

RFW 35

Ymateb gan : Ffederasiwn Ffermydd Dinesig a Gerddi Cymunedol
Evidence from : Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) is a charity that supports, promotes and represents the community growing movement in the UK. In Wales, we run three projects aimed at increasing and supporting the community growing sector; Tyfu Fyny is funded by Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 and Community Land Advisory Service Cymru and Growing Together are funded by BLF Cymru.

This response is based on the work of FCFCG in Wales since 2008. FCFCG has worked with over 600 established or emerging community growing projects in that time, supporting them to develop and sustain themselves and responding to the demands, needs and common concerns that these projects share.

The community growing sector in Wales is creating solutions to local, national and global issues. Each project is unique and develops to meet the needs of local people and environments. Through growing food, managing greenspaces and providing social and educational opportunities they offer a range of benefits including an increase in health and wellbeing, biodiversity, productive and sustainably managed green spaces and access to locally grown food.

Inquiry Questions

1. Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable;

1.1 To address the shortfall of healthy food available we need to ensure that there is increased production of fruit and vegetables in Wales. To achieve this a variety of strategies must be employed to create a resilient food system. This needs to include a reformed approach at all levels of the system from consumer, retail, distribution and producers.

1.2 To maximise the benefits to local people and economies production should take place as close to communities as possible so that producers can meet local demand and consumers are able to understand and support producers and the challenges they face.

Relationships between producers and consumers should be encouraged to help build local resilience. Community growing can help achieve this by enabling active involvement in food production which in turn can foster a commitment to local, seasonal produce. Through engagement in food production communities can access produce which may not be readily available, especially in more remote or disconnected communities or for individuals and families living on low incomes. (See FCFCG film about Brit Growers – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vagEXWDM8fl>) For many volunteers at community growing projects their share of the harvest is a valuable contribution to their diet. They also learn the skills required to grow at home, on allotments or acquire an interest in developing those skills into a career.

1.3 Forms of community growing which combine a community and commercial element such as Community Supported Agriculture provide a great and replicable model of how a community's food, employment and social needs can be met through one method. They can also play a vital role in supporting established farm businesses to increase their own financial sustainability, in turn strengthening local food production and farming. See FCFCG's short film on CSAs and Farming – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNUYKCCYY00>

1.4 We in Wales are facing a future health crisis where levels of obesity and it's associated diseases and mental health issues will have a detrimental effect on individuals, families and the provision of health and social services. This will affect the productivity of the nation and is likely to cause significant detrimental effects which will take generations to rectify. To help mitigate against this Welsh Government needs to rebalance the system so that the health and wellbeing of consumers and producers is considered to have greater weighting than short term financial benefits. We need a food system that enables every person to access high quality, fresh food that will sustain and nourish them. Incentives should be provided to producers and retailers that support this ambition. Investment in the infrastructure of community and small scale food production needs to be made and the value of their health and wellbeing benefits, environmental management and community cohesion needs to be recognised and rewarded.

1.5 The health and wellbeing benefits provided by community growing projects should be considered by Public Health Wales and local health trusts as an important resource for improving the health of the communities they serve. Currently there is a mixed picture across the country where some health and social services commissioning boards are taking a proactive approach to using nature based and horticulture activities to provide physical and mental benefits to communities. Where there are clear routes of communication and service provision such as those between [Clynyfw Care Farm](#) and local

health and social services commissioners in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion the benefits of meaningful engagement in outdoor activity and food production are clear.

1.6 The idea of Social Prescribing for health conditions that could be alleviated by exercise, outdoor activity or social inclusion opportunities is starting to take hold in Wales but there does not appear to be any support (financial, training, safe-guarding) for community growing projects to help them deliver these activities. Currently there are GP's suggesting that involvement in a community garden may benefit individuals rather than using the established Exercise Referral Scheme. However this is not accompanied by any information or funding being provided to the community project. If local health trusts embraced community growing as a method of improving the health of individuals this would result in healthier communities, increased food production and healthier diets, fewer people suffering from mental health issues and an increase in high quality environments and biodiversity. These associated benefits will in turn play an important role in improving and sustaining the health and wellbeing of communities. This virtuous circle of tackling current problems, providing solutions and preventing reoccurrence or new issues should be enabled by Welsh Government actively promoting the collaboration of local health boards, local authorities and communities engaged in food production.

2. An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs;

2.1 In order to meet the challenges of increased population, a changing climate and the potential shortfall in farm labour post Brexit more innovation will be required within the food production system. This does not need to mean an increase in the industrialisation of food production, rather the use of innovative solutions to increase the amount and quality of food grown while reducing the amount of embedded energy and water.

Sustainable innovations such as aquaponics, vertical farming and prioritising space to grow within our towns and cities will be required. Innovative approaches to land use and planning should be taken to encourage sustainable food production at the heart of both urban and rural communities. The Square Roots organisation in New York is an interesting model of innovative growing in the hearts of cities see –

<https://squarerootsgrow.com/>

2.2 Welsh Government could do more to support One Planet Developments in relation to food growing. The ability to live and work on site can greatly improve the productivity of small scale producers. Also, permitted development rights could be extended to community growing schemes where their land holdings fall below current thresholds which would enable them to increase and production prolong the growing season.

2.3 Thought should be given, when new developments are planned, to where the new communities will be able to access fresh, healthy food. Incorporating community gardens, allotments or making space for larger community supported agriculture schemes could provide nutritional as well as social and health, wellbeing and environmental benefits to residents. The agrihood movement in America is a good example of using food as a driving force for creating healthy and happy communities see – <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=545>

2.4 Recognising that food is not merely a commodity and is a vital component of creating healthy, happy and resilient communities and the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act could be a catalyst for change and innovation that brings growing to the heart of every community. By creating a system that encourages and empowers both community and commercial small producers, innovative solutions to the health, economic and environmental challenges facing Wales can rise up from within communities. (See FCFCG film about Green Isle Growers – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6v3nSvylZg>)

2.5 In order to ensure that we have enough skilled farmers and growers to meet future need Welsh Government should invest in training for those not traditionally involved in the farming sector. We should be increasing opportunities for children to learn about food production in schools at the primary and secondary levels and ensure there are progression opportunities post 18 years.

To meet the challenges of the future we need to make farming and horticulture attractive and economically viable careers and enable new entrants to enter the sector through ensuring favourable land access, infrastructure investment and encouraging innovation. Our future food security cannot be left to an already diminishing number of farmers. We need to make it possible for enthusiastic future growers to train and access land and support them to work with their local communities to meet local needs.

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

3.1 The trend in recent years to use growing methods that encourage biodiversity, soil health and the sustainable use of resources such as water has been embraced by the community growing sector. The advantage of community involvement in food production enables many of the challenges faced by larger scale growers such as watering, weeding and pest and disease control to be managed in a sustainable way. However, small producers whether in a community or commercial setting do not have access to the same financial support available to larger holdings simply due to the size of the land holding. Small scale production can be highly productive as well as bringing environmental benefits and this should be recognised in any reform of farm payments post Brexit.

3.2 There need to be opportunities for people to learn about the relationship between their health and the health of the environment and food production. People are more likely to prioritise the provenance of their food if they have had experience of growing or accessing good quality produce. Community growing schemes provide opportunities for people to reconnect with their food, nature and each other and this leads to a new or renewed respect for the food they eat and the way it is produced. Involvement in community growing can also enable people to make proactive changes to their lifestyle and help them become more environmentally conscious and sustainable.

3.3 Wales has only two established city/community farms. These organisations provide volunteering opportunities for local people that teach them animal husbandry skills or simply opportunities to engage with animals and learn where food comes from. For many children, a visit to the farms is their first experience of farm animals and the learning process that takes them from blind consumers to engaged and informed participants in the food system is important. While it's recognised that these farms play an important role in the education, health and social lives of their communities they are still vulnerable to funding problems due to the lack of financial support available for such projects in urban environments. If Welsh Government would like to see more young people entering into farming and horticulture we need to protect and increase the number of community farms in Wales.