

HCC response to the Senedd Cymru Food (Wales) Bill

27 January 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the Stage 1 scrutiny of the general principles of the Food (Wales) Bill.

Hybu Cig Cymru - Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) is a public body delivering the statutory functions of the Red Meat Industry (Wales) Measure 2010 on behalf of the Welsh Ministers. HCC is responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of Welsh red meat. HCC's stakeholder representatives implement, on behalf of all Welsh farmers and other key industry participants, a strategic plan to develop profitable and sustainable markets for Welsh red meat to derive benefit for all in the supply chain.

HCC has the following comments to make on the Bill and on the provisions contained within it.

Principles

HCC supports the focus on Wales' food systems, and the role it plays in underpinning economic, environmental and societal prosperity, nevertheless it is important that the Food (Wales) Bill is aligned with Agriculture (Wales) Bill. In addition, the Bill must support existing affiliated strategies.

The Welsh red meat industry relies on long global supply chains, with associated time logistics, and consequently during times of uncertainty there are issues of food security. The industry must adopt new ways of working, consider ways to shorten and simplify supply chains where possible and seek to respond to evolving consumer demands. An opportunity exists in the design of policy to tackle these challenges and increase the importance of food security and UK self-sufficiency, and the supply of affordable nutritious food. We need to build upon the essential role of agriculture in food production, the rural community, the rural economy, and in wider cultural and well-being provisions whilst protecting our natural resources.

HCC is supportive of the principles of the Bill, which seeks to establish a more sustainable food system in Wales. This framework is required to enable a coherent, consistent and strategic cross-governmental approach to policy and practice on all aspects of the food system. Ongoing support and interventions are also needed to further build upon business resilience throughout the Welsh red meat supply chain.

HCC is clear that Wales' red meat producers have an important role in sustainable food security in Wales, providing nutritious food in an environmentally sensitive way. Wales' red meat producers play an important role in broader UK protein self-sufficiency with England being a major consumer of PGI Welsh Lamb. It must also be noted that the development and success of global export markets are key to the economic stability of Welsh red meat farms, with export targets aligning to Welsh Government's Export Action Plan for Wales¹.

Food Goals

HCC supports the duty on public bodies to advance food goals, to provide affordable, healthy, and economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable food for the people of Wales whilst taking account of economic well-being, health and social well-being, education, the environment and food waste.

We also agree that targets should be set to specify standards to be achieved, and to set timescales for achieving them which are ambitious yet realistic. The Bill requires reviews every five years, however given the fluidity of the food sector, more frequent reviews may be advantageous to allow policy and support interventions to be adjusted, if required, on a more frequent basis. The establishment of baselines and ongoing monitoring are key in understanding the impact of Wales' food system.

However, given the wide-ranging standards within the goals (affordable, healthy, and sustainable food), careful consideration should be given to ensure that targets are not conflicting and that a balanced diet, using local products where possible, is encouraged to avoid sourcing food from less sustainable sources.

HCC is supportive of the Secondary Food Goals as outlined in Table 1 of the Bill with particular focus on economic well-being as part of a sustainable food system, believing that rural communities are underpinned by the economic sustainability of primary food producers.

The Welsh Food Commission

HCC is supportive in principle of the establishment of the Welsh Food Commission, with the aim of advancing the goals of the Bill and delivering against targets.

However, further detail is required to fully understand how the Commission would operate and how it would liaise with existing food groups and Committees, and other public bodies such as HCC.

National Food Strategy

HCC is supportive of the requirement to publish a national food strategy, setting out the overall strategy and individual policies that need to be pursued in order to advance the goals of the Bill and achieve the targets. A coherent approach to Welsh Government strategies relating to food would be welcomed.

¹ Welsh Government. Export Action Plan for Wales. December 2020.

We would welcome wide industry engagement during the strategy's development and would hope to see details included on the support mechanisms that would be available to businesses to achieve a sustainable food system.

A whole supply-chain approach is vital, with synergies between this Bill and other strategies with a cross-over into food, such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme, the Welsh Government Food and Drink Action Plan, Welsh Government's Export Action Plan for Wales and HCC's *Red Meat Vision for Wales*.

Local Food Plans

HCC is supportive of the requirement for public bodies (namely the Welsh Ministers, local authorities and Local Health Boards) to publish a local food plan every five-years, setting out the policies that they intend to pursue in order to contribute to the advancement of the Bill's goals and achieve its targets. The Bill states that the Welsh Ministers may, by regulations, amend the named public bodies; and as such HCC is supportive, in principle, as there is a clear advantage of local food plans in the context of bodies responsible for food procurement; however further detail is required to fully understand how food plans in the context of smaller public bodies would be advantageous.