

Food Sense Wales response to the ESJ Inquiry into access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food

In support of the Oral Evidence session 19th January 2025.

This evidence focuses on:

1. Setting the context of the challenges of household food security within the wider context of the food system
2. Progress made to support the provision of healthy and nutritious food, balancing the need for emergency support with the more structural changes required
3. What more can Welsh Government do support access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food for all?

About Food Sense Wales

Founded in 2018, **Food Sense Wales** was established to drive forward a cross-sector approach to the food system in Wales. We work with communities, organisations, policymakers and Government across Wales to create a food and farming system that is good for people and good for the planet.

Food Sense Wales understands the sustainability challenges across the food system and works on multiple levels to co-create a food system that is good for people and the planet. Its strategy is based around three key pillars:

- 1. Building a positive food culture in Wales that invests in people, embraces our heritage, celebrates and values “the local” and puts food education front and centre**
- 2. Catalysing a revolution in local and sustainable procurement inspired through horticulture: healthy and sustainable food on the public plate should catalyse demand for the same on every plate in Wales**
- 3. Co-creating a food policy and legislative framework that enables, sets targets for and monitors the transition of agroecological production and consumption in Wales to benefit the environment and society**

Food Sense Wales aims to achieve these goals through:

- **Developing a network of cross sector food partnerships across Wales that meet local needs in order to achieve national change**
- **Piloting and scaling innovative approaches to inspire action with initiatives such as Welsh Veg in Schools**
- **Advocating for and developing good food policy building consensus with food related organisations operating in Wales and beyond through Food Policy Alliance Cymru**
- **Telling the stories of the experiences, achievements and challenges within the food system through effective communications**

1. Setting the context of the challenges of household food security within the wider context of the food system

It is important to highlight that household food security is dependent upon affordability and availability of a healthy diet and has local, national and global dimensions:

- Do households have sufficient incomes (through fair work and/or welfare support) to afford the cost of a healthy diet?
- Is the cost of a healthy diet affordable?
- Is a healthy diet easily accessible?

There are stark warnings about the state of our global food system due to geopolitical factors and the impacts of climate change. See the [National Emergency Briefing](#) and [Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap – National Preparedness Commission](#).

In the short to medium term, availability of some foods may be impacted through these factors. However, the significant impact being felt now is the increase in the cost of food. Between January 2020 and July 2025, food and non-alcoholic drink prices rose 37%, compared with 28% for overall UK inflation according to the [Food and Drink Federation](#). The gap between rising food costs and wage growth has placed a disproportionate burden on low-income families. There is a stark disparity in the proportion of disposable income that different income groups must spend to afford the Eatwell Guide, with the least deprived fifth of households only needing to spend 11% vs the most deprived fifth needing to spend 45% of their disposable income (after housing costs) according to the [Food Foundations 2025 Broken Plate report](#).

1.2 Eating sustainably costs even more

Additional costs are incurred for those wanting to eat organically produced food; food which is free from synthetic pesticides, supports nature, reduces Carbon emissions and supports local economies. [Bridging the Gap](#) has drawn on nine pilots across the UK (including [Welsh Veg in Schools](#) and [Cardiff Planet Card](#)) to show that connecting organic, sustainably grown produce from small and medium-sized farms with low-income households can generate £8.78 in social value for every £1 of public investment, matched with £1.10 from shoppers. The return includes £3.11 in better health, £3.94 in stronger communities, £1.44 in local economic growth and 29p in climate and nature benefits. Hannah Gibbs from Sustain who leads the Bridging the Gap will be providing oral evidence to this inquiry.

1.3 Access isn't equal

Food insecurity does not impact all groups equally with certain communities facing disproportionate risk. For example, in June 2024 households with someone limited a lot by disability were more than three times as likely to experience food insecurity as households with no disabilities. [Food Insecurity Tracking | Food Foundation](#).

Supported through funding from WG Social Justice team, Local Food Partnerships took part in a workshop “[Understanding Equality in Food Systems: Applying Inclusive Practices](#)” which included an: exploration of expanding views of diversity, using our position to effect change, recognising the impact of bias, understanding communities and diverse lived experiences and barriers to participation. Food Partnerships are using these insights to shape their work, a good example can be found on the Bwyd Abertawe case study in the [Status of Local Food Partnerships](#) (page 31).

2. Progress made to support the provision of healthy and nutritious food, balancing the need for emergency support with the more structural changes needed

Welsh Government has made efforts to support cash first approaches and to help optimize household income through the Child Poverty Strategy. Many Food Partnerships

are taking these approaches and applying the principles of [Cash First](#) advocated for by the Independent Food Aid Network. See the [Food Cardiff Gold Award](#) (page 23) for a case study on maximising household income.

2.1 Community Food Strategy and Local Food Partnerships

Welsh Government has recognised the need to build greater resilience in our food system, through the publication of the [Community Food Strategy](#), which does seek to build more local and diverse food systems in Wales, predominantly through the network of cross sector Local Food Partnerships. This work has built on the [Sustainable Food Places](#) approach which Food Sense Wales has been leading on since 2019 in Wales. It has been demonstrated to be an effective leadership mechanism for local food systems [The value of local food partnerships: Covid and beyond](#).

Cross Government funding for these partnerships (Social Justice and Food Division) demonstrates the dual recognition to build more resilience in local supply chains (production and supply) – in order to make more nature and climate friendly food available; and in community approaches such as community meals, optimizing uptake of benefits, community growing, building networks around emergency food provision and training – for example through the [Nutrition Skills for Life®](#) programme.

Welsh Government's investment in local food partnerships has been a direct recognition of the need to shift the balance from majority emergency food aid to a more preventative, sustainable approach. Between 2019 to 2024 there has been £26.5million allocated to tackling food poverty ([Written Statement: Funding for Tackling Food Poverty \(17 December 2024\) | GOV.WALES](#)) which includes Direct Food Support / Emergency Food Aid funding, funding for Fareshare Cymru and funding for Local Food Partnerships.

Continuing to provide emergency food aid funding, whilst investing in structural approaches to change through the Local Food Partnerships is positive. Currently there is still a need for emergency food aid for people in crisis but more needs to be done to create a sustainable system. It would be worth reviewing how much money for emergency food aid is spent by Welsh Government to the benefit of large retail. Could schemes that promote spend in local food economies provide the dual benefit of supporting those on low incomes whilst building local resilient economies? See [Cardiff Planet Card](#) as one example of how this could be imagined. It is also worth referring to the [Local Food Plan](#) which is looking to grow the local food sector by 10 times by 2030.

Examples of all projects WG is currently supporting Food Partnerships with, can be found here: [Summary of LFP Grants.docx](#). This includes small grants and 2 collaborative grants – one across Dyfed-Powys and one across North Wales.

The Status of Local Food Partnership 2025 report can be found here [PartnershipsReportENG.pdf](#) – this report will be updated in March 2026.

With further information and video case studies of Food Partnerships here [Local Food Partnerships – foodsensewales.org.uk](#)

Specifically the committee will hear oral evidence from:

Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership which was established after the previous Blaenau Gwent PSB (now Blaenau Gwent Local Well-Being Partnership) agreed to implement a well-being programme on sustainable food and food insecurity. Particularly notable is their coordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty including multi-agency working to increase Healthy Start scheme uptake, with frontline staff training, a local retailer booster top-up voucher trial, vitamin collections at community hubs and a local media campaign.

[Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership: Healthy Food For All – foodsensewales.org.uk](#)

Bwyd Powys Food is working with the Council health protection team and local growers to support families at two Flying Start settings to access local, sustainable, and healthy food. The pilot provides weekly subsidised veg boxes from local farms, free monthly cooking classes and shared meals.

[Bwyd Powys Food: Food for the Planet – foodsensewales.org.uk](#)

And written evidence (Appendix 1) from:

Food Cardiff – Planet Card is a pilot scheme in Cardiff to increase access to planet-friendly food to households on low-incomes. Participants receive £11 per week to spend on organic fruit & veg at Cardiff Farmers Markets (a social enterprise). Initial findings from Cardiff University's independent evaluation have shown increases in healthy eating behaviours and reports of reduced social isolation amongst participants; with the financial investment directly benefiting small Welsh growers. Written evidence from a Food Cardiff member and participant on the scheme is in Appendix 1.

[Food Cardiff: Good Food Governance and Strategy – foodsensewales.org.uk](#)

In addition the committee may like to note that Food Sense Wales and the School of Geography & Planning, Cardiff University, recently published "[Food and Housing Connections: strengthening communities through good food](#)". The report summarises the outcomes from an event bringing together three communities of experts: Practitioners in social housing, Local Food Partnerships, and specialist researchers in

food system transformation and housing. One of the case studies is Down to Zero, a not-for-profit Community Benefit Society who are working with Cynon Taf (a community housing group) and **RCT Food Partnership**. Cynon Taf tenants volunteer at sites that operate according to permaculture and no-dig principles. The resulting produce supplies the Llysh Bocs subscription veg box delivery, which aims to become a self-financing social enterprise supplying locally grown produce produced by its employees. One of the report recommendations was for housing associations to partner with tenants and health teams to create cooperative food models that utilise Housing Associations and tenants' purchasing power, reduce food insecurity, and support local supply chains.

2.2 Universal Primary Free School Meals

Welsh Governments roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals has the potential to support households in a significant way, but the programme must understand why uptake of these meals is lower than desired and particularly by children from low income households. (see section 3). There is also a need to extend provision to secondary school children.

2.3 Food and Fun

Welsh Government has continued to invest in its Programme for Government commitment for holiday provision through the ['Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme](#) administered through the WLGA. This programme (originally piloted through the Food Cardiff partnership in 2015) has become a vital part of the support infrastructure for families and schools. It's a place where assets such as [Nutrition Skills for Life®](#) training, Local Food Partnerships and local initiatives feed off one another to create something that is more than the sum of its parts. For example, Welsh Veg in Schools began as a pilot within Cardiff's Food and Fun, and staff trained in Nutrition Skills for Life for Food and Fun use these skills within term time.

In 2025 Julie Morgan MS conducted a review of the programme and stated that *"I have confidence that the Programme is so valuable that there should be a systematic way found to ensure that availability is extended in low take up areas, so to avoid a 'postcode lottery'.* The recommendations made focused on ensuring provision be maximised to ensure they are reaching those children and young people who need it most, whilst also recognising the Welsh Government need to give further consideration to what wider provision is needed to support families over the holiday periods [School Holiday Enrichment Programme \(SHEP\): interim report \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

2.4 Welsh Veg in Schools – Welsh Government Foundational Economy

There has been a recognition that Wales is highly dependent on imports of fruit and vegetables and there has been a drive to increase organic horticulture through initiatives such as [Welsh Veg in Schools](#) (part funded through WG Foundational Economy in 23/4- 24/5 and 25/6). This provides the potential for all children who take free school meals to have free access to locally and sustainably grown vegetables and for a larger market to be developed for the public and commercial sectors. But it requires significant investment in support for Horticulture (training, resources, market development) and infrastructure (on farm, centrally and in schools) and building relationships across the supply chain – if it is to build the kind of Food Security that is needed for the future. Securing that funding, especially through efforts with Welsh Governments Integrated Natural Resources funding, has been extremely challenging. This year the pilot will have grown around 30T of organic produce supplying into selected schools across 13 Local Authorities and has built huge momentum – one example – [Local veg takes the lead on Ceredigion School menus - Ceredigion County Council](#).

In order for children to embrace vegetable consumption, we need a radical and long-term approach to food in school that ensures all children have access to the resources, knowledge and experiences to learn about food, to learn through food and to share good food throughout their entire learning journey. See the [Tonnes of Change](#) report for more detailed information.

It's worth noting that Welsh Government has supported Veg Powers [Eat Them To Defeat Them](#) campaign for a number of years (2019/2020–2024/5) in order to support bilingual delivery. The [evaluation](#) confirms that repeated involvement in the campaign leads to increased veg consumption over the long term and population scale improvement. Unfortunately, Welsh Government was unable to support the campaign in Wales for the 25/6 financial year.

3 What more can Welsh Government do support access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food for all?

3.1 Food across Welsh Government remains fragmented

Despite the publication of Food Matters which mapped food initiatives across government departments with the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, current government efforts to address the multiple challenges of the food system remain fragmented across multiple policy areas. To address these interconnected

issues, we believe **a robust governance framework for food policy is essential** to fully address food security.

3.2 Focus on Food from Wellbeing of Future Generations commissioner

(see separate evidence submitted by WFGC)

Whilst the focus on Food from the WFGC is very welcome, it should also be noted that there is a need to amend the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act) to include the food system in the definitions of Wales' Well-being goals – with access to healthy, climate and nature friendly diets for all.

In November 2025, Food Sense Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales published guidance for [local authorities in Wales on food](#). The guidance outlines the food policy levers which local authorities control or influence and provides examples from across Wales and the UK on how local authorities can use these levers to improve local food systems. The guidance outlines advice on governance, planning, procurement, access to food, promoting healthy diets and food waste and provides strategic links with the Child Poverty Strategy, Healthy Weight Healthy Wales and the Community Food strategy. But it requires local government leaders to take up the advice.

3.3 Food needs to be at the heart of the next Programme for Government

Food Sense Wales is part of [Food Policy Alliance Cymru](#) which recently published their Asks of the next Welsh Government calling on them to put food at the heart of its Programme for Government by prioritising equal access to local, affordable, healthy, delicious, nature and climate friendly diets by:

- Developing a comprehensive Food Resilience Plan that delivers on Wales' Well-being Goals
- Ensuring every child leaves school Food Literate
- Building Community Food Wealth
- Creating an ambitious Growth Plan for Edible Horticulture

[Put Food at the heart of Welsh-Government](#) contains a bank of recommendations and initiatives the committee may want to refer to as part of this evidence as well as list of helpful references.

Katie Palmer, Head of Food Sense Wales
9th January 2025

Appendix 1

Evidence from Planet Card participant and (community) Food Cardiff member

Shopping Experience

"Planet Card has given me a great opportunity to be part of Cardiff Farmers' markets. I want to eat food that is good for me and good for the planet and my Planet Card means I can afford to do that. I enjoy coming to the market on Saturdays or Sundays.

I am lucky I can cycle, and with all the investment in safer cycling lanes its quite easy for everyone to cycle or get the bus to the Riverside Farmers' Market. This means that my shopping experience is climate friendly too.

Produce Quality

The vegetables and fruit that I buy at the farmers markets are so much nicer than anything bought in supermarkets. They are so tasty and not covered in nasty plastic. They taste of the goodness of the earth or the trees where they are grown. A plastic packet of washed carrots I would boil in water and then eat. They would taste bland and even a bit chemical. But carrots from Paul's stall I treat differently, with more care. I may roast them, air fry them or make them into the centre piece of a meal, the star of the show rather than a bland side dish. The same goes with his sweetcorn, courgettes or peppers. I really enjoy fresh salads using ingredients I've bought with my Planet Card. This is helping me to maintain much healthier eating habits.

Changing attitudes and embracing new opportunities

I don't have much time for growing my own food at the moment but when Paul has had plants on the stall I have bought them. My basil plants grew on my windowsill and had a nice smell. They made me want to look for new recipes so I could use them. I also had a courgette plant but that I had to put in a bigger pot outside which worked. I made some delicious ratatouille with the courgettes and added a tin of red kidney beans to make it healthier. Using my Planet Card means I am eating fruit and vegetables that are in season here in Wales not food shipped in from across the world. It was a bit sad when the strawberry season ended as they tasted amazing and I loved sharing them with family and friends.

If everyone in my community could have a Planet card I think they would enjoy it too. We could all get used to eating locally grown yummy food and maybe learn more about how this is good for our planet.

Fitting in with One Planet Cardiff and local Food Strategies

Proud to be a new Gold Award Sustainable Food Place

Planet card bridges the gap between what people on low incomes want to eat and what they can afford to eat.

Planet card is supporting all the way along the food chain, better sustainable local agriculture, better local retail opportunities leading to better diets and health outcomes”

[Cardiff Planet Card](#)