



Useful advice for better business

Twenty six organic businesses in Wales have been through a “healthcheck” process which looked at how they performed against indicators of best sustainability practice and how they could improve their businesses. Ten of these businesses then had a more detailed consultation which has resulted in their own tailored sustainability action plan. This is part of a Better Organic Business Links project carried out by Weir-tscs.

The healthcheck process measured performance against 23 aspects of the sustainability excellence benchmark, covering

sustainability management, resource efficiency, supply chain effectiveness, and sourcing and purchasing.

There was a wide range of practice exhibited, with some businesses being particularly strong at promoting their products and in engaging stakeholders, as well as reducing waste and packaging. However, this work has identified that although businesses generally focus well on organics, sometimes a less focused approach is made with regards to managing overall sustainability and effectively managing other environmental impacts.

This work has highlighted a number of common themes for the organic sector in Wales and its supply chains:

1 Organic businesses require support to reduce their supply chain footprint and costs

The organic sector is fragmented and is comprised mainly of small and medium enterprises who have good intentions but often don't plan. They may not have the resources and capability to look at wider aspects beyond their own operations. Continued support is needed to help prioritise where action is needed and to provide guidance on best practice and practical steps.

2 Operational excellence is a key to overall improvement

Many smaller businesses focus well on the organics, but often overlook other approaches to their business. Support in assessing both the commercial and sustainability aspects will help make progress. In particular, organic businesses need to measure and target sustainability aspects such as energy, fuel, carbon, waste, water, sustainable materials, transport utilisation, certified suppliers etc. Through targeting and tracking progress, businesses will be able to increase their sustainability score and to reduce supply chain costs. Greater focus is also needed on business performance and measuring

efficiencies to prioritise areas for cost reductions and to ensure these are followed through.

3 Focus on inputs to reduce risks

Although organic businesses, particularly agricultural ones, have limited input needs, often the sources are not fully aligned with sustainability goals - such as importing feeds from distant locations. With customers increasingly seeking “local” products this practice presents potential risk to customer confidence in the “organic” brand. Local sources therefore need to be identified and pursued where economic, with a clear rationale if imported supplies have to be otherwise used. Suppliers need to be

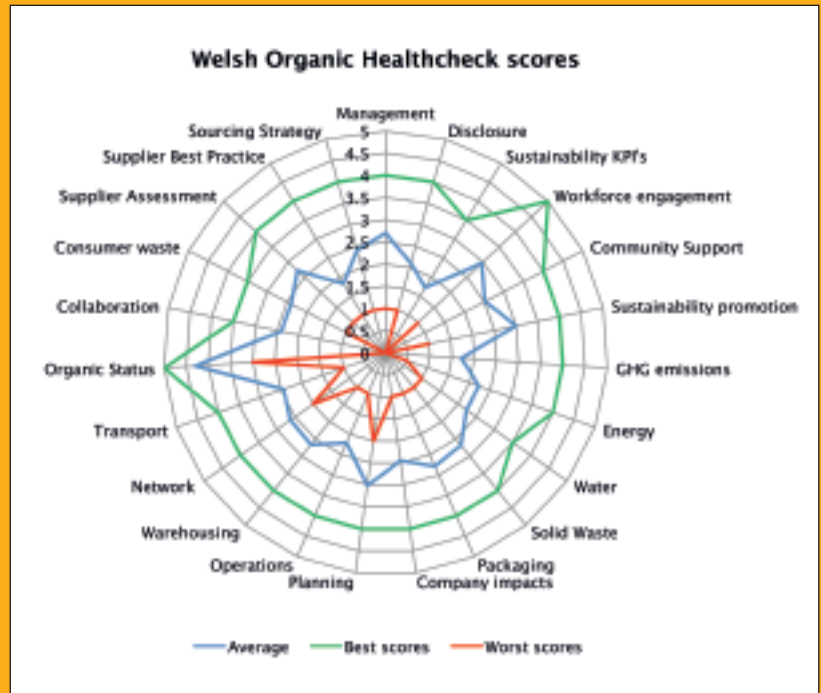
assessed beyond organic certification to ensure they meet ethical, social, and other environmental standards.

4 Reduce costs and footprint by collaborating

As most organic businesses in Wales are relatively small, they need to work together more and with non-organic businesses where appropriate. Best practice is sometimes shared informally but there is a need for more active encouragement and participation so that the leaders can share their ideas and achievements with the whole sector. There is currently some usage of buying groups, but greater participation will allow leverage to reduce purchasing costs. Target categories for this include fuel, electricity, animal feed, packaging, transport, and waste collection/recycling. Inbound and outbound transport is rarely approached in an integrated way, resulting in low utilisation of vehicles on some journeys. There is an opportunity to share transport which will reduce costs and footprint, though support from partners outside the sector will be required.

5 Enhanced business growth through extending organic into sustainability

Many current and potential customers do not fully understand how organic already embraces many aspects of sustainability in its supply chains. Organic businesses need to promote these aspects such as local sourcing, minimising environmental impacts, and ethical practices. This will help to enhance the "organic brand" by extending it into supply chain areas that consumers care about. There is a need to define the appropriate sustainability standards and messages that will influence consumers to buy more organic.



This project has looked at the supply chains of the whole organic sector in Wales. In addition to the common themes highlighted above, some more enterprise specific findings have been made on the red meat, dairy, fresh produce, retail/wholesale and processing sectors. There are also strategic issues for each sub-sector that need to be addressed for long term survival and success. We will publish details on the individual enterprises shortly.

For more information on the supply chain project please contact us on **01970 622248** or email **bobl-project@aber.ac.uk**

Tir Organig

Organic Centre Wales has launched the first sign in Wales to let walkers and tourists know when the land under their feet is organic. The new bi-lingual 'Tir Organig' signs are available free to certified organic farms in Wales, and are proving to be very popular!

Nearly 9% of farmland in Wales is organic, almost double the amount of land of that in neighbouring England. The signs offer a way of crediting farmers who have worked hard to gain organic certification on their farms. The new signs can be used on fence posts and stiles or wherever footpaths cross or run alongside organic land, offering a way for farmers to showcase their organic land to members of the public and tourists.

Welsh rambler Gwynfor Hallett from Tonyrefail said: "I think the signs are a great idea. My wife and I eat organic produce whenever we can, but I suppose other than the wording and branding that comes with it, we don't have any other real association of where it comes from. When I go out for my walks it would be interesting to see a 'Tir Organig' sign to bring home the connection between the food on my dinner plate with the land I'm walking on" Certified organic farmers can order their free 'Tir Organig' signs by contacting the BOBL team at **bobl-project@aber.ac.uk** and **01970 622248**





Promoting organic food through sustainable agri-tourism

Organic Centre Wales has published a guide to how the wider agri-tourism sector can both provide a market opportunity for organic food, and increase tourism businesses' own green credentials by offering organic food to visitors. The guide also provides a starting point for those considering an agri-tourism venture. As more and more issues around sustainability, local flavour and authentic experiences combine, organic agri-tourism is a market sector ripe for further development. The guide also provides details on developing a comprehensive business plan for those new to agri-

tourism, and existing agri-tourism operators will find practical advice on measures to further reduce their carbon emissions, save energy and promote their destinations as a 'green choice'. In view of the competitive nature of the market, the advantages of certifying as a green or sustainable agri-tourism business are also discussed. For a hard copy of this report please contact bobl-project@aber.ac.uk **01970 622248** or find a copy on-line at www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/uploads/agritourisme_july11.pdf

Using social
media tools to
build your
business

The use of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter is growing week by week and businesses that have put off getting involved are missing a trick!

Social media sites are a **free** platform that is easily accessible to anyone with internet access. If you are new to the world of social networking and want to see how businesses like yours are using social networking sites to promote and develop their businesses then get in touch. We can run an introduction to social media workshop in your area. In addition to workshops we are also developing an Introduction to Social Media pack, which we will be sending out to organic businesses in Wales shortly.

We will also be repeating our successful media training workshops later on in the year. These workshops are designed to help businesses understand how the market for organic produce is developing and how to engage with the media. Enabling businesses to work constructively with the media will support the development of the organic sector and help the spread of positive messages about Welsh organic food and farming. This in turn will build consumers' commitment to buying organic. If you are interested in attending one of these workshops then please contact us on **01970 622248** or at bobl-project@aber.ac.uk

Sustainable Food Communities

The Soil Association is carrying out a project called Sustainable Food Communities (SFC) in Wales, which is funded by the BOBL project.

The aim of the SFC programme is to drive significant changes in food culture by supporting food communities in Wales through food education, practical engagement and consumption. The SFC project is currently working in four areas, Cardiff Riverside, Newtown, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd. There is a small amount of funding available for food related initiatives within each of the four local communities, and we've already received some exciting and enterprising project proposals to date!

The Mid Wales Food and Land Trust will be working with Penygloddfa C P School in Newtown to develop a vegetable growing enterprise. The school will grow and supply produce to the local Cwm Harry Box Scheme - a partnership which will benefit both the school and the box scheme. In Cardiff the Riverside Community Market Association (RCMA) is leading on the development of a food charter with the aim of creating a sustainable food system for Cardiff. It is expected the charter will be launched later this year. In addition RCMA will be coordinating a project to increase public awareness about, and consumption of, "urban fruit". This will involve encouraging the planting of fruit trees and distributing the harvest to local people, particularly in

disadvantaged areas. We will have updates on these projects and others in the next newsletter.

If you are based in one of the four areas mentioned above and you have a food related project idea that you think will support the SFC work then please contact Phil Morgan. These initiatives must be innovative and build on the three strands of education, engagement and consumption.

PMorgan@soilassociation.org



Education for sustainable development: What do we need to learn about the food chain?

All schools in Wales are now required to educate children about sustainable development and help them make good choices as they grow up. Food is an essential part of this because we all need to eat and food production and transport have a big environmental impact. Organic Centre Wales is part of a working group that is developing best practice in food education and recently produced a topic paper, 'Transformative education and food: thoughts from Wales'. Now the group is organizing an event at which people from different parts of the food chain (farmers, processors, wholesalers, caterers) will come together and discuss what a sustainable food chain would look like, exploring their common ground and their inspiration for what they do, as well as their differences. The results will inform food education in Wales, not just for schools but for the public too. For more information, contact Jane Powell, jnp@aber.ac.uk

Dates for your diary

For details please see the events page on our website:

www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/eventslist.php

Organic Centre Wales conference – Organic: Better Business

Thursday 27th October 2011 -

Royal Welsh Showground, Llanelwedd

Help develop the organic sector in Wales... We want to hear from you!

If you have an idea that you think will help benefit the Welsh organic sector, please get in touch. We have funding available for scoping research, pilot projects and exploring innovative ideas.

Photos: Anthony Pugh

The BOBL project aims to build better links throughout the organic business community to deliver profitability, sustainability and exemplary environmental performance.



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government