



Ailfeddwl am Fwyd yng Nghymru - Rethinking Food in Wales

Consultation by The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee of the National Assembly – **Response from Paramaethu Cymru**, the Welsh arm of the Permaculture Association (Britain).

1.1 Paramaethu Cymru is in contact with more than 500 individuals, families, groups and small businesses across Wales with interest in permaculture practices. They especially include growing food in healthy, sustainable ways. It also teaches design principles to people on courses, short or long, and easily understood, so that they are empowered to make earth-friendly, people-friendly choices in their lives

1.2 A permaculture approach requires careful design commencing with Survey and Analysis, so we welcome this survey and especially the fact that it requests referenced evidence rather than simply opinion. However, the short time scale given to it may not lead to thorough and inclusive bilingual responses, especially in these months when food producers are particularly busy.

1.3 Permaculture is guided by three ethics: Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share. Earth Care is implied in the issues you selected. A Permaculture approach is also guided by 12 principles, one of which is to integrate, rather than segregate. It results in a planning design which takes a **holistic** view, exploring interrelated outcomes, seeing our relationship with food as a web of connection to other factors (eg soil health, human health, biodiversity, social justice, employment, education, history and culture), as indicated by the 2015 Aberystwyth University *Food Values* project¹, and the 2009 IAASTD *Agriculture at a Crossroads Global Report*.² Our response tries to explore some of those interconnections.

1.4 So, whilst the responses here are given under the separate issue headings, there are overlaps, which are indicated in italics and also we add three further issues, beyond the explicit

remit of this Committee but which seem of critical importance to the success of any implementation plan:

A Food for health – i.e. seeing food as medicine, adjusting diets as effective medical treatments (People Care)

B Processes which help to reverse global warming – as outlined in ‘Drawdown’ research³– (global Fair Share).

C Education re food in schools – e.g. including nutrition as part of the Core Curriculum in schools, as an effective means of re-educating wider public opinion re food as well as future adult generations – a scheme being promoted already in one Welsh district.⁴

2. Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable (and food for health): Medical evidence increasingly shows that many of these dietary problems can arise through over-dependence on processed food products⁵.

2.1 Our health services now identify lifestyle causes for a majority of referrals for health support, and that is currently a growing trend. Many of those problems are diet-related, but most treatments are not, because pharmaceutical companies are understandably not interested in researching treatments that offer them no commercial benefits.⁶

Commercial food interests favour production and promotion of processed foods, to the detriment of more nutritious and beneficial natural foods, which do not receive the same kind of promotion and which may in the longer term save the NHS budgets.

2.2 - Therefore, whilst accepting the role of food companies in providing jobs and economic benefits as well as food supplies, we feel a role of Government is to counterbalance those commercial interests, with their strong lobbying and advertising voice, by focusing upon promoting further research and publishing what is in every citizen’s interests, primarily facilitating strategies that serve consumers rather than retailers. So we welcome this review if it reinforces that perspective.

2.3 A healthy diet is therefore one that is balanced, and uses fresh ingredients.

Sadly, many people in Wales now can only access most fresh ingredients from supermarket shelves. These are bulk purchased through national arrangements which often mean: long haulage distances for collection and delivery and food wastage through highly selective purchasing; and price control by the purchasing companies which tend to drive the farm-gate price down. Increasingly they are also prewrapped, which adds to their environmental impact

costs. Sadly, even the NFU seems dominated by agribusiness interests⁷. Therefore we also welcome the aim for locally produced, accessible and affordable food.

2.4 Alternative, small-scale local production and sales schemes such as veg box schemes, farm shops, roadside vending and farmers' markets can provide an alternative, increasingly popular, affordable, local provision of fresh produce and should be encouraged. The Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens is a key promoter in Wales of such schemes.⁸

2.5 Via the One Planet Development (OPD) planning policy uniquely adopted by the WG in 2011, there are now 24 individual OPD smallholdings in Wales.⁹ Each one supports livelihoods and significantly lowers their One Planet footprint while becoming far more self-sufficient than the average. Each one fully integrates permaculture or regenerative agricultural principles and offers fresh local produce within their communities.

2.6 - Much more could be done by the Welsh Government to support the One Planet Development Policy by making it available more quickly to more people and not just in the countryside.

2.7 If Wales is to become more self-sufficient and hence resilient after Brexit, questions of rural and urban land access, succession farming, small scale smallholdings and diversification must also be addressed.

2.8 Means of facilitating this would include:

- a. -Improving supply chains and routes to market
- b - .public procurement that favours local suppliers (perhaps a procurement taxonomy which includes criteria other than price - eg local, organic, pasture fed, fair-trade)
- c -support to develop local co-operatives so small producers can take advantage of public procurement;
- d - more local abattoirs, registered for organic/small scale kills;
- e - more organic sales through local marts and support for small producers:
- f. encouragement of, or perhaps even requiring, local councils to facilitate community gardens and growing schemes.

3. Serious research on how Wales will apply post CAP farm subsidies and not rushing to early decisions e.g.

- 3.1- applying true cost (or 'whole system) accounting, so that all parts of the supply chain have to account for their contribution to the real costs of 'cheap food e.g. especially including costs of recycling packaging materials;'
- 3.2 Broader definition of the 'public goods' which farming/food subsidies support - we've already got policies for modest environmental benefits, which we should ramp up, but we also need to consider the 'public good' of thriving rural communities, as well as the leisure and tourism benefits;
- 3.3- a Basic Income (instead of area based subsidies) for all farmers, with a low threshold of land holding for entry, to improve access to farming careers for young people; and to support very small and micro-producers.
- 3.4- They too could be supported by a free Enterprise Facilitation service, as used successfully in Blaenau Gwent.¹⁰

4. Community growing schemes, of which there are growing numbers, many supported by Paramaethu Cymru

4.1 These are also a means for providing healthy locally-produced food, especially in disadvantaged areas where unemployed people can gain valuable volunteer experiences of raising produce, gaining skills and benefitting from the social engagements with the community that arise in such schemes. Such social benefits have also been shown to contribute to the mental and physical health of those participating in them.¹¹ .Machynlleth has developed free-to-use fruit bushes and trees on small verges etc through the town, with open access, which is proving popular with tourists and local people and encourages eating of fresh fruit.¹² Other food growing schemes linked with Paramaethu Cymru include Tyddyn Teg (Gwynedd); Garth Organics (Llangollen); Cultivate (Newtown) and Dyfed Permaculture Trust (Sir Gar). Paramaethu Cymru is in process of developing its website to map such schemes to encourage visits to them and training to set up more.

4.2 Paramaethu Cymru is active in promoting such local schemes all over Wales. They employ significant numbers and so would also help to meet the target of *An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs*, where quality measures include job-satisfaction. There are demonstrated incidental further health benefits gained by people simply from engaging in such community schemes.

4.3 The government could sponsor research to investigate successful small-scale models and also barriers (e.g. for the unemployed) that might be overcome to encourage their

further spread and greater involvement. *Such small businesses also provide scope for increasing employment opportunities.*

5 A drive to support local growing in gardens and allotments.

5.1 A Nationwide 'Growing the Future' (GTF) Project was initiated by the National Botanic Garden of Wales (NBGW). The project was designed using permaculture processes and in its three year span it was lauded for its innovative approaches and effects in sites spread across the whole of Wales to teach and encourage home growing of food crops. Its website still offers that support.¹³

5.2 Sadly some of the GTF courses ceased when funding ceased – it needed a longer life for more sustainable effects. Happily NBGW have applied for a new version of the Project which Paramaethu Cymru are hoping to collaborate with.

National awareness and more extended support of such projects could help meet the objectives of healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable.

6 Medical treatments have been dominated by pharmaceutical companies. These frequently result in treatment of symptoms rather than causes, and often people have become too reliant upon receiving such temporary panaceas, rather than trying to attend to causes. There can be less expensive, naturally-occurring alternatives (e.g.turmeric as an anti-depressant¹⁴).

6.1 Health staff need:

- a) training to prescribe (often cheaper) dietary remedies where they can be appropriate
- b) sufficient time in consultations to be able to do so.

7 Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards/ Processes which help to reverse global warming – as outlined in 'Drawdown' research

7.1 At present almost all farms are heavily dependent upon external inputs: fuel, fertilizers, pesticides, medicines

This increasingly hits the economic viability of small farms especially. Their small scale can pressure them into specialising in a single enterprise, which in turn makes them more vulnerable, less resilient. Research and practice are indicating that there are low cost alternatives such as improving soil conditions through mixed farming; integrating trees in fields;

mob grazing; intercropping¹⁵; use of cover crops which prove successful for small farm units (e.g. Primrose Organic Farm¹⁶).

7.2 R&D of these low-input practices, mostly shunned by agribusiness, needs to be supported and promoted at a national level. *These would also help to meet the target of 'An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs'.*

7.3 High environmental and animal welfare standards are demanded by existing soil association and organic farm requirements.

They are increasingly being expected by the population at large, yet seem now to be threatened by negotiations e.g. for 'free trade' with U.S.A. resulting from Brexit.

7.4 High standards could be encouraged more strongly with more support given to farms meeting those standards and national schemes for recognition of outlets selling food which meets those standards. *These would also help to meet the target of 'An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs'*

8. 'Drawdown' is an extended in-depth international research project that has identified 100 ways not just to mitigate global warming but to reverse it.

8.1 A third of the top 25 strategies to reverse global warming relate to food production and go beyond sequestration of carbon in soils. Many of them also offer greater profitability for farmers/growers, though initial investment costs can make them seem less welcome. They include reducing food waste (not just through recycling it as compost); people switching to plant-rich diets; and agricultural practices, especially some that incorporate trees¹⁷.

8.2 These research results should be seriously explored by the Committee and incorporated in the outcomes. Their global contribution can also be used as part of the process of persuading people to consider adopting them.

¹ http://www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/uploads/food_values_reporteng.pdf

²

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/est/Investment/Agriculture_at_a_Crossroads_global_report_IAASTD.pdf

³ Paul Hawken (ed) *Drawdown: the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming (2017)* and <http://www.drawdown.org/references#food>

⁴ <http://llanfyllin.sector39.co.uk>

⁵ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110110172405/http://www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/lidnsbranch/> also e.g. Arthritis Digest 2017 Issue 4 Food News, p 5

⁶ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/43758>

⁷ [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/nfu%20an%20english%20agribusiness%20lobby%20group%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/nfu%20an%20english%20agribusiness%20lobby%20group%20(1).pdf)

⁸ <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/federation/15e1a4b17de6dc3e?projector=1> = a must-see video.

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- ⁹ www.oneplanetdevelopment.co.uk
- ¹⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-39975637 and <http://www.sirrolli.com/sirrolli>
- ¹¹ https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/Gardens_and_health.pdf
- ¹² <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/federation/15e1a4b17de6dc3e?projector=1>
- ¹³ <http://www.growingthefuture.co.uk>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23832433>
- ¹⁵ <http://www.nuffieldinternational.org/live/Reports%20///C:/Users/user/Downloads/1474016405Andrew-Howard-report-2015.pdf> and search intercropping
- ¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Primrose-Farm-211865775501415/>
- ¹⁷ <https://wales.permaculture.org.uk/practical-solutions/agroforestry>