



Towards a Community Food Strategy for Wales

Wednesday 24 November at 10.15am

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVZjasxb2qA>

Cadeirydd / Chair: Aled Rhys Jones

Panel: Katie Palmer, Food Sense Wales; Rhodri Elfyn Jones, ffermwr / farmer; Ella Baxendale, Bwyd Da Môn / Good Food Môn; Cyng. / Cllr. Ann Davies, Cyngor Sir Gâr / Carmarthenshire County Council; Jenny Rathbone, AS / MS; Cefin Campbell AS / MS

Aled Rhys Jones

I'm Aled Rhys Jones, chairing this session. So, I'll extend a warm welcome to this session on creating a Community Food Strategy for Wales, organized by Adnodd, Bangor University and Food Sense Wales. For those of you who were here first thing, we had an outstanding presentation from Professor Tim Lang, setting a challenge for us to think more broadly about food, in different contexts to get to grips with climate change, of course, and think how we can build much more sustainable communities and we're very aware of recent developments. The Welsh Government have confirmed that they will launch a Community Food Strategy during this term of government. But what should be in that strategy? What resources will we need? And how will we measure success? These are some of the questions we will try to answer during the next hour and a quarter. Joining me is a panel of very experienced speakers.

Katie Palmer: (Director, Food Sense Wales)

I'm tasked with giving you a little bit of background about the Community Food Strategy and where it sits in the context of broader food policy in Wales at the moment. I think it was great to hear from Tim this morning and actually he's done quite a lot of my job for me, which is brilliant. I'm going to pick up on some of the points that he made and also, I guess the major issue is where he talked about the Community Food Strategy and us being able to "hang quite a lot of stuff off that" I think was the phrase he used earlier this morning.

I'm going to start by talking a little bit about the challenges and then the political and legislative context that we find ourselves in. Talk a little bit about the possible scope of the community food strategy and then talk about all the fantastic action that's

happening on the ground at the moment. I think Tim on a number of occasions talked about people and democracy and the kind of unique situation I think we have in Wales with this really big community drive around this agenda so I will draw on that also.

I think, you know, we had a really good introduction this morning about the multiple challenges in our food system as part of a global food system and I'm not going to dwell on them because I think probably everyone knows what they are. But I guess my role really is to question the role that a community food strategy could play in mitigating and insulating Wales against some of those impacts we see from the global food system, thinking about diversity and resilience and security and inclusivity and equality - all things that I think a community food strategy should be thinking about. Also, how we reduce our burden globally. We saw the global responsibility report produced a couple of weeks ago, it really shows the impact that that Wales' food system is having on deforestation and forced labour and other social issues across the seas.

What is the political context in Wales? Well, if you've been thinking of nodding off or anything in the last week, ten days you'll have missed quite a bit. I think the place to start probably is with the Community Food Strategy and the programme for government. The Community Food Strategy is a programme for government commitment, and it sits alongside other commitments such as developing a sustainable farming scheme and things like the economic contract, looking at town centres, net zero carbon schools, the curriculum, foundational economy. There's a number of different levers within the programme for government that could all contribute to developing a just, resilient food system for Wales.

Then the next development discusses the Plaid/Labour cooperation deal which is currently on the table and will be looked at by members this weekend and if that does pass through it has big implications for things like free school meals, a pledge to increase free school meal eligibility so that all primary school children in Wales have access to a free school meal. It has talked particularly about procurement, it has talked about moving the net zero target from 2050 to 2035, it has talked about setting limits for biodiversity. Importantly it includes the community food strategy and the Sustainable Farming Scheme as well.

Finally, the third big-ticket item is the Food Wales Bill which went through the Senedd this week, and this is all about establishing a more sustainable food system in Wales to strengthen food security, improve Wales' socio-economic well-being and enhance consumer choice. That will be moving forward over the next 12, 13 months to its next phase before it goes to the Senedd again.

Then we need to pay particular attention as well, as Tim referenced earlier, about our local policy and of course with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. How does the Community Food Strategy potentially interface with well-being assessments and well-being plans? We've got the socio-economic duty now in Wales and of course that has big implications for equality and how local authorities are thinking about food security

in that regard, net zero plans for local authorities and also the Public Health Bill. “Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales” requires every health board to develop a plan around the Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales strategy.

So, what could a Community Food Strategy look like? What should it look like? This is my kind of thought on sketching out the sorts of things that might be important to consider for a community food strategy.

I think number one for me is this piece around integrated thinking. It's about national and local leadership and it's about a shared vision with everybody that's working within that food system and is impacted by that food system. I think it needs to set a mission and a vision and as I said that needs to be a shared vision and built from the ground up and the top down, and it needs to come with targets which are monitored, and accountability connected to them. I think there is a role for national policy integration, so we need that kind of cross-sector governance in leadership both at a national level, but we also need it as a local and a regional level.

I think Tim put quite a lot of emphasis in his talk earlier around the importance of thinking about food in a regional way. I think it's really important that we take all of that fantastic work that's currently happening on the ground at the moment in a vast array of different arenas around the food system. I think we need to make sure we're hearing community voices. We need to be drawing on that on the ground activity and investment that's already happening with things like growth deals and foundational economy work, circular economy work, where funding is being channelled through the end of the Rural Development Programme, programmes like Food and Fun, the School Holiday Enrichment Programme, food partnerships. And we need to be learning as we go and look at scaling up and out all of these initiatives that are working well on the ground.

I put a couple of examples there of things that I think are particularly pressing within this context of the Community Food Strategy. One of these is food in schools and the potential to link policy nationally around some of the key areas - around procurement, school food standards, foundational economy, how we think about matching local production capability to our school food menus, for example, and how we potentially integrate broader issues around the curriculum in Wales.

And then the other area would be around horticulture and how we increase the amount of horticulture that is in Wales and really try and address some of those challenges around access to land and skills.

I wanted to give you a very brief flavour of some of the on-the-ground things that are happening in Wales and the variety of activity as I've referenced earlier, everything from developing food partnerships, looking at alliances to address food insecurity issues, commercial horticulture, horticulture in a community context, skills, developing food leadership, how we support our children and families during the summer holidays, how we drive up veg consumption.

I'm going to pick out three to briefly touch on, to go into a little more detail. We've heard from Tim this morning about the importance of the foundational economy, and the Welsh Government have highlighted that they feel this is a really important agenda and have invested in it. We've seen work both in Carmarthenshire with the Public Services Board and also up in North Wales with Môn Larder around developing local supply chains, and that work has highlighted and brought out some of the challenges that there are in terms of developing local public procurement.

Some work that's going to move, expand this foundational economy work as well through the Rural Development Programme is look at piloting the use of food hubs that will bring together local growers to sell to the public sector. I will pick up on some of those key challenges and opportunities and try and identify a model that would work for public in the local context.

Next I want to show, just because this one is really live at the moment and there are opportunities to bid into getting involved in some of this work, is looking at Resilient Green Spaces and this work really incorporates six areas to look at building local food infrastructure and skills working across allotments, food hubs, orchards, greener corridors and verges, community farms and horticultural skills development and is a partnership project that involves a lot of partners in its delivery.

Then finally I wanted to highlight the Sustainable Food Places approach which is a UK programme run by Food Matters, Sustain and Soil Association, and Food Sense Wales is working with Sustainable Food Places in developing a Wales model for Sustainable Food Places which is all about making healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live. It's about establishing cross-sector food partnerships, involving local authority, public sector bodies, third sector organizations, businesses, academic institutions, civil society - developing vision and strategy in an action plan for making healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live. Working together to realize that vision through concerted and coordinated action across the whole range of different food issues.

The Sustainable Food Places movement in Wales is gathering great momentum and it's really exciting that we've got over a third of the local authorities in Wales now moving towards this approach. We've got five members and three that are working towards membership so that is really exciting. We're developing a programme board that will help bring that work together and share best practice.

My final piece is just to give an example of how the Sustainable Food Places approach works through giving an example of Food Cardiff which was the first Sustainable Food Place in Wales and it's one of only six places in the UK to achieve Silver status. It comprises 127 individuals, 74 organizations and it's recently just launched its three-year strategy which involved a consultation with over 2,000 people across the city.

[shows video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to5YwfHMK-k>]

"Food Cardiff connects people and projects to promote healthy, sustainable and ethical food across the city. Being a veg city is one campaign that supports Food Cardiff's five good food goals and 42 pledges have been made to grow, sell, cook, serve and save more vegetables in Cardiff.

(Wild Things Lauren Saunders:) So we create small seasonal menus. We like to use local producers, ideally ones based just outside Cardiff or in Wales. We don't think that good food should just be something that privileged people can enjoy, it should be everyone deserves to have access to good nutritious food. We run regular community dinners. They are a dinner for everyone, and they provide an evening for connection, for healthy food - people might learn about different cuisines they've not eaten before.

(Castell Howell Edward Morgan:) We were proud to get the opportunity to go into schools, especially here in Cardiff. We went in with our chef. We made ice cream from carrots, smoothies from broccoli. It was heart-warming to see children, who said they didn't eat like this, within 20 minutes eating carrots. So, it was a great venture to be a part of.

(Growing Together Riverside:) We started to give away plants to people and some soil to help the community to gain confidence and to learn new skills with plants. It makes me feel in love, to grow, to have the compost, to have the seed and I ate my first tomato I grew in Cardiff, and it was amazing. I became a veg advocate because I believe that the way to access good healthy food sometimes is to start and grow it yourself, so I thought it was a really good idea to help people learn to grow their food and what you can do with it. There's no more satisfying feeling than having the tomato come off your plants. That's success in life and in the garden, isn't it?"

[video ends]

Aled Rhys Jones

So can I once more thank Katie very much for opening the session and setting out the context for the discussion, definitely there are very many points to cover, so thank you very much to you Katie.

Rhodri Jones (farmer, agricultural solicitor and director of Rural Advisor)

As you've heard already and as you will hear there are plenty of better qualified people than me who will tell you about fantastic pluses for the community of a policy such as this, but I'll just touch maybe on what I as a farmer believe that can be achieved with something like this policy.

I think it is most important for the agricultural industry and for Wales as a whole especially as we leave the Common Agricultural Policy and look to create a new policy for Wales. And that's what's most important, to create something suitable for Wales. I think much too often it is easy to look over the border and unfortunately

there are signs that this is happening as we look at agricultural policy and climate change policy with an unwillingness to see and acknowledge specific characteristics within this culture. I do hope we can develop confidence and that we can mature and extend our horizon and learn from countries which have economies and communities more similar to us in Wales. Therefore, we have the opportunity now to amend the silo mentality, if you like, and to create a far-reaching policy which draws upon the strengths of Wales if we are willing to look at what is facing us now.

I am very glad to see in recent days the agreement between Labour and Plaid Cymru mentioning a community food policy and support of sustainable agriculture. The only question I had was why are the two things still treated separately?

Now, I remember reading the last consultative document on a new agricultural policy for Wales and seeing a mention of supply chains as something separate, apart from farming, and that a separate policy would be developed for that. Well, the time of Covid and Brexit and now comments we hear from indigenous rainforest people at COP26 has shown that farmers are an essential part of food supply chains, and that there is more of a role for the much shorter supply chains that we need now.

Without doubt the next few years will be a time of great change for food in Wales. Wales is an agricultural country with the majority of agriculture being sustainable or has the potential to be so. We therefore need our politicians to be brave enough to acknowledge that emissions from sustainable food production in Wales are one-third of the global average, and that's without taking into account biogenic methane cycles. Repeating 'Don't eat meat' because it is easy to do so isn't an answer that does justice to the reality of production in Wales. We must differentiate between production methods across the world. Welsh agriculture is a strength at this time, and I'd be very happy to see this nutritious food made available locally, for the benefit of producers and the community.

We need to make the most of this strength and put it at the centre of a reformed policy. Both community food policy and national food policy can bring together so many important policy areas which could be a basis of so many benefits across our communities. I am thinking specifically of preparing local food, to do with food poverty and public procurement, public health and very importantly keeping the profit and taxes and growth within our communities in Wales rather than it disappearing to the coffers of shareholders and companies which aren't interested in investing in our people and our culture.

The answer to the challenges is in our own communities not with big companies processing food in laboratories. Intensively processed foods have had a bad effect on people's health over the past decades. And now, if you believe them, they are talking of taking the natural raw materials out of the process altogether. Nor is it with other companies who are buying our land in order to sell environmental benefits, planting trees in order to allow the greatest polluters to carry on their businesses with a clean conscience, while leaving our communities in Wales all the poorer.

No, the answer to the challenges of Wales means depending on our own strengths. Other contributors will be better qualified to say more about what the new policy could do in different sectors, but for farmers a community food policy can be an important step in the transformation of the industry from being dependent on subsidies to being far more self-sufficient. As the agricultural and food policies form in the future we must look at the fact that decades of policies means that – whether deliberately or incidentally - the price the farmers receive for their produce has been kept low (and I am not making any comments there about the appalling problem we have about food poverty. The roots of the problem go far deeper and are more structural).

Farmers as well have been isolated, too small individually to have an effect on the price. The food market is all one sided in favour of the large companies and depending on subsidies. We need to acknowledge that before we form a suitable policy to take the sector forward. At the moment the policy direction of Welsh agriculture ignores the structural problems about what happens to produce between leaving the farm and reaching the customers. So, one of the great benefits I want to see from a policy such as this is to recreate the policy connection between agriculture and food, not to be afraid to connect agricultural policy and food as has perhaps happened in many recent policy documents from Welsh Government.

And reconnect farmers with customers and give them a bigger role in the food chain. We can then keep the benefits of our sustainable food and landscapes within Wales to reinvest in our communities.

Aled:

Bwyd Da Môn runs a community hub which redistributes produce from a number of supermarkets and other food producers through a food club for their members.

Ella Baxendale: (Manager, Bwyd Da Môn)

I work as a manager at Bwyd Da Môn (Môn Good Food) in Llangefni on Ynys Môn (Anglesey). We are still quite a new establishment, only opened officially in March this year and we made the decision to form the hub to deal with the problem of waste on Anglesey. Every year over 90 tonnes of food, good food very often, is wasted in the UK. So, the question was "Why do people still go hungry when so much perfectly good food is being wasted?"

I'd like to think the hub works in quite a simple way. We take food which would otherwise go to waste from supermarkets, wholesalers, all kinds of companies in reality. We redistribute it to our members. Our members pay £5 a week and receive between £15-£20 worth of food. So, people on low income can have cheaper food and it helps with their budgeting. But also, as it is a system which is paid for through subscription it means that anyone is welcome to join and we have seen from experience that all kinds of people are interested in this work from the viewpoint of saving money or avoid waste. Also, being subscription means there is no stigma attached to using Good Food Môn.

Food is an enabler. It begins so many conversations on topics people might consider more important than food. Food can begin almost every topic under the sun - budget, health...all sorts of important conversations. But what we try and do is concentrate on education. We work with Coleg Menai or Llandrillo Menai group I should say.

We have launched cookery classes for beginners, and they are free to anybody who want to take part and learn how make the most of what they have already in the house rather than have to go out and buy ready foods. That is one thing that the members who have been taking part in the cookery courses, they depend much less on ready foods and are more willing to cook.

We also work with the health board to give a little bit of focus and make sure that what people cook is healthy and that is still being developed at present. We also work very closely with the Citizens Advice in Anglesey and the County Council. We have worked together with them to launch a subsidy scheme for those in need. This does not take the place of the Food Bank. This is a separate scheme, but we work closely together.

Just to give you a few figures. Although we are still in our first year, our members have helped us to redirect over 7.5 tonnes of food from landfill, and that is not bad when you think of the size of Anglesey, and we are only one small organisation. We have seen over 250 members through our doors since opening in March. 130 of them are still members today. So, it does show there is a clear interest in the work we do. We also see there is a great interest from other programmes throughout Wales. We've had conversations with Bwyd Da Bangor and there are groups in Denbigh and Wrexham working on similar schemes as well. So hopefully over the next few years we can create a lot more food security through reducing waste.

What should a Community Food Strategy deliver for communities in Wales? Within Bwyd Da Môn we want to see more people making the most of what is available and reduce waste in order to help those who are in need. Support education programmes for people of all ages - school age up to 100 years of age. And using food for starting other conversations.

Councillor Ann Davies: (Cabinet member for Rural Communities in Carmarthenshire, farmer, Vice Chair of the FUW in Carmarthenshire)

I am going to be, like Rhodri, giving you the farmers' viewpoint more than anything. It is a pleasure to speak in a conference which looks at food and how we produce it and the importance of producing food locally.

I farm with my husband in the Tywi valley and brought up three daughters on home and garden produce and they have been brought up living off what we grow. That extends to the farm as we use our own milk, lamb, chicken, turkey and so on. And food that is frozen and pickled is what we use all year round.

Our carbon miles are very low and, though we couldn't produce everything, it was a way of producing good quality food and saving a little bit of money to be honest. There is a lot of mention now about growing trees on family farms and the other is creating more allotments. Those two elements deal with producing food locally and the need we have to do this in rural Wales. Our family farms are the backbone of our communities, and this is where you see land which is perfect for producing lamb and beef of the best quality, especially in north Carmarthenshire.

As they are sold in marts and bought by local butchers, this produce stays within our communities and this is a way of supporting the circular economy. As a council we need to support this as much as we possibly can. The combined buying power of our public services bodies could, if legislation and the desire was there, push this agenda forward.

We recently invited some of our secondary schools to give some insight into what they thought the net zero carbon meant to them and what we could do to reduce the effects of climate change and then of course the effects on food production. All of this comes together, and we need to look at this in a holistic manner, to be honest. They are not topics which can be taken apart; they need to come together in a conjoined manner.

All the schools involved answered that reducing carbon miles was part of the solution so growing local food and producing our food was part of the answer along with providing communities with community gardens and allotments. Bearing in mind that most of our children are at least two generations away from being nurtured and working on the land this is so refreshing to see. They get this and they can see what we need to do.

For me a Community Food Strategy is what it says - locally produced, locally procured and locally consumed. The council has a place in moving this agenda forward, of course. But in reality, we all have a responsibility to ensure that this happens. Our young people are on board with this agenda and are looking for us to act and not continuously talk about it. So, let's get going, let's support our local farmers, be they beef, sheep, dairy, vegetables or arable. Let's keep our food miles as low as we possibly can and let's work together to achieve this.

Jenny Rathbone (Labour member for Cardiff Central, member of the Climate Change Environmental and Rural Management Committee and the Public Accounts Committee):

I very much welcome this opportunity and take up the challenge posed by Rhodri, which is the politicians need to be brave. I absolutely agree we do. We really cannot afford to tamper at the edges at this problem. We have to have a whole system approach to it, not least because we have a public health emergency occasioned by all that processed food that Rhodri spoke about, and that has led to the epidemic of obesity amongst young people which is so distressing to see.

We cannot afford to go on spending 10% of our NHS budget on diabetes care. Our failure to deal with this issue in a preventative manner means that we spend a lot of our time chopping off people's limbs and trying to save their eyesight, so we really can't go on like this.

I pay absolute tribute to all the work that Katie Palmer has done in Cardiff. Obviously, I'm a Cardiff Member [of the Senedd], so I'm fully aware of all the fantastic work that Katie and Food Sense and all the initiatives that Katie set up and her ability to penetrate the public health department of Cardiff and the Vale Health Board has all been absolutely fantastic, but it simply isn't sufficient.

For example, I read recently that Veg Power, which is a great initiative, UK wide initiative to get kids to eat more vegetables, despite all the wonderful graphics and the huge amount of energy put into engaging with children on this important issue it led to a 2.3% increase in the consumption of vegetables by children. I think I'm right on that one and that clearly isn't going to achieve what we need to achieve what we need to achieve in Wales to have a much healthier population.

Ella Baxendale spoke very clearly about the Bwyd Da Môn project, which is fantastic and this in a place as fertile as Anglesey and so it is extraordinary, is it not, that even on Anglesey people are suffering food poverty. There are lots of similar schemes like the one that Ella described. I have one in my own constituency, run by a radical church, which is fantastic, and they have really taken this to another level by setting up a teaching kitchen so that they've got four points where people can be taught cookery, including one which is disabled accessible.

Yet when I go and have a look at the building site of the new well-being centre only a couple of miles away, where is the food teaching? Well, there isn't any at the moment. There are no facilities for teaching people how to cook. Ann talked about how we are two generations away from having been working on the land in Carmarthenshire but we're also two generations away from, in many of our communities, people knowing how to cook. They think that food comes out of a packet, and I regularly talk to school pupils about what they eat, and it is terrifying that somebody who is entitled to free school meals is eating chips. That is the meal that they choose to pick up, and when you ask them what else they've had today, I'm afraid the nutritional value of what they're eating in a day is no better than what they choose to eat in secondary school.

The hope that we are going to be able to deliver free school meals for all primary school children is the systemic change that we need. We cannot go on having obesity levels when children start primary school that are really frightening, and then to double them by the time they leave primary school. This is the opportunity really to change people's relationship with food, but we need to do a lot more, earlier than that, starting with when people get pregnant but I think I won't go any further on that one.

I think there's a great deal that we need to do, starting with we need access to land. I have long been confused why the floodplains between Cardiff and Newport aren't used. This would be an ideal location for growing fruit and vegetables, which we are obviously in danger of being short of given the disruption to the globalized just-in-time mechanism we had come to rely on. We now have a major food security problem staring us in the face and we need to be growing our own food. It's fine to be occasionally importing luxury foods like pineapples, avocados, etc., that we can't grow in this country, but we cannot be relying on that for our daily everyday food. We have to be self-sufficient in food in Wales as far as possible. It doesn't mean to say we're not going to buy food from across Britain, but Britain needs to be self-sufficient in food, end of story.

We need to be able to access land and we need to ensure that anybody who wants to make it their business is able to get pump-prime funding for some of the tools they're going to need to make it successful. I've got a meeting in about an hour with somebody who wants to do just that with young people, who, he hopes, will make it into a real business. But I know that the number one top of our conversation is going to be, "Where's the land and how are we going to access the money?" NatWest sent me an email only this morning telling me about this money they're going to make available to small businesses, but it doesn't anywhere talk about how we're going to ramp up the production of fruit and vegetables that I know could happen in Wales, because there's lots of horticulturalists who are keen to increase their production, but they need money. They need some grants to buy polytunnels to extend the season or places where they can actually clean their produce and make it ready for market.

If we're talking about spending very considerable sums of money in schools, then we need to really get our procurement processes better organized. Caerphilly Borough Council made a very promising start in supporting a small dairy producer to initially supply three schools and then increase that to five local authorities, but it's not led to a mainstreaming of that approach and we really, really do need to focus on exactly what each local authority is going to need in terms of tons of carrots and potatoes and onions to ensure that we are able to afford to invest in our children.

You know some of the other things that have been proposed by Katie are really, really important so things like allotments. I represent a very urban area and therefore allotments for many of my communities are simply not available. We need to do a lot of guerrilla gardening with whatever spaces are there just for people's well-being and encourage people to use the spaces they already have, which is called their gardens, because a lot of people are not doing that. We need to have many more orchards close to where people live so that people can go and pick fruit at that seasonal time of year and learn how to conserve it.

Cefin Campbell (Plaid Cymru MS for Mid and West Wales, previously Councillor for Carmarthenshire County Council):

I want to begin by mentioning some of the challenges which face the agricultural sector and the countryside in general because we must remember, as Jenny

Rathbone was saying, there are activities to do with food happening and that is very important to remember. But the next year is going to be significant because the Welsh Government is going to introduce an Agriculture Bill in the Senedd, and the Agriculture Bill is going to be far reaching for the nature of farming in Wales. And, as you all know, there was a Food Bill that individual member Peter Fox introduced about a fortnight ago.

But the challenges we all face in reality are the challenges to the agricultural sector and the rural economy. But there is more to the rural economy than just farming, of course, that is, we have people leaving the rural areas and it is being depopulated. The challenge for the environment and the environmental crisis, we must try and solve all of these problems for the future generations.

I want to refer to a few things briefly. The Food Bill by Peter Fox. This gives big opportunities if it gets adopted, because it deals with tackling food poverty and Rhodri and Jenny referred to it earlier. Some kind of community food strategy was established and that brings suppliers and people who procure food and users of food together.

Tackling food waste, again is something which has been mentioned already. And the importance of labels and branding and in Wales we have the brand which is of high quality and is acknowledged across the world as a brand which means value for money and high quality.

As far as the Agricultural Bill is concerned, this certainly is going to put pressure on farmers to move somewhat from producing food to tackling the environmental matters and promoting biodiversity. We've seen that already in the White Papers which have come before us already. For me, producing food of quality has to be essential for our future but I also agree that we need to get that balance correct, between producing food and promoting biodiversity. And I was part of a discussion at the beginning of the week looking of how we can ensure the future of a very rare bird in Wales, the curlew, which is in danger of disappearing. Farmers have a role to play, safeguarding the future of that rare bird and there are many other species of bird and animals that need to be protected.

Rhodri referred also to the agreement between Labour and Plaid Cymru. I am completely supportive of this agreement in particular in context of the discussions this morning. Giving free school meals to primary school children is radical and transforming and means that we tackle food poverty but also, something that Jenny Rathbone so importantly referred to, we can ensure that our children have the balanced diet of nutritious food required because there is a clear connection between an improper diet and diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer and obesity in children.

I just want to finish with this. In this agreement as well, there is a commitment to ensure basic payments to farmers during this period of transformation of producing

food to being more environmentally friendly. So, I mentioned free school meals. So, a committee to make sure we manage food locally and also with trees, which means that people from outside Wales can't take the profit from what should belong to Welsh people and local communities.

Following the point which Ann Davies made, I think that procuring public food opens all kinds of big possibilities for farmers and food suppliers, because if we can increase from the 50% level to 70% that means creating thousands of jobs and that means consistent opportunities for farmers to be healthy local food suppliers. That is important, that we keep them as local as possible. That consistency, of a market available for farmers to provide food to schools, hospitals, old people's homes, etc, that is a good idea for the future.

Ella Baxendale:

In answer to a question about costs we have found the costs of bills increasing tremendously recently, so our aim was if we reached 200 members by March 2023 then we would be completely self-sufficient through subscriptions and that was our ambition from the outset after our money from grants came to an end. Although we are still quite confident that we will be able to grow enough to do that. As far as giving a specific figure on that I think it is quite difficult for anyone to do because the costs might continue to increase.

What kind of balance of food do we have? Sometimes we do have things people would see as odd. Last week for example, we had calamari, lamb hearts, a lot of vegetables, a lot of various tins. There is a good variety. Ensuring that everything is healthy is something which is quite difficult. We are not in the situation to turn things down because they are not healthy, and at the end of the day if somebody requires food, they need food. We want to enable people to eat healthily and to educate them or give them a healthy choice. There are so many people these days, and perhaps this is more of a problem for the food banks, sometimes you have to make the choice between eating something which isn't healthy or not eat at all, and we don't want anybody to have to make that choice.

Aled:

How do we get access to land? There's a question here from Vicky asking, "Why not use the planning system to ensure access to land by reviewing the use classes or make land around towns and villages into community amenity land which they can only be used for this purpose. This kind of amenity needed can be agreed locally including fruit and vegetable growing."

Jenny Rathbone:

I absolutely agree that we need to use the planning system, but we found with all manner of things that trying to get the planning system to do what we want it to do is a hugely complicated business. I hope that we don't need to legislate, but we may need to. We clearly need to review the use classes, not least so that when a fruit and veg

shop closes we don't have it replaced by yet another junk food takeaway, but we also need to have community amenity land around towns so that everybody has the opportunity to grow but most people are not using their gardens for this purpose so we need to start there frankly.

I think in terms of the amount of land that should and could be made available, the land owned by the public sector and local authorities and health boards, this is a conversation I've had endlessly with Cardiff Council because they do own some land near the floodplains between Cardiff and Newport but we still haven't got anywhere and we now need to really ramp this up because our schools are going to need a hell of a lot more produce coming from local production rather than importing it from elsewhere.

Aled:

You referred to the importance of the Agriculture Bill and the Food Bill. Why are the two topics dealt with separately?

Cefin:

It doesn't make any sense that food is separated from the sector which produces food in the first place. I hope when the Agricultural Bill is put before us, that lots of the objectives of Peter Fox's bill will have been adopted or integrated into the Agricultural Bill and perhaps possibly, there won't be a need for Peter Fox's bill if everything in that has been incorporated in the Agricultural Bill. But that is work for me to do, lobbying the Agricultural minister over the next few months to make sure that happens. But yes, it doesn't make any sense to keep the two separate.

Aled

What do you think, Rhodri?

Rhodri:

It's a positive step, I think. We were getting into a conversation about how the new policy was going to be financed and the Minister was very keen not to finance food production. Well, there are many arguments there but let's get away from financing food production and acknowledge that the produce comes straight from farmers and let's work on a system of taking the food from the farmers to those who eat it in a more sustainable way, rather than seeing all of the profit flowing out of our communities. That is what you want to deal with, not fighting and seeing where the new subsidies are going to go. Look at the structure and improve that. That is what we want to see.

Aled:

Ann Davies, you have worked hard to try to improve the public procurement, to have more local food on local plates. Do you think there are going to be more opportunities for farmers now to take advantage of that and increase their profits?

Ann Davies:

Exactly, Aled. As you know we work through the Public Services Board, Hywel Dda Health Board, the police, the fire brigade, and also, we are talking with Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. So, if we can get things to come to fruition, it will make a very substantial difference to our local farmers. And it is so important, isn't it, that we can produce and sell food locally, and, as Rhodri said, that the pound circulates in the area and the profit comes back and is spent of course in the area. Farmers traditionally don't keep their money in their pockets, they tend to spend and invest in their farms, implements, improving stock. The money circulates with farmers all the time, it doesn't sit in the bank, it is used. So, circulating the money, that is what we will be doing, and that money will stay in our communities.

Aled

Time has got the better of us. We could have discussed this for much longer, but we've covered many interesting topics in the last hour and a quarter. Thank you to the panel....