

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 21 April 2021 16:00 GMT +01:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Food for future well-being in Wales
CONVENED BY	Jane Ricketts Hein, Wales Real Food and Farming Conference
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/5278/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

37

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

31-50

51-65

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

15 Male

22 Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

3 Agriculture/crops

Fish and aquaculture

3 Livestock

Agro-forestry

3 Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

8 Education

5 Communication

1 Food processing

2 Food retail, markets

3 Food industry

Financial Services

1 Health care

1 Nutrition

1 National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

6 Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

3 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

1 Large national business

Multi-national corporation

4 Small-scale farmer

2 Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

14 Local Non-Governmental Organization

1 International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

6 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

1 Local authority

3 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

2 Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

A guest list was drawn up that included individuals and organisations from throughout the food system; guests were specifically invited on the basis of their diverse areas of expertise. Attention was also paid to the geographical distribution of participants. The language preference of participants was considered, with one group being held in Welsh and a translator engaged so that the group could feed back in Welsh (one of the two official languages of Wales, English being the other). A small amount of preliminary information was sent to participants, including the Principles of Engagement, which were re-sent later with the joining instructions. They were referred to in both emails. Reminders of some of the Principles (the need to listen, i.e., be respectful, the need for urgency, complementing the work of others) were made during the introduction to the event, and re-enforced by the way the facilitators enabled the discussions.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

It was difficult to endorse a couple of aspects of the Principles, e.g., committing in advance to something where the “final outcomes” are unknown. However, certain specific aspects were reflected. Trained and experienced facilitators were engaged, thus ensuring that the principle of respect was adhered to. In addition, the Principles of Engagement were sent out twice to each participant. Complexity and stakeholder inclusivity were reflected in the varied guest list that was created, and this was further endorsed by the allocation of those participants who accepted into four discussion groups. While accepting that many participants have multiple roles within the food system, efforts were made to allocate people with similar roles to different groups. We complemented the work of others by making the Dialogue relevant to the situation in Wales by basing it on a piece of legislation that is unique to Wales, specifically the Act’s associated Wellbeing Goals. The building of trust was taken to mean trust between the participants within the Dialogue, and was achieved through a commitment to anonymity and the recruitment of trained and experienced facilitators able to create an open and safe atmosphere.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

The major focus was exploring how the food and farming system in Wales could help citizens and the government to achieve the seven Wellbeing Goals enshrined in Welsh legislation and thus create a fairer and healthier society.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- ✓ Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- Finance
- Innovation
- Human rights
- Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

Three overall conclusions were discussed by most or all of the groups. The Discussion topics presented in the following pages were not set in advance, but emerged during the Dialogue.

Education – understood in its broadest sense and including a diversity of people. Firstly, there were calls for food literacy, including cookery skills, to be developed among young people. Secondly, it was felt that knowledge about the benefits of a healthy, nutrient-rich, local diet was needed in the wider population in order to encourage a transition towards it. The links between agricultural production systems (such as, organic or grass-fed) and nutrient density in food products also need to be clearer. Thirdly, there were calls for agricultural colleges and advisers to provide more and better training and advice on sustainable and healthy production systems. Finally, the capacity of the agricultural workforce to produce healthy, nutrient-dense, food products on ecologically and economically viable holdings would be increased by greater efforts to share examples of best practice and ideas, and the ability to gain access to research activities and results.

Cooperation and cross-sector working in policy and practice – policymakers were called upon to ensure that agriculture, food and health policies are joined up. At the practical level, participants recognised that farmers, growers and food producers must cooperate more, but may need help to work in consortia in order to fulfil contracts, access funding and regain more local control of their food products.

Localisation – Stronger local food systems were frequently (although not uncritically) called for. The need for support and innovation in encouraging local supply chains, from growing a greater diversity of crops and other products to developing better marketing strategies (partly through education, as above) was recognised. A major market is the public sector, and imaginative re-thinking of public procurement to enable links with local farms and other suppliers was felt to be needed.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/4

Food production systems for the future:

Conversations are needed about how land is used. Specifically, farmers have been incentivized to move into beef and sheep, but most groups saw the value and, indeed, a need to move back into mixed farming and horticulture. Turning a small percentage of Wales' land area over to horticulture could allow the country to become self-sufficient and even export fruit and vegetables. Historic farm documents and local older farmers could be consulted about what crops and practices formerly work on the land. These show what may be possible in practical terms, even down to field level.

Most groups called for greater support for and much wider adoption of agroecology – even for it to become the 'norm' in agriculture.

Even where the term agroecology was not used, there was a wish that policies be developed that encourage sustainable primary production.

Who? Farmers and landowners have a vital role here, especially those already following these practices. Large landowners can encourage their tenants to implement certain practices such as carbon sequestration and carbon neutral / positive actions. Those already involved should act as exemplars for other farmers and landowners, demonstrating what is possible in food production through new effective, economically viable, ecological and enjoyable farming models. Farmers are also encouraged to participate in the ongoing debate over what works and what needs to change. Younger farmers are urged to talk to other young people and children about where food comes from and support teachers with the provision of appropriate resources / information.

Agricultural colleges should make conservation and agroecology compulsory elements in all their agricultural courses.

All participants are encouraged to keep speaking with government on behalf of farmers and farming, and also engage with research and evidence-gathering processes.

All sectors involved with agriculture should come together to explore and test new farming models for access to land, increasing farmer engagement with sustainable methods of production and exploring incentives for these practices, such as "payment for results".

In addition, there was also a call for policy that directly and comprehensively incentivizes organic, regenerative and agroecological farming along the land sharing model (making the whole area of the farm good for biodiversity, not just the margins). There was an appeal for the polluter pays principle to be adhered to so that agricultural chemicals become much more expensive, and farmers are encouraged into less intensive methods while also making the cost of currently cheap imported feed much more expensive. This would then remove much agricultural pollution.

Success: The landscape will look very different, with more agroforestry and green strips for biodiversity. There will be a lot more agroecological farming: it will be standard practice.

Soil health will improve to support a greater diversity of crops and biodiversity, alongside other environmental benefits such as flood reduction and drought resilience. This will mean an increase in the volume of fruit and vegetables – of good nutritional quality – being grown, resulting in an increase in human health and well-being.

There will be more farmers on smaller farms, and eating the food they produce.

The messages around food and farming will create a positive vision of opportunity and hope.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/4

Encouraging local food systems:

It was felt that the Covid pandemic had helped many people to appreciate local and sustainable food, and that there is now an opportunity to invest in developing and strengthening local food systems. There were several calls for actions to increase the development of local and short food supply chains. These included addressing training, access to land, encouraging enterprise among farmers and growers, support for producers to sell directly to the market, and those farmers receiving a fair price for producing quality goods for their local communities. The emphasis should be on encouraging the consumption of less processed food in order to protect human health, but where added value processes are wanted, they should take place closer to the market.

Education and engagement with people were seen to be important, including information about the importance of local and seasonal food for human health, the environment, local economies and communities.

Who? There are obvious roles for all along the food chain in the development of local systems, including the necessity for producers and sellers to produce and market good quality local goods. However, public procurement received the most attention. This is a large potential market, and one that has a huge effect on public health as it often directly affects the most vulnerable in society who are in schools, hospitals and care homes. Thus, while there were many calls for local public procurement to be policy, and for it to be included in all public sector organizations, one group commented that supply companies also have an important role in encouraging the public sector and other private companies to use local produce.

Success: Everybody in Wales will habitually consume local seasonal products, including as many as possible that have been processed and packaged locally, as these have the best nutritional value. This will contribute to vibrant local communities where the emphasis on local systems engenders respect for each other and efforts to promote fairness and equality. More towns will have local food shops, but where supermarkets are the main food retailers, they will stock local food and healthier food choices. All food shops will stock healthier and local choices as standard - even garages. The market itself looks different, with plenty of new entrants, and movement away from supermarkets and imports. The measurement of local food in chains could be undertaken; for example, wholesalers should be able to provide data on the number of companies supplying them.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/4

Valuing the food system and its workers

It was widely felt that food, its cost of production and those that produce it are undervalued, particularly when wider costs such as the effects of a poor diet on health or pollution caused by intensive agriculture are included.

With respect to the food system, the extent of food poverty was recognized, but somehow food prices need to better reflect the true costs of healthy and sustainably produced food. Over time, agroecological practices will reduce input costs and the resulting improved nutrition will reduce health care costs, but there will be a transitional period. It is also important to mitigate the power of supermarkets in directing what is grown - and how - and pricing.

Ways of valuing the agricultural, horticultural and food industries and their workers were more widely discussed. The lack of new entrants into agriculture was noted and this is partly because they are widely seen as unattractive careers. For children, it was suggested that home economics in school is key because of negative perceptions of the food industry. They need to understand food and be shown that aspiring to become a farmer is possible. Similarly, it was noted that a former scheme to promote careers in the wider food industry had now ceased. One innovative suggestion was to allocate a certain amount of land per child or school.

For those who do enter training schemes, there was concern about a lack of support when they leave. Efforts should be made to build the capacity and value of the agricultural workforce as a whole to attract talent and help the country through the proposed agroecological transition. As part of this, funding for appropriate food research should be available, and access to research results should be improved, especially research linking food consumption and production to health outcomes.

Who? The re-framing of "food poverty" as "food and nutrition security" at all levels from individual to national by policymakers, thinkers and the media may help to allow a reconsideration of this challenging subject.

Farming unions, landowners and schools need to work together to improve access to land for children and encourage them to consider agriculture or horticulture as a career.

Schools and agricultural colleges, along with other further education colleges, also need to ensure that their students understand food, including how to cook: a sustainable food production education programme was suggested.

Advisory organisations should support current and future farmers to develop the appropriate skillsets and mindsets to enable them to innovate and thrive.

Success: The public will value and benefit from high-quality nutritious food and, importantly, increase its intake of nutrient dense fruit and vegetables, while farmers receive a fair price for their products.

Lots of young people want to get into farming, having benefited from excellent educational and training opportunities, and feeling that they and other new entrants have a sustainable and strong future.

Farmers feel empowered, are organized and collectively sell their products. A skilled and ecologically aware farming workforce will grow in recognition, increase in size and economic sustainability, and improve its capacity to lead the way in agroecology.

Having built on work and volunteering opportunities, what had been seen initially as activism is now a genuine transformation of the community, and people want to be involved.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/4

Thinking and working together

All the groups had ideas that require the co-operation of various elements of the food and farming systems. Perhaps the call for a National Food Strategy sums this up best.

Within the agri-food system, it is felt that agricultural policy stops at the farm gate and farmers are not encouraged to think beyond it: a greater level of co-operation is needed to address pollution and soil protection issues, among others. Similarly, regenerative agricultural initiatives should also include consideration of local communities.

Public procurement policies could be linked to agricultural support schemes in order to get local, healthy, nutritious food into schools and hospitals, while producers should work together more to fulfil larger contracts. Some progress is being made on "circular economy" thinking and practice, but the system as a whole has not kept up with people's ideas and plans.

Linking food, agriculture and health policies was particularly discussed. One example is to set a new standard for food's nutritional quality while building and communicating the evidence base for nutrition-supportive agricultural practices. At the same time, 'food as medicine' should be embedded within national public policy on health promotion. This involves formalising links between the food system and the health system to reduce highly prevalent non-communicable diet-related diseases and build consumer demand for high-quality, affordable food. Increased support for green prescribing is also called for, including in the management of certain chronic diseases.

Who? It is recognized that all sectors and stakeholders have a role here. Farmers and growers must work together, both with similar producers and across sectors, while the wide variety of organizations and advisers from the farm, food and business sectors must also work to join these functions up. Of course, government and policymakers were seen as key enablers in linking these elements together, for example by using food policy as a way of addressing sustainability and health issues in Wales. The media has a role in telling the truth about food, its sources and benefits, particularly in ways that are relevant to Wales and Welsh consumers, although it was also recognized that everyone can contribute to public awareness and the national debate.

The difficulties of cross-sectoral working are not underestimated, and it is suggested that Holistic Goal Setting is a useful tool to ensure that everyone is on board and has the same understanding; it is important to establish this first before moving to actions or projects.

Success: We will have a healthier population, including better dental health, with fewer dietary related illnesses. Ideally raw food will be free in 2030, the farming of such food products being fully subsidised. Being charged for processed food only will also strongly contribute to a healthier diet.

The First Minister will have set out a Welsh food system that relates to Wales' unique legislation, while the farming support system will motivate and encourage farmers, who are able to adapt quickly and positively.

Successful collaborations will proliferate. Streamlined objectives within policymaking and support for the food system will make it easier for collaborators to gain funding and enhance their ability to successfully work together.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Very few areas of divergence appeared within the groups, but a number of issues were mentioned that occur regularly. It was noted that there is a difference in opinion and experience about the suitability of much of the country for different agricultural systems, specifically whether horticulture and cereal growing are viable activities for most of Wales, or whether livestock is really the only option.

Despite strong support for local food supply systems, it was acknowledged that this may not always be the best alternative, either environmentally or for health. There are also examples of processed products associated with a locality or even the country, which are not necessarily made with local ingredients, but where the recipe itself has the association. Similarly, a company may be deemed to be “local” – employing local workers and participating in the community – but not contribute to the local food supply chain.

There are also many misconceptions and flawed perceptions affecting many of the stakeholder institutions and groups, which can lead to problems with trust between elements of the food system and wider society. These include the perceived ability and willingness of some institutions, particularly local and national governments, to change policy and practice, sometimes leading to suspicions of “greenwash” and insincerity in their desire to change. Similarly, many farmers feel unfairly attacked or blamed for causing environmental and health problems. The need for a discussion about sustainable livestock farming is recognized, but sensitivity is urged.

Also at a societal level, there is an issue about allowing new entrants access to land, while maintaining existing family farms. Relatedly, it is difficult to decide on the best way to support local communities, in terms of livelihoods, community spirit, culture, environment and health.

This illustrates the final issue of balancing multiple considerations when making decisions. For example, farming is still seen as having to compromise for environment protection, while making the price of food reflect its true cost must be balanced with a lack of access to quality, nutritious food for many people. In addressing these, sensitivity to national context is important. Food poverty – or insecurity – should not excuse poor nutritional and agricultural standards.

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