Developing the markets for organic food in the Welsh hospitality and tourism sector

Case studies of organic hospitality and food tourism businesses in Wales

The Yurt Farm, Crynfryn, Penuwch, Ceredigion
Laurie Murton and Thea Deklein

Revised May 2013
History and background
Crynfryn farm has been worked by the Murton family for the last 30 years. This 150 acre organic farm has seen a variety of enterprises from dairy cows and yoghurt processing to large scale vegetable production and beef and sheep. The latest enterprise, the provision of yurts as holiday accommodation, is a radical departure but sharing the ideals and principles which govern the principles of organic production.

Laurie Murton, the grandson of the original owners and his partner, Thea Deklein are both in their mid 20s, grew up on opposite sides of the Aeron Valley and share a love of the land. They are not involved in the running of the farm, but were determined to find a way of making their own income from the farm, whilst bringing their young family up on the land.

Creation of the enterprise
With little capital but a great deal of support and goodwill from friends and family, in 2007 they considered their options. By visiting other yurt sites in England and Wales, they built up a picture of possibilities and were encouraged by the support they were shown by similar providers. They attended local training courses, one run by Business Eye the other by Medrwn, and were put in touch with a very helpful tax man and a supportive group of other tourist providers. With help, they put together a business plan, a grant application for £10,000 which they received from Ceredigion, and realistic cash flows, creating two jobs, one full time and one part-time. The environmental health and health and safety officers were very supportive together with the NFU who dealt with the issues surrounding insurance.

Facilities
The winter of 2008 and early months of 2009 involved tremendous work with the creation of the site, and erecting five new yurts, each one providing ample privacy and well spaced out over about 10 acres of grassland, bordered by untrimmed hedges and mature trees. Other buildings on the site include a cabin, which can be used as a social space with showers at one end, and a communal cooking space with a wood burning stove and comfy seats at the other. Two wooden composting toilets, built out of green oak are nearby, flowing into a reed bed drainage system. In addition to the buildings, there is a play area for the children, with sand pits and swings in the trees. The site is off grid, so wind turbines and solar panels create hot water and light, but they have had to resort to a petrol generator in grey months. Mains water is available for the showers, but with push buttons to limit use. They have found that most guests are increasingly aware of sustainability issues and appreciate the need to use the recycling and composting facilities.

The yurts themselves are in three different sizes, offering flexibility to visitors; 21, 18 and 14 foot in diameter, they are warm, spacious and light. There are wood burning stoves for heating with wood provided, together with gas hobs for cooking. Furniture is made with timber from the farm and organic futon mattresses and sheets are provided, with duvets and pillows being hired if required.
Organic produce is readily available for the visitors, with a complimentary basket of produce on arrival. BBQ burgers and other cuts of Hereford meat are available to purchase from the farm shop, together with fresh vegetables produced on the farm. There are no plans to provide ready meals, as enterprising local neighbours will be setting up a restaurant/cafe during the next tourist season, and this and other local attractions are well publicised on their website.

First season
Their first season, from April – October was a great success, with 140 change-overs. They received excellent feedback and are hoping to increase this figure to 150/200 next year. Their marketing is mainly via their own website, www.theyurtfarm.co.uk where they have an online booking system. They also advertise on the Organic Holidays website: www.organic-holidays.com where they had 578 ‘clicks’ in 08/09 and 287 ‘clicks’ in 09/10. They have recently won the ‘Muddy Boots’ travel award from The Oldie magazine, and the hope is that this will encourage more visitors from a wider age range. Their bookings up until now have largely consisted of families with young children.

The future
With regards to accommodation, an old railway carriage has recently arrived which will extend their accommodation offer for 2010. They have applied for another grant, this time from South West Wales Local Investment Fund, which will hopefully fund the cost of building and renovation work.

This new, young enterprise is inspirational and deserves to be a success in the ever-expanding market of alternative tourism. The market for yurt accommodation is strong and growing especially in Wales and Devon, but with their emphasis on sustainability combined with quality, Laurie and Thea certainly have made an excellent start.

**LEARNING POINTS:** This young couple, now with two small children, have had a very successful first season. From the bookings calendar on their website, it would appear that the summer of 2010 will be even more successful. Of course, they are more vulnerable to weather than other providers, but again their commitment to a high quality, but simple offer is impressive. They entered the market with a relatively new idea, which has been very well received by the general public. Their deep understanding of what they offer is, I am sure conveyed to all their visitors, who cannot fail to be impressed by energy and enthusiasm exhibited by this relatively young couple.