

A Welsh Food System Fit For Future Generations

Executive summary of a report by Sustainable Places Research Institute at Cardiff University, commissioned by WWF Cymru

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How to deliver healthy, nutritious food for all in the face of shrinking resources and a growing population, while addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, is a major challenge both globally and for Wales. A raft of recent reports have highlighted the need for food system change.¹ We have an opportunity in Wales to design a food system that works hand-in-hand with nature and truly delivers well-being for future generations.

The Welsh food system forms part of a wider, international system, with much of our food economy integrated into UK-wide networks. This is recognised throughout the report, but the report's focus is on those issues where Wales has devolved authority to act. The Well-being of Future Generations Act, in particular, gives us the opportunity to adopt a leading role in the UK in developing food policies, within the wider UK context of Brexit and the severe challenges the UK food system faces.

Our food system encompasses a wide range of activities from farm to fork. A supply chain of producers, manufacturers, processors and retailers operates locally and globally, with consumers enjoying products from across the world as well as from local food businesses. The food



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system is a vital component of our economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being. It feeds us, provides jobs, and supports communities and culture.

But there are systematic problems that need addressing urgently too. Many people in Wales cannot afford access to a healthy diet. The food system has negative impacts on the environment, public health and economic well-being. This hinders our ability to prosper as a nation both now and in the future.



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Wales urgently needs to create an integrated, sustainable and just food system fit for future generations.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act provides the vision and levers needed to achieve this transformation. It can facilitate a more joined-up approach across the food system, for example by linking agricultural policy with health policy, and connecting the food we produce in Wales with the food we consume.

The food sector provides an ideal opportunity to demonstrate how a systems approach can deliver a wide range of benefits under each of the Act's seven well-being goals and apply the sustainable development principle as set out in the Act. With the right policies in place, re-localising our food production and consumption and promoting shorter supply chains can generate multiple benefits for the local economy, environment, health and well-being.

Affordability and diets:

recourse to food banks is rising, with The Trussell Trust network providing 113,373 three-day emergency food supplies in Wales in 2018-2019.ⁱⁱ One in five of people in Wales worry about running out of food due to lack of funds according to the Food Standards Agency,ⁱⁱⁱ and 160,000 children in Wales live in households for whom a healthy diet is increasingly unaffordable.^{iv} Meanwhile, rising rates of obesity cost the health service £73 million per year.^v 28% of children are obese, while 94% don't eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Environmental impacts:

The Welsh government has declared a climate and nature emergency. Wales's first *State of Natural Resources* report^{vi} concluded that none of Wales's ecosystems have all the attributes required for resilience. Wales's wildlife continues to decline according to the *State of Nature 2019* report^{vii}, with the latest findings showing that one in six species are at risk of extinction.^{viii} Unsustainable agricultural management is the single largest driver of biodiversity decline,^{ix} while agriculture accounts for 12% of Welsh greenhouse gas emissions.^x Our food consumption also has global impacts, with palm oil in packaged foods and soya grown to feed livestock driving deforestation.^{xi}

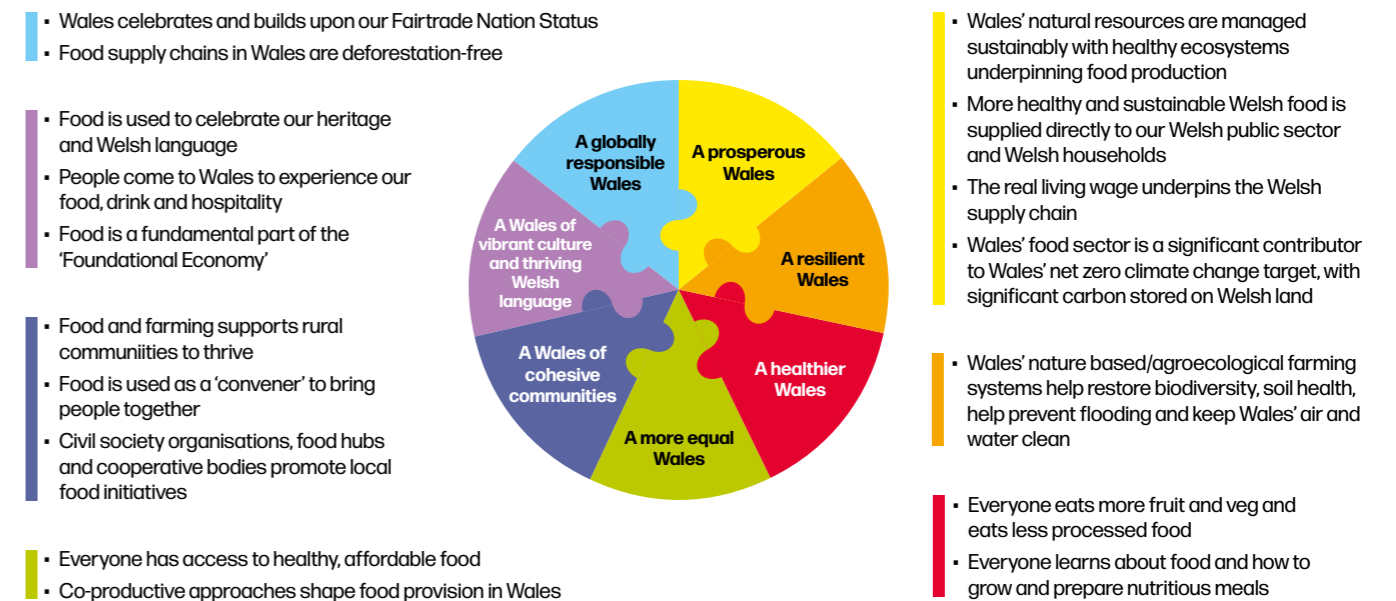
Economic well-being:

Many working in the food industry receive low pay and many farmers are highly dependent upon current EU subsidies. The uncertainty of post-Brexit payment support and the potential impacts of Brexit on UK export markets make this a deeply concerning time for many in the food industry.

An integrated approach to food could contribute to each of the seven goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act:



Figure A: Outcomes of a Food System Fit for Future Generations



Note: This infographic was originally developed by Food Policy and Practice Wales. It has been slightly adapted for the purposes of this report.

Developing a food system strategy for Wales

To deliver a food system fit for future generations, with all the benefits this will bring, the Welsh government needs to develop a food system strategy for Wales. Drawing on recent international reports, scientific evidence and policy approaches in the UK and the EU, and current food policies and legislative requirements in Wales, we recommend three major components in developing this strategy:

1. Co-creating a new vision for Welsh food, based around 10 key interlinked themes

The 10 key interlinked themes

1. Agroecological farming
2. Agroecological farming skills
3. Horticulture promotion
4. Local food procurement
5. Sustainable food hubs
6. Food cooperatives
7. Digital markets
8. Sustainable dietary guidelines
9. Quality food standards
10. Promote Welsh food in a British Isles Context



In building the local supply of healthy, sustainable and accessible food, Wales's food and farming sector should regenerate its ecological foundation, restoring nature to provide the many functions and services that farmers and society rely on. We recommend that Wales makes this transformation to an agroecological farming region by 2030.

Agroecology: Agroecology applies ecological concepts and principles to food production practices, managing interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment for food security and nutrition. For example, an agroecological approach to soil health would be one which focuses upon natural inputs and their retention. The diversity of practices within an agroecological system creates a more robust and resilient system that is less vulnerable to international market dynamics.

Farming using agroecological principles will require a comprehensive package of training and skills. Welsh government should support the setup of regional training centres to drive collaboration and knowledge exchange, drawing upon the wealth of knowledge of farmers, businesses, and further and higher educational institutions. Training and business advice, as well as widening access to land, are also needed to increase small-scale horticultural production in Wales.

Local and regional public procurement - for example in schools, hospitals and council offices - can help create markets for local food businesses. Public Service Board Well-being Plans should include public value criteria around environmental, welfare and nutritional standards in food production.

A new food vision for Wales should centre around re-localising the food system, restoring environmental, social and human capital to strengthen food security and capture more value locally. It should look at what we can sustainably produce in Wales, and tailor this to consumer demand and market opportunities. This vision needs to be co-produced between government, farmers, food businesses and other stakeholders including, importantly, the public through new participatory approaches at local, regional and national levels.



2. Infrastructures: rebuilding sustainable food provision

Food infrastructures need rebuilding. To support local supply chains and rebalance the distribution of power, infrastructure is needed in towns and the countryside to link food producers to consumers in more diverse ways. This means more sites for food markets, community retailers and food processors, investment in food cooperatives and the development of a network of food hubs that aggregate and distribute local food. Local authorities should be required to make plans for developing food hubs, which could facilitate local and regional provisioning and procurement for the public sector as well as private buyers.

Wales should embrace and develop digital food markets and supply chains that link consumers with producers and food hubs. Increasing citizen ownership and involvement in a more localised food system can improve community cohesion as well as help shape what is produced and how. These re-localised infrastructures will also allow retailers to stock more local food produced through agroecological based farming practices.



3. Delivery mechanisms

To realise the new food vision for Wales and build the necessary food infrastructure, an integrated set of policies and funding mechanisms need to be developed. Public Service Board Well-being Plans and Well-being Assessments, Natural Resources Wales's Area Statements and the school curriculum should be key vehicles to deliver sustainable food production and consumption.

A new Wales Food Commission should be established to oversee the delivery of the food system strategy, comprising the Future Generations Commissioner, Area Statement leads, education and public health boards, Welsh government leads on food policy (including agriculture, procurement, health and social care) and food practitioners (including community-based organisations and environmental NGOs). We also recommend creating a National Universal Food Framework to ensure all Welsh people have the right to access healthy food.



Next steps

This report proposes a radical reconfiguring and realignment of food policy in Wales. We hope it provides ideas for immediate action as well as further discussion and research. We are keen to engage with stakeholders to identify areas of common ground and explore differences to help create a food system in Wales fit for future generations.

- i. Experts agree that there needs to be "a radical rethink of business models, food systems, civil society involvement, and national and international governance" to address the interlinked crises of obesity ([The Lancet Commission on Obesity, 2019](#)), undernutrition, poverty ([Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, 2018](#)), climate change ([IPCC 2019 Climate Change and Land](#)) and ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss ([State of Nature 2019; IPBES 2019, Global Assessment Report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#)).
- ii. The Trussell Trust, [End of Year Stats](#), accessed January 2020
- iii. Food Standards Agency, [Food Security in Wales](#), March 2018
- iv. The Food Foundation, [Affordability of the UK's Eatwell Guide](#), September 2018
- v. Public Health Wales, [The case for action on obesity in Wales](#), 2018
- vi. Natural Resources Wales, [The State of Natural Resources report](#), 2016
- vii. The National Biodiversity Network, [State of Nature Report](#), 2019
- viii. The National Biodiversity Network, [State of Nature Report](#), 2019
- ix. The National Biodiversity Network, [State of Nature Report](#), 2019
- x. National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory, [Greenhouse Gas Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland: 1990-2016](#), June 2018
- xi. WWF, [Risky Business](#), October 2017