

Summary:

We are at a crossroads in the way we feed ourselves as a nation. The way we produce our food and the way that we consume it in the future will play a major part in determining how successful we are in living up to the unprecedented challenges that face us in terms of the climate change emergency and biodiversity loss. The reality is that food production defines the relationship between our countryside and nature. Agriculture alone is responsible for 16% of Wales' total greenhouse gas emissions and in recent decades we have witnessed a devastating decline in the population and diversity of life in our countryside, rivers and seas.

The appointment of the Minister for Climate Change and the Deputy Minister for Climate Change is a significant and very welcome step in recognising the scale and urgency of the challenges facing us. It is concerning though that there is no direct mention of food and farming in the Ministers' letter dated 30th of July 2021, on Welsh Government Priorities with respect to Climate Change. Food is such a fundamental issue that responsibilities straddle many departments of government, but in terms of climate change and the environment in general it sits right at the top of the global agenda with the clear consensus that we cannot begin to meet the challenges that confront us without radical change in the way we feed ourselves. It therefore has to be high amongst our priorities in Wales if our response is to be both effective and credible.

Context:

When it comes to systems that have to change to create a regenerative future, food is ground zero. In Wales this is a transition in which important green shoots have already emerged, a massive amount of work and research has been done and there is a substantial bank of intellectual and experiential capital to draw from. The current context of the nature and climate emergencies, the spiralling costs and suffering caused by diet related disease and food inequality leave us at a crossroads that is globally recognised.

We appreciate that a diverse and resilient food system requires a mix of domestic production and opportunities for trade. However, the question for us in Wales is do we have the confidence, creativity and will to make the radical changes that are urgently needed to the existing system in order to be truly transformative, build resilience and avoid food-as-usual practices? To do this we need to acknowledge and understand the reality of the current food system which is that what appears cheap actually creates vast unsustainable costs elsewhere in terms of damage to the environment and food being one of the biggest drivers of NHS spending as a result of escalating diet related disease.

Relevance to the Committee:

Our food system is at risk from a changing climate. It also directly contributes towards climate change, with agriculture contributing around 16% of Wales' total greenhouse gas emissions. Based on UK data, food manufacture, transport and retail emissions account for another

5.5%. Furthermore, unsustainable land use is one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss, with more than 80% of Wales' land utilised for agriculture. Crucially, our land and our sea is our biggest natural defence against climate change and it could be our biggest ally in restoring nature. For example setting catch limits which enable fish stocks to be restored and maintained above biomass levels that deliver the Maximum Sustainable Yield is crucial.

It is vital that we accompany measures intended to steer farmers away from practices damaging to the environment, with a coherent vision of an economic context to underpin that change. In that respect we would ask that the committee specifically examines the role of Welsh Government in the following:

1. Agriculture (Wales) Bill

The Legislative Programme confirmed that the Government plans to bring an Agriculture bill to the Senedd in this Senedd year. Whilst this sits in the Department for Rural Affairs, it is clearly of huge significance to climate and biodiversity and therefore must also be a priority for both the Climate Change Ministers and this committee. If not, there is a danger of siloed and incoherent policy making from Welsh Government as a whole. This critical piece of legislation will shape our landscapes, ecosystems and rural communities for many years to come. We see ecological resilience, food production and the long-term viability of farming in Wales as interdependent. For example, a healthy environment underpins food production itself. Crucially, the Agriculture Bill must respond to the triple challenge of delivering high quality sustainable affordable food whilst restoring nature and getting to carbon net zero. Given the wide scope of the Bill, we strongly recommend that the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee makes scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill a key priority for 2021/22. Scrutiny of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme, which is likely to be the main vehicle for agricultural support following the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme and associated agri-environment schemes should also feature prominently within both Committees' work programme.

2. Community Food Strategy

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to a Community Food Strategy which FPAC welcomes as a vital opportunity to coordinate food policy across all areas of government including health, education, climate change and the economy – an approach we are seeing successfully unfold in Wales through an evolving network of Sustainable Food Partnerships¹. It is our view that the substantial transformations in the food system we need to make our food supply more resilient and to meet the challenges in all these areas also offer enormous opportunities to transform local economies from the ground up, building food democracy and making a real difference in addressing structural inequalities in Welsh communities. We feel Welsh Government should set ambitious targets for Wales to produce and supply a growing proportion of its own food - where this makes sense within environmental parameters – and to reduce food waste.

3. Public procurement and routes to market

The committee will be aware of the substantial work going on across Wales in respect of the foundational economy and the potential to generate and democratise wealth at a local level. Public spending is an essential element in this effort and also has the potential to be transformative in the food system by directing spending in ways that address policy objectives on

¹ There are 8 areas across Wales that have or are developing cross sector Sustainable Food Partnerships supported by Food Sense Wales and the Sustainable Food Places Network. Food Cardiff has recently been awarded Silver Sustainable Food Places status – one of only 4 places in the UK

climate, biodiversity, health and education partly at least through prioritising social value in the procurement process. Driving economic activity through public contracts presents the chance to underpin investment, stimulate both more diverse primary production (in horticulture for example) and drive added value secondary production in the local economy. In helping to underwrite risk and give confidence in this way the same supply chains, building local infrastructure (food hubs, food partnerships, food processing, community supported agriculture etc.) and cooperative working models that emerge can facilitate shorter supply routes to the public and bring new opportunities in the private sector marketplace.

The Ministers' letter highlights the Circular Economy and reducing waste as a priority. Short supply chains in the food industry can play a key role in this. Veg box schemes, farmers markets and other direct sales models can reduce food waste (due to selling fresher) and packaging and make returning and reusing packaging much easier. Farming practices are also crucial with agroecological systems minimising the use of external inputs (such as artificial fertilizers and pesticides) by integrating crop and animal systems to make efficient use of natural resources for pest control and fertilizer².

4. Growing Horticulture

We have an enormous opportunity to grow the horticulture sector in Wales and a global responsibility to do so. Currently Wales only produces one quarter of a portion of Veg per person per day on 0.2% of land, but there is potential to increase that dramatically. A growing proportion of the UK's fruit and veg supply is increasingly dependent on climate-vulnerable countries and the UK's supply of fruit and vegetables from countries likely to face high, or extremely high, levels of water scarcity in the near future increased from 40.6% to 53.7% between 1987 and 2013 (Peas Please 2020).

In addition, research suggests that increasing intake to five-a-day (whilst reducing meat and sugar consumption) would lead to significant health and environmental benefits. It would contribute 10-31% to the Climate Change Committee target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, land use and peatlands by 2050 (SHEFS 2020)

Market gardening can create significant employment opportunities from relatively small areas of land, across the UK horticulture has a much higher per hectare employment than other forms of agriculture; 0.23 FTE/ha compared to 0.028 average; with small scale agroecological vegetable & mixed farms even higher. A study of 69 agroecological farms of 20 ha or less, the majority of which included commercial horticulture, showed an average of 3.2 FTE/ha. It also showed that small diverse mixed farms typically deliver more environmental, social and economic benefits per unit area compared to larger monoculture farm³.

5. Secondary production and retention of value

The need to realise and retain value within Wales and its communities is a pressing issue closely linked to Carbon emissions. Increasingly access to processing in meat (especially abattoirs) and dairy is a barrier to establishing local supply chains, creativity and enterprise in local food

² IPES-Food (2016) 'From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems', International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems. Available at: www.ipes-food.org

³ Laughton, R. (2017) *A Matter of Scale: A study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (20 ha and less)*. Landworkers' Alliance and Centre for Agroecology, Coventry University available at: <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/matterofscale.pdf>

production with control of this part of the food chain resting in fewer and fewer hands and leading to additional carbon emissions through unnecessary food miles. The solution to this lies in cooperation and community owned infrastructure with Welsh Government playing a key role in facilitation and economic support. Government should also monitor and set targets for Carbon emissions across the whole of the food system, not just for agriculture⁴

About Food Policy Alliance Cymru:

Food Policy Alliance Cymru is a coalition of organisations and stakeholders building and promoting a collective vision for the Welsh food system. Through collaboration, engagement and research the Alliance aims to:

- Co-produce a vision for a food system in Wales that connects production, supply and consumption and gives equal consideration to the health and wellbeing of people and nature.
- Advocate for policy change to address the climate and ecological emergencies, the public health crisis and the rise in food insecurity.
- Ensure Wales is linked to UK policy, research opportunities and the broader Global system.

The Following member organisations of FPAC have contributed to this response:

- [Food Sense Wales](#)
- [Food, Faming and Countryside Commission](#)
- [Landworkers Alliance Cymru](#)
- [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#)
- [Social Farms & Gardens](#)
- [Sustainable Food Places](#)
- [Urban Agriculture consortium](#)
- [WWF Cymru](#)
- Simon Wright, Wright's Food Emporium and one of the founding member of the Wales Independent Restaurant Collective (WIRC)

You can also read the Manifesto that Food Policy Alliance Cymru prepared before the 2021 Senedd Elections [here](#).

For further details, please contact [Katie Palmer](#), Programme Manager at Food Sense Wales and one of the founding members of Food Policy Alliance Cymru.

⁴ ⁴ About 21-37% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are attributable to the food system according to the IPPC report on Climate Change. These are from agriculture and land use, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail and consumption.