

Gwell Cysylltiadau Busnes Organig



Better Organic Business Links

An Organic Centre Wales project

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

Six case studies of successful organic hospitality and food tourism
businesses in Wales

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Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
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Better Organic Business Links – Gwell Cysylltiadau Busnes Organig

The Organic Centre Wales has received £2 million funding through the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013, which is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, to run the Better Organic Business Links (BOBL) project over 3 years (2009-2012). The BOBL project is designed to support the primary producer in Wales and grow the market for Welsh organic produce in a sustainable way. The project will develop new, emerging and existing markets for organic produce whilst driving innovation, at all levels, within the supply chain. It will strive to increase the consumer demand and markets for organic produce, especially in the home market whilst also ensuring that the primary producers are aware of market demands. The project will provide valuable market information to primary producers and the organic sector in general.

Delivery of the project is divided into five main areas of work:

1. Driving innovation
2. Consumer information and image development of organic food and farming in Wales
3. Market development
4. Market intelligence
5. Addressing key structural problems within the sector.

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Case Studies Identifying Six Successful Organic Hospitality and Food Tourism Businesses

1 Aims and objectives of the project:

The overall aim of this project is to support the development of organic food tourism initiatives, as part of the Better Organic Business Links (BOBL) project. This document produced jointly by ADAS and OCW staff is the key task under Work Package 2.

2 Introduction

Organic agri-tourism is an entrepreneurial activity and many factors contribute to the success of an enterprise. Business performance is inevitably influenced by the characteristics of the farm, the farmers, their social networks and the resources available.

The range of agri tourism enterprises, within the organic sector is now extensive, with well over 100 organic producers throughout Wales offering a wide range of tourism facilities. Our aim was to ensure that our case studies reflected both the variety and location of those enterprises.

Many tourism providers are also becoming increasingly aware of the sustainability of their provision, and in addition to registration with Visit Wales, many previously registered with the Green Dragon Environmental Standard, which has recently been taken over by another organisation, Groundwork.

However, a project in Powys, promoted by the Brecon Beacons National Park and in conjunction with Glasu is encouraging providers in Powys to sign up to the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS), the largest and most established sustainable tourism certification scheme in the UK. As this initiative is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government, it is possible that take-up of GTBS will spread to other areas of Wales. Under this certification scheme, rigorous criteria include energy efficiency, recycling, water conservation and building practices, purchasing policy including food and cleaning products.

3 Case studies

Our six case studies include a large traditional beef and sheep farm with a concentration on language and local culture; a smallholding with both the owners working as teachers off the farm; a young couple starting out with an alternative enterprise providing self-catering accommodation in yurts; a family farm diversifying into self-catering cottages used for groups; a large family beef and sheep farm who have started a off-farm café and shop in addition to their on-farm self-catering accommodation and finally an organic walled garden supplying fresh produce to a bijou hotel adjacent to the garden.

3.1 *Organig Parc, Carnguwch, Llithfaen, Gwynedd*

Richard and Bethan Ellis and their son, Carwyn



History and background

Visitors driving up the long tarmac road to the cottages, through well-maintained grassland, cannot fail to be immediately impressed by this 300 acre organic farm. The re-built stone walls, recent tree planting, the two acre fishing lake with water shute and mill stream, provision of wind powered lights on the road, are all evidence of the care and attention provided by Richard Ellis who came to this family farm 30 years ago. Now farming with his 29 year old son, Carwyn, it was converted to organic production in 2000 and currently stocked with Limousin X cattle and 250 Lleyn sheep, all now inside for the winter.

Creation of the enterprise

Planning for the future of the next generation and the continuation of employment opportunities for local people were the motivating factors behind Richard and his wife Bethan's plans for converting the farm buildings to holiday accommodation in 2001. Plans for conversion were drawn up by Gruffydd Price, one of Wales' contemporary architects but work was originally interrupted by the foot and mouth epidemic which devastated many farming businesses in North Wales.

The creation of environmentally friendly accommodation was uppermost in the minds of the family. However, eco-friendly construction materials and techniques inevitably demand increased investment and the family was fortunate in obtaining a grant from the Welsh Tourist board (now Visit Wales). Other support was available from the bank and Richard attended a short business course in Manchester.

Original slate roofs were restored and the exterior stone pointed with lime mortar. Floors were laid with locally sourced Welsh slate and oak, old beams salvaged and used as lintels above the fireplaces in the lounges and wood used for the double glazed windows and patio doors. Walls were well insulated throughout with local sheep's wool, and the use of oil fired Rayburn stoves provide background heat in addition to constant hot water and cooking facilities. Ample supply of water is available off the hills, and the use of Auro organic paints ensures low toxicity interiors with virtually no threat to those visitors prone to allergic reactions.

Open for business in 2004, this Five Star accommodation at Organig Parc won the 2007 CLA Rural Buildings Award for Wales. This award provides public recognition for landowners and farmers who "go the extra mile" in constructing or converting farm buildings.

Facilities

Five holiday cottages, each with outstanding views of the surrounding countryside and mountains accommodate between three and six visitors. A Welcome Pack of basic foods is available on arrival, and breakfast can be provided if required. The houses are furnished and equipped to the highest standards, with colour TV/DVD players in most rooms. Organic principles are continued throughout the houses, with organic cotton bed sheets and pillow-cases, woollen blankets, pillows, bedspreads, together with organic cotton towels. Each cottage has its own washing machine with an indoor clothes drying horse, which is much appreciated by the visitors. Environmentally friendly cleaning products and hand soaps are provided avoiding the use of potentially damaging bleach or other products which might contaminate the farm's water systems. Re-cycling is enthusiastically embraced by visitors using containers for the collection of tins, paper and glass. Appropriate food waste is composted with other farm-yard wastes, which go back on the land. Wood from fallen trees is cut for logs on the wood-burning stoves

The Ellis family are proud to offer high quality activity holidays at Organig Parc throughout the year. Maps in the houses identify walks around the farm but access is restricted to those staying in accommodation; metal detecting around the farm is an enthusiasm of many visitors; trout fishing in the lake is very popular and visits to the farm animals are encouraged with Richard offering tractor and trailer rides around the farm. They are passionate about maintaining the rich heritage of nature on and around the farm, and are happy that they can share the local Welsh-speaking culture with their visitors.

The future

Both Richard and Bethan feel that they have made their contribution to the future of the farm, with their vision of a truly organic enterprise now realised. They acknowledge that it is now up to Carwyn who is gradually taking over the business to expand it if necessary. With an excellent website, www.organicparc.co.uk and other marketing tools, Organig Parc is now a popular holiday destination with a large number of return visitors on a regular basis. This successful enterprise now offers a secure future for the farm and employment possibilities for future generations on the land.

Learning Points: *The Ellis family have cleverly combined their traditional culture with every possible aspect of organic and sustainable production, and consequently offer a very high standard of tourist accommodation. They are using these powerful tools to convey a message to their visitors of food production, care of the environment and maintenance of culture for the future generation.*

3.2 Swallow and Seaview Cottages, Plas Llanfair, Tynyngogl, Benllech, Anglesey

Mike and Gill Parker

Background and history

In the late 1990s, Mike and Gill were both teachers, living and working in Kent. They were contemplating moving away from the increasingly busy south east of England and applied for jobs around the country. Mike was offered a teaching position in Anglesey and with his parents living in Beaumaris, the area seemed ideal. Looking for a house with some land, Plas Llanfair built in the 1750s with eight acres of land and two barns offered great potential. Set in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it has direct access to the coastal path and beautiful Anglesey beaches. They concentrated on improvements to the house and land, erected a polytunnel and applied to the Soil Association for a producer and processor license. From their productive garden, they started to sell produce on the local farmers' markets and Gill started to make jams and chutneys from their own fruit, which her parents help to pick. This is now a very successful enterprise, with its own website, selling to local shops and markets, see <http://www.organicjams.co.uk>

Creation of the enterprise

In 2000 the barns were requiring attention and Mike and Gill felt that rather than just patching them up, they should be converting them to accommodation, providing a source of potential income. Farming Connect provided them with a business plan and Jayne Roberts of Menter Môn was supportive and offered suggestions for use of the conversions. They were hopeful that they would get a grant for the conversion, but unfortunately their application was unsuccessful. They considered attending local tourism courses, but couldn't really afford the time.

The lack of grant money meant that if the conversions were to go ahead, the Parkers would have to be very dependant on their salaries in local schools. Mike is now a special needs co-ordinator working full-time and Gill an art teacher, working four days a week. They both readily admit that whilst double time means double money, the situation can get quite stressful.



Accommodation and facilities

Work started in 2007, to create two cottages, Swallow and Seaview and these were finished in July 2008, just in time for the holiday season. Individually designed and sympathetically converted, the two conversions have been completed to the highest standards with as much use as possible of natural materials, with truss timbered roofs, handmade oak doors and staircases, solid oak and slate flooring. Heated throughout by LPG, both houses have under floor heating and log burning stoves in the lounge

area.

Both cottages have recently been graded at 5* by Visit Wales and Plas Llanfair was recently awarded the Green Dragon Level 2 certification in recognition for effective environmental management.

The cottages are beautifully furnished and equipped with microwave oven, ceramic hob, multifunction oven, washing machine, and dishwasher. Each property has a 32" LCD/HD ready television with Freeview, HD/ DVD player

The immediate area surrounding the cottages has been attractively landscaped, with the mill pond creating a water feature which will be fenced off for safety.

The Parkers have found that having two adjacent cottages has provided an element of flexibility for visitors. With one cottage sleeping five and the other four, families or small groups can book both cottages, thereby ensuring an atmosphere of 'together but apart'. They are let out on a weekly basis from April to November and are also available for three and four night breaks from November to March.

During the 2009 season they were full throughout the main holiday period, and Mike and Gill concede that on changeover days, the whole family has to help. At the moment, Gill does all the washing and ironing for the two houses and whilst there are times when they could do with help, there is no spare money so they do all the work themselves. However, they very much enjoy their involvement with the visitors, some of whom have organic interests and already, they have had quite a number of return bookings.

The future

One of the Parker's websites is <http://www.plasllanfaircottages.co.uk> and they have three more, ensuring as many hits as possible. They also advertise in Linda Moss' book Organic Holidays.

In their early middle age, both Mike and Gill have energy and enthusiasm to continue with their new project. They are encouraged by this year's bookings and are hopeful that future seasons will be equally successful. However, they are slightly concerned that a local estate run by a Chester based company has been granted planning permission for 60 holiday cottages, which would of course influence the visitor numbers to Plas Llanfair and many other tourist providers in the area.

LEARNING POINTS: *Significant income from smallholdings has never been easy to make, but the initiative and commitment shown by this couple is impressive. By hard work both on and off the holding, and by their ingenuity with fruit processing, they have endeavoured to maximise their income sources. Hopefully, their efforts will be rewarded by an increase in new visitors and more 'returning' visitors, but as this is only their second season with their new properties, this summer's bookings will be crucial.*

3.3 The Yurt Farm, Crynfryn, Penuwch, Tregaron, Ceredigion

Laurie Murton and Thea Deklein

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 some of the grey summer 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 have received excellent feed-back 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 on line 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 wider age range which up until now has largely consisted of families with young children.

The future

As far as plans for the future are concerned, these are currently centred on their new baby due to arrive just after Christmas. 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.*

3.4 Aberhyddnant, Crai, Brecon, Powys

Liz and Paul Mathews

History and Background

Aberhyddnant is a 220 acre working organic family hill farm in the Brecon Beacons National Park farmed by Liz and Paul Mathews. An additional 100 acres of land in Libanus is also rented on a 10 year Farm Business Tenancy. The farm achieved full organic status with the Soil Association in 2000 but is now registered with Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd. The farm is also in its ninth year of the Tir Gofal agri-environmental scheme.

Accommodation/Facilities

There are two self catering holiday cottages on the farm. The first one was renovated in 1995 and the other in 2000. Both were traditional farm buildings and the first cottage was renovated without any financial support whilst they were fortunate to receive a Welsh Tourist Board (now Visit Wales) grant on the second cottage. The cottages sleep up to a total of 10 adults and four infants. In the main holiday season, Liz and Paul Mathews target families with young children, or those of primary school age, but in the low season, the target audience changes to the “empty nesters”, those visitors without children, are not tied to school holidays and looking for out of season short breaks.

The cottages are in the Green Dragon Award/Scheme, which is awarded to those businesses committed to reducing their negative impact on the environment. Liz mentioned that in recent years, there has been a growing interest from European holidaymakers wanting “green tourism” in particular from Belgium, Holland and Germany. They advertise in the magazine Green Parent a publication aimed at parents of young children with green ideals. See www.abercottages.com



adjoining shop.

The farm shop and tea shop started in 2008 with the philosophy of closing the circle of production by selling meat and eggs direct to the customer. These premises are rented and run as an experiment for 3-5 years before they decide whether or not to continue as a viable venture. The aim of the tea shop is to enable customers to buy all the ingredients they need to prepare a Welsh meal with the emphasis on providing a “simple rustic menu.” All meat served and sold in the tea shop is produced from the farm at Crai, and the produce supplied by the farm is then complemented with local and organic produce. All ingredients are sourced as locally as possible from Breconshire or the surrounding counties. All meals are prepared on the premises with most of the ingredients available for purchase in the

The tea shop is located in Trecastle on the main A40 approximately four miles from the farm at Crai and the majority of customers are passing tourists. The shop sells a variety of food plus local crafts such as candles, wooden Welsh lovespoons, jewellery cards and knitwear. One of the reasons for diversifying into the sale of crafts is because of the problems that Liz has incurred with the stocking of the shop. Unfortunately, they don’t have a very large customer base and whilst they are keen to offer a variety of food products, fresh vegetables have a short shelf life.

Another problem is labour and because the tea shop is located some distance from the farm, it means that an additional full-time person is required to run the business and this, of course, becomes expensive. Whilst supplying the shop with meat from the farm is an essential part of their marketing, the labour costs can mount up and become very expensive. This situation recently intensified when the local abattoir closed. Liz points out that if they included their own labour in their financial costs, the café/shop would probably not be a viable business.

Visitors to the holiday cottages and customers to the tea shop are made very welcome at Aberhyddnant farm and encouraged to take advantage of the farm trail which was partly funded by Tir Gofal. Liz and Paul ensure that every opportunity is taken to inform customers about organic farming and to help them understand the high standards of animal welfare and whole farm environment policy that Aberhyddnant adopts.

Liz has recently developed Aberhyddnant Organic Farm Holiday Hampers, with the aim of providing visitors with high quality local produce to enjoy during their stay in Breconshire. Initially this started as an honesty policy for visitors staying at the cottages, who could help themselves to frozen produce from the freezer, which they could cook during their holiday and paid for at the end of their stay. Currently, four hampers of different types are available: two offering Breakfast boxes for 2-4 people, and two offering Weekend boxes, also for 2-4 people. Liz also offers various BBQ packs available during the summer months. Visitors can order on line and make up their own hampers or substitute items from the website, see: www.aberorganic.co.uk.

The provision of hampers has proved so successful that it has grown into a service for visitors in other holiday cottages in the area. In 2009, six holiday cottage owners were involved in the scheme, and Liz is very keen to encourage more owners to become involved and is planning to hold a promotional event at the café in the spring of 2010 to encourage more tourism providers to join up. The intention is to run the business as electronically as possible, using email updates about the hampers when the booking form for the cottages is sent out and using website links between the cottage owners and the hamper site.

Liz and Paul Mathews have incorporated various green policies into their business. Both the holiday cottages have wood burners using logs supplied from their own woodland and the wood burner in the tea shop provides the heating and hot water. A micro hydroelectric system provides for the farm house and holiday cottages at Aberhyddnant, with any surplus electricity being sold to the National Grid. There is a recycling policy for the tea shop and visitors are encouraged to recycle as much as possible in the holiday cottages.

The future

Clearly, the tea shop is still in the evaluation period, but together with holiday cottages and the hamper business, Liz feels that the current system of managing their business is rather complex with too many conflicting issues. The idea of concentrating on farming is attractive, but she feels that there is a need to streamline the business.

Liz Mathews hopeful for the future and has picked up valuable support from the new WAG flexible business support scheme, but would have welcomed advice or signposting towards information on various aspects of employment law and business matters when they were opening the tea shop. She acknowledges that on receipt of grants, business help is readily available, but without grants, she feels that information on these matters is harder to access.

LEARNING POINTS: *Change and diversification is a necessary challenge for farmers, and the efforts that this couple have made to extend their ideals and services are impressive. Although on the main A40, the tea shop is not geographically close to the farm and the connection between the provision of food and the manner of production is a hard one to make. Once again, the commitment to an holistic approach to food production is impressive and challenging. Although their commercial premises are rented, they continue to have a commitment to deliver a very strong organic story to their visitors via both their holiday cottages and tea shop.*

3.5 Clynfyw, Abercych, Boncath, Pembrokeshire

The Bowen family

History and background

Clynfyw is a 200-acre family run organic farm located in North Pembrokeshire together with 100 acres of woodland. The farm achieved full organic status with the Soil Association in 1999. Approximately 20 acres of the farm land is permanent pasture and the remainder is on a four-five year arable rotation producing organic cereals for neighbouring organic farms. The arable rotation comprises of barley with the stubble ploughed for oats or triticale and then under sown with a grass and white clover ley for two to three years. Over the years a variety of options and enterprises have been investigated. The most enjoyable were the Welsh Black suckler herd and the pig unit. However, largely due to the impact of TB in the area, the direction now being pursued is one of minimal farming with tack sheep and cattle over the summer and cereal production. This year for the first time there has been out wintered tack cattle.

Accommodation and facilities

The Bowen family's experience of farm diversification has been an evolving one, but one that has not been without problems. However, they acknowledge that many useful lessons have been learnt along the way.



Over the last 10 years the farm has diversified and currently offers a 70² metre studio with a newly laid sprung floor which can also be used as a games room, and four self catering cottages, which together provide a versatile space and facilities for conferences, parties or holidays. The first cottage was developed in 1986 whilst the remaining three were opened nine years ago. Marketing for the holiday cottages was originally targeted towards family holidays with visitors encouraged to explore the farm trail with a tractor-drawn trailer.

Initially the intention was to provide an education centre, offering access to the farm for schools and other educational establishments in the locality. A calf shed was converted into a centre/classroom for visiting pupils and a network of paths and farm tours were created. However, this venture was not very successful, due mainly to lack of demand and the fact that schools and other educational providers in the locality did not have sufficient funding to pay for the facilities provided. Mr Bowen also pursued the use of Clynfyw as a venue for weddings, functions and parties, but there was insufficient demand for these services.

Disabled facilities and disability access have always been strong features of the accommodation, and using valuable feed-back from visitors received over the past 12-15 years, Mr Bowen has continually updated the facilities and equipment available to visitors. He already accommodates a regular booking for 6 weeks a year for a sign language course and continues to be in discussion with access charities and statutory bodies, and there is a full access statement for each of the cottages, available on the website and in large print or Braille if required.

This provision of first class disabled access and services for holidaymakers has led a natural progression which has recently started to come to fruition. For several years, Mr Bowen has been cultivating a link with Pembrokeshire Social Services, with a view to using Clynfyw cottages and facilities as a venue for providing respite care. Last year social services were forced to close one of

their respite homes in the county and he is hopeful that working with social services to provide respite facilities could be an area that has the potential to develop in the future. However, he is aware that there is significant pressure on local authority finances, and the facilities at Clynyfw would only serve a very small market, and would not be suitable for everyone.

When respite care is being provided at Clynyfw, Mr Bowen works very closely with a local care agency called Ceri Care who provide an excellent service. The philosophy is to make the cottages homely and welcoming, avoiding an “institutionalised feel” whilst providing excellent access.

The Bowen family have incorporated various green policies into their business. All the holiday cottages are run on a wood pellet biomass system, which heats the cottages in the summer but needs supplementing in the winter months. This equipment is now rather out of date and is very labour intensive. Newer versions would utilise a hopper system for the wood pellets and/or logs from their own woodland. Solar panels provide most of the hot water in the cottages and photovoltaic panels are due to be installed. A reed bed system deals with all the foul water. A comprehensive programme of tree planting in Clynyfw woods is carried out annually. The mileage from all visitors to Clynyfw is calculated and money sent to the Green Belt Movement in Kenya.

Wherever possible, they try to keep their environmental impact to a minimum and, in for their efforts they have been awarded the Queen’s Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development for their low-impact policies and were voted best Sustainable Tourism Business in 2004 in the Arena Network Wales Environmental Awards.

The future

The Bowen family will continue to promote their excellent facilities at Clynyfw to a wide audience, through their excellent website, www.clynyfw.co.uk. However, they intend to strengthen relationships with Social Services in their home county and continue to investigate the demand from neighbouring counties to see whether Clynyfw has an increasing role as a facility for respite care.

LEARNING POINTS: *With an increase in the numbers of both conventional and organic farmers offering holiday accommodation, it is perhaps unsurprising that this farmer is looking to shift the marketing of his accommodation into a different area. Their commitment to provision of high standard is commendable, and hopefully, this new market will provide the increased occupancy that these houses clearly warrant.*

3.6 Hurst House on the Marsh, Laugharne, Carmarthen

Owned by Professor Jeremy Stone,
Manager of the organic garden David Butt

History and Background



Hurst House on the Marsh is a unique “Boutique” country hotel located in the middle of an SSSI on the outskirts of Laugharne. The hotel which has 17 bedrooms, spa and restaurant is owned by Professor Jeremy Stone. The hotel is situated approximately one metre above sea level and the SSSI is a haven for wild birds. It is home to 3,500 golden plover, lapwing, snipe and curlew with ducks, geese and swans being frequent visitors. Visitors are encouraged to go on walks and hire bikes to fully appreciate the surrounding

countryside. Although no agricultural stock are currently owned the surrounding farmland is all organically registered and neighbour’s stock can be grazed on the paddocks surrounding the hotel when required.

Facilities

A key element to the hotel and restaurant is the walled kitchen garden. The garden along with 3.5 hectares of hotel grounds and paddocks will achieve full organic status with the Soil Association in January 2010. By registering the grounds and paddocks, it has enabled grass to be collected and used as a mulch on the kitchen garden to help prevent soil erosion. Violets and other edible flowers are also sown in the grounds and lawns which are then used in the cuisine. David Butt who manages the garden concentrates on producing crops which have a short shelf life. Spinach for example is picked on demand and served, maybe three minutes later, with the dish Eggs Benedict! David has a background in horticulture and education with a wealth of experience of growing both organic and non organic horticultural crops. He works very closely with chef Dave Watts (from Raymond Blanc’s Manoir Les Quatres Saison near Oxford) to produce quality fresh seasonal and flavoursome food. Apart from sea fish almost everything on the menu is located within a 30 mile radius with the emphasis on local produce, some of which is organic

The kitchen garden grows edible flowers, 37 different types of lettuce, mustard, five types of rocket, spinach, leeks, herbs, shallots, pumpkins, beetroot, fennel, squashes and courgettes The garden ensures that the restaurant is self sufficient in broad and runner beans plus small salads but additional tomatoes and peppers are bought in. The aim is to provide the “slightly unusual” but it does depend upon the availability of organic seed. Garlic is used as the only pesticide, which has been very effective against pests such as carrot and cabbage fly. Hurst House is currently involved in a research project with IBERS regarding the effectiveness of garlic as a pesticide and also the possibility of using garlic as a method for controlling slugs. Strawberries are a regular summer crop, using marigolds and clover as cover, and some apple varieties, such as Blenheim, are also produced, which are suitable both for eating and cooking. There are several cherry trees in the grounds but these are primarily to encourage bird activity and pollination.

Guests visiting Hurst House are made very aware of the organic garden, with diners in the restaurant overlooking the growing crops. They can literally see what they are eating - and to reinforce the connection, there is a plan of the garden on the back of the menu! Residents are encouraged to visit the garden during their stay and edible tours of the garden are available. The

garden is open all the year round and there is also a gardening school which usually combines a morning in the garden with David providing the horticultural aspect, followed by a cookery class in the afternoon by Martin Blunos a famous TV chef. David Butt also runs a gardening advice service for guests where guests can contact David via the phone and by e mail. David reports that interestingly some guests are now returning during the season to see how crops are developing.

Building conservation prevented Hurst House from using certain green energy systems. For example they had hoped to put solar panels under the slates and double glazing, but both were refused. Unfortunately a request for underground heat extraction was also refused because of the hotel being located in an SSSI. However, all wood for the numerous log burners in the hotel is provided from sustainable woodland and the majority of lighting both interior and exterior is LED. In addition all green waste and traditional kitchen waste is composted for the kitchen garden. Cardboard and glass is recycled through Carmarthenshire County Council and all the hotel roofs have their water collected which will be used to water the garden. All toilets are double flushed toilets. Finally, the owner of Hurst House, Professor Jeremy Stone, has close links with the helicopter industry and has a policy of banking carbon whenever possible to improve his carbon footprint.

The future

A number of developments are being considered for the future, these include:

- Developing an additional winter garden
- New greenhouse if planning is obtained.
- Maybe looking to having log cabins on stilts located on the Marsh
- Looking at developing Hurst House branded products. They currently produce cakes and biscuits, and they may look to linking this to a garden package. Carrots can be seen growing in the garden, picked and used as an ingredient in a Hurst House branded product.

LEARNING POINTS: *With a certified organic garden, offering a wide range of produce literally on the doorstep, the work carried out by this establishment seems an ideal opportunity to 'get the message across' to quality visitors and diners. It is, however, a big challenge to engage visitors on matters sustainable and organic, and hopefully their knowledge is increased by the fantastic opportunities available, from master classes to gardening advice and information, which is offered by this bijou hotel.*

4 Provision of organic food

These six providers vary widely when it comes to the provision of food, with a full range of produce being offered in some establishments, and none at all being offered in another.

Organic Parc have concentrated their energies in providing high quality, sustainable building, and have very much left the provision of food to the customers' choice, promoting local food on their website, and celebrating the diversity, quality and freshness of Llŷn seafood. Gill and Mike Parker, run a secondary business on their organic smallholding, making jams and chutneys from their own produce, which they sell to visitors and on local farmers' markets. The Yurt Farm ensures that organic produce is readily available for the visitors, with a complimentary basket of produce on arrival. Together with BBQ burgers and other cuts of Hereford meat, they ensure that a wide variety of organic produce is available to purchase from the farm shop, together with fresh vegetables produced on the farm. Aberhyddnant is another holistic provider making a feature out of the organic food produced in the area, cleverly combining the organic Hamper business together with the tea room and shop. Clynyw is at the opposite end of this scale, offering a full service to their residents, but admitting that there is little interest expressed by the local authorities in the provision of organic food.

In the final case study of Hurst House, with a certified organic garden, offering a wide range of produce literally on the doorstep, the work carried out by this establishment seems an ideal opportunity to 'get the message across' to quality visitors and diners. However, they concede that it is a big challenge to engage visitors on matters sustainable and organic.

5 Sustainable and green policies

Green policies are often fundamental to the development of any enterprise, and frequently start with the construction of premises. The creation of environmentally friendly accommodation was uppermost in the minds of Richard and Bethan Ellis at Organig Parc and their Five Star accommodation won the 2007 CLA Rural Buildings Award for Wales. This award provides public recognition for landowners and farmers who "go the extra mile" in constructing or converting farm buildings. The accommodation used eco - friendly local natural building materials wherever possible such as welsh slate and oak and used local sheep's wool to insulate walls. Mike and Gill Parker used the same philosophy when building their holiday cottages at Plas Llanfair and used similar eco friendly construction materials.

All the organic case studies have incorporated various green policies into their agri tourism business and three of the case studies Aberhyddnant, Clynyfw and Plas Llanfair have achieved The Green Dragon/Arena Network Award for Green Tourism in recognition for effective environmental management. The green policies can be divided into three main headings: renewable energy, water conservation and reed bed systems and recycling and composting

5.1 Renewable energy

The majority of the businesses are using some form of renewable energy. Aberhyddnant farm are completing a micro-hydro-electric system which runs the farm house and holiday cottages with surplus electricity being sold to the National grid. Clynyfw cottages use solar panels to provide most of the hot water and a wood pellet biomass system to heat the holiday cottages. The Yurt farm site is "off grid", so wind turbines and solar panels create hot water but they have had to resort to a petrol generator to supplement their supply at certain times. Hurst House had wanted to undertake various energy saving or green projects but have had permission refused, either by County Council planners or by CADW. In addition, all the case studies relied heavily on log burners often supplying the logs from their own sustainable farm woodlands. The wood burner in Aberhyddnant tea shop also ran the heating and hot water for the premises.

5.2 Water conservation and reed bed systems

Reed bed systems have been constructed to deal with all foul water at Clynyfw, and The Yurt Farm. The latter have two wooden composting toilets built out of green oak which flow into their reed bed drainage system. Other water conservation policies are to collect roof water to water the organic kitchen garden at Hurst House and to use showers with push buttons at The Yurt Farm to conserve water. Organig Parc is fortunate on being able to rely on water from the hills, and all of the businesses encourage the use of eco friendly cleaning products to avoid the use of potentially damaging bleach running into watercourses.

5.3 Recycling and composting

Most of the guests visiting these premises are increasingly aware of sustainability issues and appreciate the need to recycle and use composting facilities. Aberhyddnant have a recycling policy in the tea shop and visitors are encouraged to recycle as much as possible in the holiday cottages. Hurst House recycle all cardboard and glass in the hotel and Organig Parc said that recycling is enthusiastically embraced by visitors using the containers provided, to recycle tins, paper and glass.

The Yurt Farm and Organic Parc are two examples where composting facilities are provided and Hurst House compost all their green waste and kitchen waste from the hotel to use for their kitchen garden.

6 Summary and conclusion

These six case studies are examples of organic agritourism. Each enterprise targets visitors who are sympathetic towards green and sustainable views.

Liz Mathews at Aberhyddnant mentioned that in recent years, there has been a growing interest from holidaymakers from Europe wanting “green tourism” in particular Belgium, Holland and Germany. Liz advertises in Green Parent Magazine a publication aimed at parents of young children with green ideals.

Every opportunity is taken by these businesses to inform visitors and customers about organic farming and the high standards of animal welfare and whole farm environment/green policies that organic farms follow. Provision of organic produce to the visitors is very much a matter of choice on behalf of the providers. But clearly, where produce from the farms or holding is available to visitors, the connection between the scenery, environment, agriculture and food provision is reinforced.

These case studies demonstrate how agritourism on organic farms is a distinct and developing category, one where farm-based tourism is linked not only to the appreciation and consumption of organic produce but also where the provision of accommodation embraces principles such as recycling of wastes, use of renewable energy, and methods of carbon reduction.

Organic agritourism can play a role in rural development by, for example, adding value to a farm’s production, establishing new markets and contributing to the development of short food supply chains. The case studies in this report provide detailed evidence of how organic agritourism is contributing to rural development in Wales. They also highlight the importance of access to financial and marketing resources for success and the value of working closely with the appropriate authorities and business networks.