

Carmarthenshire

Pembrokeshire

Neath Port Talbot

Swansea



Food for the **Region**

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM CONFERENCE

SOUTH WEST WALES

CONFERENCE REPORT

Carmarthenshire

Pembrokeshire

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**5th & 6th
October 2021**

JOIN THE
FOLLOW-UP
EVENT

**SAVE THE DATE
5th April 2022**

“CO-CREATING A HEALTHIER & MORE REGENERATIVE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM FOR THE REGION”

Hosted online over two consecutive days, the Regional Food System Conference for South West Wales brought together over 100 people to explore challenges, ideas and opportunities related to our food system.

The goal was to share perspectives and co-produce priorities for regional collaboration, by creating space for a wide diversity of people to participate in conversations about what's important, what they'd love to see, and how we can make change happen.

This report captures some of the key themes that surfaced from the discussion, and identifies the actions we can all take to create change. It's an agenda that is owned by all of us, and involves a set of challenges that requires us all to work together.

With thanks to our partners and contributors:



As a not-for-profit regional alliance, 4theRegion is working towards our vision of a happier, healthier South West Wales with a thriving economy. Our mission is to amplify what's already working well, enable collaboration among a broad partnership of changemakers, and empower people to contribute according to their own strengths and passions. Join us, or contact us to get involved!
www.4theRegion.org.uk



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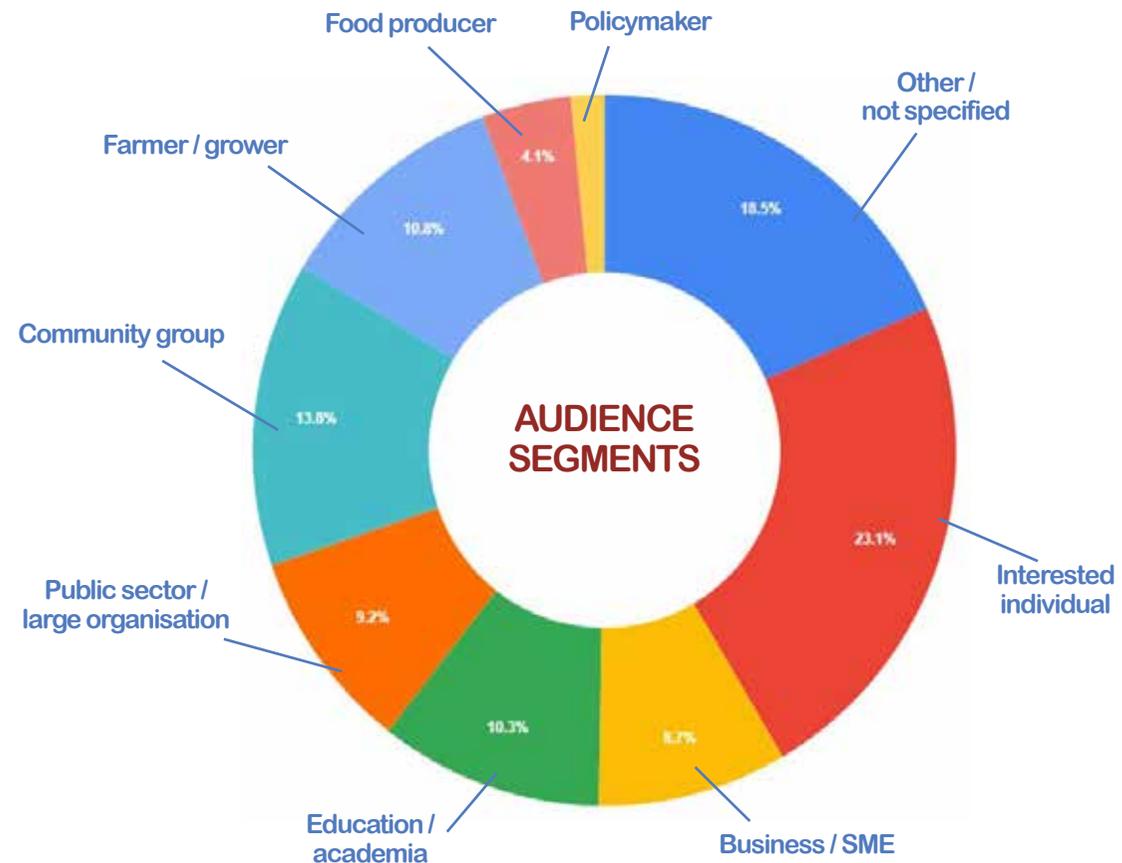
SOUTH WEST WALES

FEEDBACK:

“I liked how a diversity of voices was encouraged - it gave a really rich and nuanced picture of the experience of the food system. It was very well organised and chaired. A culture of respect was strongly fostered and this was observable in the chatbox and breakout rooms.”

Diverse Participation Listening to Each Other with Respect

The Regional Food Conference was designed to bring together people from all parts of the food system, to break down the silos and enable people to hear from those they don't normally get to speak to. Everyone has valuable expertise and experience to share, and by tapping into the wisdom of the crowd we can discover shared priorities and common values, as well as alternative perspectives we may not have considered.



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Why is this conversation important? What matters to you?

“Reconnecting young people and their families with farming and the land.”

“I want Wales to lead the way in producing healthy local food and distributing it to our communities.”

“Creating more opportunities to buy locally produced food, reduce the dominance of supermarkets.”

“Knowing where our food comes from, knowing what’s in it.”

“Pride in producing Welsh food for Welsh consumers, pride in seeing my produce on the supermarket shelves”

“Diet related disease is a huge issue in Wales and across the UK”

“Concerned about animal welfare. I don’t want to see animals shipped long distances, and we shouldn’t have to do that.”

“Sharing good practice, sharing learning and scaling what works.”

“We need to prioritise soil health, measurement of crop quality and nutrient density.”





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What are the big issues? What are the challenges?

“Feeding ourselves and being as self sufficient as possible”

“The more people support local producers, the more scope there is for more producers to establish themselves.”

“Ability to deliver at sufficient scale to be viable.”

“I think people have lost the relationship with locally produced food, as supermarkets fly in food all year round, not to mention the burgeoning ready-meal market.

“Shifting land use to reduce carbon footprint, reducing intense animal production especially polluting chicken farms, and increasing vegetable and fruit production in Wales.”

“Scaling up local horticulture growing to feed the local populations at prices they can afford.”

“Need to engage people in issues of pesticides, monoculture, animal welfare, packaging and processing.”

“Climate change and the use of land to generate electricity.”

“To produce sustainably and ethically while still offering the products at a price people are willing to pay.”

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“Children and families in more deprived areas have less access to healthy, nutritious food and so they suffer from more ill health, need more antibiotics and have lower wellbeing generally.”

“Diet related disease is a huge issue in Wales and across the UK.”

“We need to tackle aggressive advertising and remove processed food as easy choices. Reliance on processed food can lead to diet-related health issues.”

“How can we engage with the health boards in our region to co-create solutions relating to food?”

“There are health implications with pesticide use and soil contamination. We need to prioritise soil health, measurement of crop quality and nutrient density.”



KEY THEMES health

Community gardens can be part of social prescribing programmes but more support is needed.

Poor mental health in agriculture is high. We need to increase support for workers in the industry.

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“Transforming our food system is critical to tackling the climate emergency. We need to be clear about the impact of our global food system on climate change.”

“We need an end to battery chicken farming: cruel, not nutritious as a food source and bad for the climate.”

“Food waste that goes into landfill is a huge contributor to emissions.”

“Promoting sustainable agricultural and agroecological practices that work with nature to reduce artificial inputs and lead to a reduction in pollution.”

KEY THEMES

environment

“Livestock production gets a lot of criticism, but we should differentiate between livestock that are part of the problem and high welfare livestock systems that can restore ecosystems.”

“We have to remind ourselves that humanity is devastating ecological systems and all our local actions should be avoiding anything that might tip this beyond a point of no return.”

“We need to encourage regenerative practises such as food forests and agroecology.”



“14% of land in Wales is only really suitable for arable cropping. Can we use land to grow in different ways, using agroecology and urban spaces?”

“Increase access to growing spaces for communities.”

“About 80% of Welsh land is Less Favoured Area and is suitable for growing grass but much more challenging for growing fruit and veg.”

“Access to land is the biggest barrier to more local farming enterprises.”

KEY THEMES

land

Community gardens can be part of social prescribing programmes but more support is needed.

“New developments should consider community allotments and green space.”

“Use empty buildings to create more markets, greengrocers, butchers, etc. Make these affordable to run by reducing business rates.”

“If woodlands are well planned, they can be used for food production too.”

“Mixed farming seems to have little support and monocultures are encouraged.”

“The starting point for addressing the environmental impact of the food system lies in changing the way land and seas are managed, with the adoption of more sustainable farming, forestry and fishing practices.”



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“We desperately need an overarching food and farming strategy for Wales that links up climate, biodiversity, health and economy.”

AGENTS FOR CHANGE:

Public Sector & Policy Makers

INVOLVE & LISTEN TO PEOPLE

Peoples assemblies and community conversations are important to uncover opportunities and co-create solutions - everyone needs to feel ownership of this agenda. Councils and the Welsh Government need to be involved, listening, and ready to embrace the outcomes of these discussions.

MAKE LAND AVAILABLE FOR GROWING

Access to land is a massive problem at all scales - for new farmers, new community supported agriculture initiatives, community projects and individual allotment growers. Public bodies and PSBs should map disused land across the public sector and have a strategy to make more of it available to growers on long term leases or through community land trusts. Council-owned farms can provide an opportunity for new tenant farmers to get started.

LEAD THE WAY THROUGH PROCUREMENT

Local Authorities and other public bodies can lead the way in supporting local supply chains and making healthy food more widely accessible, by committing to ensuring that locally produced food is served in council outlets, schools, hospitals and other public settings.

There are not sufficient volumes of locally grown food available yet, but public bodies can send a powerful signal of support for local producers.



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“Let’s organise a meeting with the hospitality sector to co-create opportunities for more local producers.”

AGENTS FOR CHANGE:

Businesses & Producers

“An accreditation for businesses to showcase that they are proud to be users of local, sustainable produce.”

CONNECT HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES WITH LOCAL SUPPLIERS

Restaurants, cafes and shops could do more to source produce from local suppliers, to celebrate and champion regional produce. Businesses could sign up to a pledge or a certification to show that they support local suppliers.

FACILITATE BETTER COLLABORATION AMONG SMALL PRODUCERS

Small suppliers could collaborate to strengthen regional supply chains and distribution infrastructure, in order to deliver at greater scale. “Meet the Supplier” events could connect regional suppliers with hospitality and other businesses.

MAP REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES (and map regional producers)

We need more and better facilities in the region for processing locally grown produce. We need abattoirs, bottling, washing, packaging, distribution, processing and manufacturing facilities. The first step is to map what facilities currently exist and understand the gaps and opportunities. Similarly, we should map the producers that exist in our region.



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“Could we co-create a regional initiative to engage with young people through the Eco Schools programme?”

AGENTS FOR CHANGE:

Schools & Educators

MAKE FOOD MORE CENTRAL

Connecting children with the health, environmental, cultural and career aspects of food should be a priority. There are all sorts of ways that schools can support children in becoming active food citizens. Growing food, cooking skills and food confidence should be embedded in the school experience for every child. Teachers need support to deliver more interesting food based education.

CONNECT SCHOOLS WITH FARMS

Schools can “adopt” local farms to reconnect children with where their food comes from. Farmers are keen to engage with children and a regional initiative to promote these links might be beneficial. Without support, these connections are not being made.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The food and farming sector offers great career opportunities and is vital to the resilience of rural economies. Perhaps we need to rebrand farming and remove the stigma of jobs being “low-skilled” in the farming industry, giving young people a broader perspective on the variety of land-based and food-based careers that exist.

“Tell children and young people the truth about food production and give them power to make decisions.”



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Groups
in Swansea
& Carmarthenshire
are setting up
Sustainable Food
Places. Contact
4theRegion to get
involved.

AGENTS FOR CHANGE:

Communities

Put FOOD on the agenda at any community groups you're part of - local events, shared meals, growing projects...

COMMUNITY FOOD ACTIVITIES

Create opportunities for people to connect with each other around healthy local food, for example through shared community meals, cooking classes or community growing projects. Consideration should be given to inclusivity and accessibility - people on low incomes, people from minority communities, and intergenerational opportunities.

LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENTS

Towns, villages and other places can set up community-led organisations, for example becoming Sustainable Food Places, to form alliances and enable more partnership working. These movements are essential for developing place-based solutions and nurturing active food citizenship within the community.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Increasing the number of community supported agriculture schemes. Hold community meetings to explore opportunities.

EVERY TOWN A MARKET TOWN

Local produce markets can be an important outlet for local producers. Vacant shops on local high streets could become local food hubs. Make local produce available in all communities.



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“You can measure the nutrient density of the fruit and vegetables you grow or buy, using a handheld device called a Brix Refractometer.”

AGENTS FOR CHANGE:

People - All of Us

ACT IN LINE WITH YOUR VALUES

Buying locally produced food, or growing your own, can be less convenient than buying into industrial food systems, but as more of us make informed choices, healthy and locally grown food will become easier and more affordable for everyone. Support local produce markets and food events. Make a personal pledge to source your own food from local, regenerative, ethical suppliers as much as possible: be the change you want to see in the world.

USE YOUR SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Don't be overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge. Each of us can affect change in our own spheres of influence. At home, with family and friends, at work and in our communities, we can talk about the importance of local, healthy, sustainable food; and we can lead or participate in campaigns, projects and groups.

ASK THE QUESTION - USE YOUR VOICE

Put pressure on the supermarkets - write to them asking for more local produce, organise a petition, join existing campaigns. When you eat out, ask the restaurant where their food comes from and use feedback forms to request more local produce. Ask for more regional, sustainable produce in your local shops.

South Wales Food & Drink is a website that lists regional producers. Add your business for free, and find local suppliers.



EMERGING PROJECTS

Create a programme of visits to farms and producers - learn, share best practice, inspire young people and entrepreneurs

Gnwp Resilience Pembs
Swansea Community Growing Network
Incredible Edible Carmar
Banc Organics
Liliwen Herbs

A follow-up meeting with Welsh Government Ministers, especially to explore opportunities for peoples assemblies and support for initiatives

Llanelli Town Council

Open dialogue & collaboration with the Public Services Boards and the Health Boards around community food, local supply chains & wellbeing.

SEF
4theRegion
NRW

Bringing fresh meat and fish to Llanelli, eg empty buildings

Working group to support CSAs and train new entrants

Cae Tan CSA

Organise an event or a project to connect land owners and larger farmers with new growers and those who want to start land based businesses

Summit Good
Cae Tan CSA

Establish Sustainable Food Places in Carmar & Swansea

Bywd Abertawe
Incredible Edible Carmar

Hold an event for the hospitality sector to motivate action on local sourcing - showcase good examples and understand obstacles

Sol Consulting
4theRegion

If you would like to be involved in any of these emerging projects, or would like to propose other collaborations, please contact 4theRegion!

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

How To Support Regional Food

PUT IT ON YOUR AGENDA

All partners are requested to put the subject of transforming our regional food system onto their upcoming meeting agendas. We invite you to present this report to your colleagues and agree actions appropriate to the scale and influence of your organisation. If you would like us to come and speak at your meeting, please ask!

WE WILL PRESENT THIS TO MINISTERS

Julie James MS expressly invited us to follow up with her to discuss how the Welsh Government can support the localisation and sustainability of Wales' food system.

REGIONAL EMAIL LIST

Following feedback from the conference, we have agreed to keep in touch by means of a regional email list for all those interested in and/or active in transforming our food system. If you have updates or information to share, or if you would like to join the list, please email zoe@4theregion.org.uk

RECONVENE IN SIX MONTHS

This is just the beginning of an ongoing change process that will involve us all working together over time. We will reconvene at approximately 6 monthly intervals to keep things moving forward.

TALK TO US

If you are working in this space, have a project in mind, or would like to fund or support regional initiatives relating to food, please reach out to us so we can connect, amplify and collaborate!

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT

None of us can transform the regional food system on our own, but by working together with the right vision and level of ambition, our region can lead the way in Wales and the World.

In the face of climate change, worsening wealth and health inequality, and other multi-dimensional crises, food can be a powerful force for good, reconnecting us with our natural world, with our local places, and with each other - and making us more resilient, as people and communities. Given this immense potential, the truth is that none of us is doing enough, to support and scale the healthy, fair and regenerative food system we want to see.

This report sets out what can be done, and what needs to be done, by us all. We hope you feel inspired to be part of the solution, and to be part of the change you want to see in the world. Keep in touch! There is lots to do!

With thanks to our partners and contributors:



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