing food for themselves and their families is challenging due to inadequate incomes and the rising cost of living. In 2016-17 Trussell Trust food banks in Wales provided 95,190 Welsh people, including 34,803 children, with three days of emergency food.ⁱ This provides an underestimate of the number of people going hungry in Wales due to a lack of data from other emergency food aid providers and food bank users being only a small group of the wider food insecure population. The stigma of accessing emergency food aid helps to explain why this is usually a “strategy of last resort” for people, with many employing other coping mechanisms or preferring to go hungry instead.ⁱⁱ

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

FPAW believes that food poverty in Wales is unacceptable. We recognise that Welsh Government has made some progress in trying to tackle food poverty, for example:

- including an action to ‘improve access and affordability of food for all, providing choices that contribute to a healthy balanced diet, particularly in deprived communities’ in the Towards Sustainable Growth Action Plan,ⁱⁱⁱ
- setting up the FPAW;
- including 3 questions on food insecurity in the National Survey for Wales;
- expanding provision to tackle school holiday hunger through the WLGA’s food and fun School Holiday enrichment programme.^{iv}

However, given the fact that the UK has some of the highest levels of food insecurity in the developed world^v and 30% of Welsh children live in relative income poverty^{vi}, this is simply not enough.

The revision of the “Towards Sustainable Growth” action plan and new obligations for public bodies under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, together with mounting pressure on consumers as a result of poor wage growth and inflation; provides an opportune moment for all sectors to come together to tackle food poverty in Wales. To this end, the FPAW has been reviewing Scottish Governments approach and they aim to:

1. Eradicate the need for food banks from Scotland and shift from delivering food charity to food justice where everyone has access to healthy affordable, nutritious food
2. Build a community food movement that promotes the social value of food and supports people at risk of poverty in dignified settings where they can access wider community based activities and support.

To achieve this, the Scottish Government has developed a “Fair Food Fund” of £1m for 2016/17-2017/18 to support projects that give people opportunities to access fresh, healthy food.

The FPAW would like to see the following points incorporated into any future vision for Food and Drink in Wales:

- routinely measuring household food insecurity to understand the full scale of the problem, who is at risk, and identify policy solutions;
- Support for an independent inquiry into childhood food insecurity which hears directly from children;
- A menu of policy measures to tackle the problem including food provision in school holidays, increasing uptake and value of Healthy Start, employment opportunities that offer secure, well paid work, addressing skills gaps in the food industry, improving access to welfare rights advocacy and advice and improving access to the Discretionary Assistance Fund.

In addition, the former Minister for Natural Resources and former Deputy Minister for Farming and Food asked the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) to provide advice on whether the Welsh Government’s Food Strategy was sufficiently comprehensive and up to date. The PPIW worked with two of the UK’s leading experts on food policy - Professor Terry Marsden, Sustainable Places Research Institute and Professor Kevin Morgan, School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University.

Their report^{vii} argued that in recent years there has been growing recognition of the relevance of food policy to wider policy goals and to well-being. They recognised, for example, increasing concern about food poverty, poor diet and the reduction in the number of independent farm businesses. They argued that these factors made a comprehensive and holistic approach to food policy more important than ever requiring a clear vision backed by action to secure more healthy and sustainable diets for all and monitoring of progress in achieving this.

The report argues that the link to well-being means that food needs to be at the centre of public policy. It recommends:

- providing support for farmers to produce less intensive, more sustainable, and higher food quality products through more diversified sets of supply chains;
- placing sustainable diets at the heart of food and nutritional policy by adopting successful public health interventions such as Food for Life and bolstering public sector food procurement and catering provision;
- progressing research and development on sustainable production and consumption systems;
- supporting the community food sector;
- monitoring food policy outcomes in line with the Well-being of Future Generation Act goals;
- creating a full Welsh Government Cabinet Minister for Food; and creating an active network of food sector Partnership Boards

How can we rethink food so that we have:

Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable;

Many of the initiatives that Welsh Government initiated to support access to healthy affordable food are no longer gaining Welsh Government core support (for example the Rural Regeneration Unit's fruit and veg co-op scheme and more recently the impending loss of Community First teams which support communities vulnerable to food insecurity).

The Nutrition Skills for Life™ training programme, funded by Welsh Government since 2006, has been embedded into many Communities First cluster work plans across Wales in the past decade. It aims to build community capacity to support healthy eating, a key determinant of health and wellbeing. This is achieved through training community workers to pass on evidence based nutrition messages to communities that they work with and providing support for the development of community nutrition initiatives. Good nutrition and healthy weight is essential to mitigate against the risk of child and adult obesity and other chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, osteoarthritis and depression. Good health enhances quality of life, increases capacity for learning, strengthens families and communities and improves workforce productivity.^{viii} The phasing out of Communities First has resulted in a significant loss of trained staff and reduced capacity to deliver community food and nutrition initiatives such as accredited nutrition courses, practical food skills courses (Get Cooking and Come and Cook/Dewch i Goginio) and the structured weight management programme Foodwise for Life. It will result in reduced activity, for example, at Level 1 of the All Wales Obesity Pathway^x at a time when Welsh Government has committed to developing a national obesity strategy.^x The withdrawal of these programmes from deprived areas will impact on the health and wellbeing of present and future generations, particularly our most vulnerable citizens in Wales, and will widen diet related inequalities in health.

The role of the third sector in helping to address the availability and accessibility of food needs to be recognised. For example, FareShare Cymru works with over 200 charities and community organisations across South Wales and in 2016-17 redistributed enough food to contribute to over 1.5 million meals to organisations that help feed people in need. It is estimated that this food saved the third sector circa £500,000 which many of the organisations are able to divert back into their vital frontline services or enable them to continue to provide their food services.

Surplus food is only part of the solution, but the impact that FareShare Cymru and its community food members (CFMs) have is important to recognise. Research^{xi} by NatCen for FareShare UK highlights the key improvements to the physical and mental well-being of clients who are able to access a more nutritious and balanced diet as a result of Fareshare food distribution to CFMs:

- 59% of clients say they eat more fruit and vegetables since accessing the CFM
- 53% of clients say their physical strength has increased since getting food at the CFM
- 52% say that their energy levels have increased
- 87% say that eating a meal at the service has a positive impact on how they feel
- 92% say that being able to have a meal at the service helps them 'face the day ahead'
- 82% say it makes them feel part of a community
- 29% say that what they enjoy most about eating at the CFM is socialising.

An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs;

There is a need to consider training and skills development for the whole of the food industry, including the third sector organisations that operate in this area. Third sector organisations offer work placements and volunteering opportunities as well as training, often for people who are long-term unemployed. Funded training for volunteers would help improve their skills assisting them in entering the food industry as a paid employees.

Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards; and

Any future vision of food and drink in Wales should be based on the principles and goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales (2015) Act and be in line with targets and goals laid out in other strategies. There is no national indicator associated with the Act associated directly to food.

Sustainably produced food should mean that food waste is minimised. Any plans related to the future for food and drink in Wales should be developed in line with the waste hierarchy and the targets and ambitions laid out in the Welsh Governments Towards Zero Waste Strategy and supporting plans including waste prevention.

Food and drink businesses need to be encouraged to ensure that they are implementing the waste hierarchy. Waste prevention saves resources and money which can be reinvested in the food business. Included in this is the role of surplus food redistribution in ensuring that no good food is wasted. During 2016-17 FareShare Cymru redistributed over 460 tonnes of surplus food to organisations that help feed people in need. Reducing food waste has further environmental benefits. Ensuring that the maximum use is made of the food produced reduces the need to produce more decreasing water use, fertilizer and pesticide use and decreasing transportation.

Procurement is one of the best levers to direct public spending to sustainable choices, and to ensure a market for the business which is transitioning to sustainable production. Recommendations for improvements to public food provision, such as in hospitals and schools, can be found in the Institute of Welsh Affairs paper 'Good Food for All'.^{xii}

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/#fy-2016-2017>

ⁱⁱ J. Perry, M. Williams, T. Sefton & M. Haddad (2014) "Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK" <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/emergency-use-only-understanding-and-reducing-the-use-of-food-banks-in-the-uk-335731>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140611-action-plan-for-food-and-drink-en.pdf>

^{iv} <http://wlga.wales/food-and-fun>

^v https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IWP_2017_09.pdf Prevalence & Correlates of food insecurity among children across the globe UNICEF 2017

^{vi} <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/households-below-average-income/?lang=en>

^{vii} <http://ppi.wales.gov.uk/files/2016/06/PPIW-Report-Food-Policy-as-Public-Policy.pdf>

^{viii} WHO (2014) Health in all policies: Helsinki statement. Framework for country action.

^{ix} Welsh Government (2010) All Wales Obesity Pathway

^x Welsh Government (2017) Public Health (Wales) Bill

^{xi} <http://www.fareshare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/More-Than-Meals-Exec-Summary-FINAL.pdf>

^{xii} Institute of Welsh Affairs – The Senedd Papers#3 Good Food for All http://www.iwa.wales/click/wp-content/uploads/SeneddPaper3_v3.pdf