

RFW 34

Ymateb gan : Deietegwyr Iechyd y Cyhoedd yng Nghymru
Evidence from : Public Health Dietitians in Wales

PHDiW are a group of Specialist Dietitians employed within University Health Boards or Public Health Wales (NHS). Public Health Dietitians provide credible and unbiased nutrition information, accredited training and resources to support key settings (such as nurseries, schools, and care homes), organisations (such as Communities First, Families First and the voluntary sector), communities, and members of the public to make healthy food choices with knowledge and confidence. Community Dietitians are trusted stakeholders frequently engaged in a range of local and national working groups, and have assisted, or led in the development of food/nutrition related policies and guidelines, including the All Wales Obesity Pathway, Food and Health Guidelines for Early Years and Childcare Settings, and the Nutrition in Community Settings Pathway.

We welcome this opportunity to submit written response evidence.

What is your vision for the future of food in Wales and what needs to be done to achieve it?

How can we rethink food so that we have:

1. Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable;
 2. An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs;
 3. Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards;
- and
4. An internationally renowned destination for food lovers?

Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable

Current dietary patterns mean that the population in Wales do not meet the government recommendations for a healthy balanced diet that can contribute to the prevention of a range of chronic diseases.

In terms of climate change and health we need to shift the balance towards a diet that is higher in cereal and grains and lower in meat and we need to be eating less sugar, fat and salt and processed food products that contain high amounts of these components.

Access to healthy foods in certain areas, not just areas of deprivation is difficult. By supporting local food producers, this can result in reduced food miles, building food tourism, create more jobs, and building communities, and as a consequential benefit, promote activity and mental wellbeing

We need to rethink what food can be produced in Wales that meets the need for a healthy nutritious diet and enable people to be more in touch with where food comes from and increase local growing e.g.

- Community orchards in every community/ward where all community members can learn to grow and care for fruit trees and berry bushes and possibly vegetables – link with growing schemes, environment groups and natural resources Wales. Trees and green areas would promote environmental health and air quality for the community as well as a means to physical activity. This could also include planting fruit trees on available space in GP surgeries, hospitals and community buildings
New build projects for older people/retirement that have a statutory requirement to allocate space for raised bed areas to grow herbs and miniature fruit trees – accessible to all people in the building.
- Utilising public spaces to plant/grow fruit and vegetables as the model in Todmorden ¹
- Employ gardeners and growers who can inspire and teach all generations. Free courses for all on growing in your back yard.
- Increase allotments and employ sustainable ways of utilising excess crops through local communities
- Agricultural school in Wales with outreach projects into communities to advise and guide on growing projects
- Rehabilitation projects or community orders to include activities such as clearing sites/preparing areas to plant/grow.
- Making Wales the “Harvest Festival” –centre of UK, celebrating local produce – sharing produce – as a key feature in calendar.
- Promotion of affordable weekly seasonal fruit and vegetable boxes for families with recipe guides
- Cooking clubs/demonstrations using plant based protein sources.
- Support for pop up restaurants using Welsh produce during holiday season on campsites/holiday sites and beach fronts – with a website links to what is happening in the Welsh foodie destination.
- Promoting of locally produced meat – high quality slow growing stock
- Growing schemes to go into schools
- Increasing links between the growers and the local community or through public/third sector organisations as farmers can’t always meet the demand that is required. This is crucial to enable local producers to access and submit to contract tenders through combining as consortia or as a contract lot. Examples of this type of work is being set up in the Vale of Glamorgan through the Sensemaker project.

PHDiW as a key stakeholder in the Wales food poverty alliance (WFPA) and believes that food poverty in Wales is unacceptable. We recognise that Welsh Government has made some progress in trying to tackle food poverty and support the WFPA view that it is an opportune time for all sectors to come together to tackle food poverty in Wales. As a member of the WFPA we endorse the incorporation of the following into a future Food and Drink vision for Wales:

- routinely measuring household food insecurity to understand the full scale of the problem, who is at risk, and identify policy solutions;
- Support for an independent inquiry into childhood food insecurity which hears directly from children;
- A menu of policy measures to tackle the problem including food provision in school holidays, increasing uptake and value of Healthy Start, employment opportunities that offer secure, well paid work, addressing skills gaps in the food industry, improving access to welfare rights advocacy and advice and improving access to the Discretionary Assistance Fund.

Many of the initiatives that Welsh Government initiated to support access to healthy affordable food and development of food skills are no longer gaining Welsh Government core support,(for example the Rural Regeneration Unit's fruit and veg co-op scheme, the Cooking Bus and more recently the impending loss of Community First teams which support communities vulnerable to food insecurity.

It is vital going forward that not only food production needs to be expanded in terms of growth of fruit and vegetables but also the alongside this a programme of education and training to develop peoples' skills and knowledge to incorporate these into a healthy balanced diet.

The **Nutrition Skills for Life™** training programme, funded by Welsh Government since 2006, has been embedded into many Communities First cluster work plans across Wales in the past decade. It aims to build community capacity to support healthy eating, a key determinant of health and wellbeing. This is achieved through training community workers to pass on evidence based nutrition messages to communities that they work with and providing support for the development of community nutrition initiatives. Good nutrition and healthy weight is essential to mitigate against the risk of child and adult obesity and other chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, osteoarthritis and depression. Good health enhances quality of life, increases capacity for learning, strengthens families and communities and improves workforce productivity ².

The phasing out of Communities First has resulted in a significant loss of trained staff and reduced capacity to deliver community food and nutrition initiatives such as accredited nutrition courses, practical food skills courses (Get Cooking and Come and Cook/Dewch i Goginio) and the structured weight management programme Foodwise for Life. It will result in reduced activity, for example, at Level 1 of the All Wales Obesity Pathway ³ at a time when Welsh Government has committed to developing a national obesity strategy⁴. The withdrawal of these programmes from deprived areas will impact on the health and wellbeing of present and future generations, particularly our most vulnerable citizens in Wales, and will widen diet related inequalities in health.

School curriculum

The development of the knowledge, skills and confidence to grow and cook healthy budget friendly meals needs to be a high priority and could be embedded within the Welsh school curriculum.

Ideas such as growing herbs, fruits and vegetables in school gardens – benefits could be:

- a) Reduced cost of ingredients for school cooking classes
- b) Reducing cost of school meals – savings put to high quality Welsh meat/fish/eggs/dairy
- c) Opportunities to provide excess fruit and veg for community kitchens cooking mid day meals for older people
- d) Opportunities to provide fruit/veg boxes for older people at home.

1. An innovative food industry sustaining high quality jobs;

Good nutrition is essential for optimum health and wellbeing and for the prevention and risk reduction of non communicable diseases. Any discussion about nutrition has to look at the food supply. There should be more support for increasing fruit and vegetable growing and products that meet dietary recommendations in terms of lower fat, sugar, salt and increased cereal fibre and grains.

The Public Health Wales Act (2017)⁵ will require all of the public bodies covered by Well-being of Future Generations Act to carry out Health Impact Assessment (HIA)⁶ in Wales. This will ensure that potential future impacts on the health and well-being of communities or on individuals are considered when making decisions. HIAs should be conducted on food system strategies, policies, projects that will affect the food system, and people's ability to access health food.

The legislative framework in Wales promotes a 'Health in All Policies' approach to tackle key public health issues and reduce inequalities in health. This should be applied to the food system in Wales to support citizens to access health, sustainable, affordable food.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act provides a unique opportunity to use food as an example of how all the 7 goals can be met through ensuring healthy sustainable food production and provision through a thriving food industry, which promotes health and reduces inequality in access to affordable food as well as bringing communities together through food.

One of the biggest challenges facing public health in relation to food is the business interests of industry. Many foods sold in the UK undermine health. Health must be prioritised over big business. This should be considered in preference to the development of innovative or novel food products for a niche market. The food industry should be innovative in supporting the need to promote a healthy balanced diet and make it easier for people to access an affordable healthy diet, e.g.

More local markets, street markets, pop up shops which are subsidised so that they can compete with supermarkets. Exploration of food production units to provide subsidised nutritious ready meals through a social enterprise model, and creating employment.

Programmes and initiatives such as the all Wales **Nutrition Skills for Life™** programme provide opportunities for people to develop the skills to budget, shop, prepare and cook healthy, affordable meals for themselves and their families. This enables people to retain connection to and through the food they eat e.g. social connections with food, making food and cooking and sharing meals together. Furthermore it can help to retain connections with where food comes from and how it gets to our tables.

2. Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards

Wales should continue to produce premium price high quality meat, inhibit factory farming and use methods to increase acceptance and uptake of cereals, pulses and grains intake to meet sustainability targets and health requirements. Marketing these choices as healthy, tasty and alternatives to meat in school menus, the work place and restaurants
Public procurement of food through the national procurement service can be an exemplar organisation for the rest of Wales in procuring ethical, sustainable and healthy food.

Balancing health aims, consideration to reduce health inequalities in Wales but at the same time promote Wales as a 'Foodie destination' is a complex balancing act.

Wales is known for having a wealth of knowledge and skills in the production of high quality meat and dairy products, with high environmental and animal welfare standards and something we should be proud of and promote. However, the production of animal protein with high standards of animal welfare takes time and the end produce is potentially expensive. This may mean that with the impact of exit from the EU – these products become less accessible to some sectors of Welsh society.

The aim would not be to increase inequalities within communities, but to enhance health and wellbeing via a well balanced diet that meets the recommended government guideline as outlined in the Eatwell guide principles, and promote a diet built around plant based foods but including adequate amounts of high quality animal protein/dairy products.

Often people lack the practical cooking skills to utilise plant based protein sources and as the price of high quality animal protein moves up this may influence the move towards affordable but lower quality processed products within areas of high deprivation – potentially increasing health inequalities.

3. An internationally renowned destination for food lovers?

Foodie destination development ideas include:

- 1) Welsh food blogs – with information of what is happening around Wales for food tourists promoting quality produce and reduced food miles
- 2) Pop up restaurants from April – September – showcasing Welsh produce – in areas of tourism
- 3) Promotion of Welsh produce within self catering accommodation – provision of welcome box of produce, with up to date links to local restaurants, markets and foodie events.
- 4) Continue with Welsh food events
- 5) Develop new events e.g. promote Wales as the 'Harvest Festival' centre of UK
- 6) Encourage local restaurants to produce their own 'take home' foodie treats.

- 7) Supermarkets showcasing Welsh produce.
- 8) Cafes and restaurants promoting Welsh produce
- 9) Increased local food events involving local communities in more deprived areas, shifting from the less accessible food festivals

¹.<https://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/news/its-official-we-are-a-community-benefit-society>

². <http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=16155>

³.<http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>

⁴. WHO (2014) Health in all policies: Helsinki statement. Framework for country action

⁵. Welsh Government (2010) All Wales Obesity Pathway

⁶. Welsh Government (2017) Public Health (Wales) Bill