Sustainable Food Communities

Creating a virtuous circle between food education, practical engagement and consumption to drive significant changes in food culture.

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on behalf of

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The Better Organic Business Links (BOBL) project, run by Organic Centre Wales, is a four year project designed to support the primary producer in Wales and grow the market for Welsh organic produce in a sustainable way.

The aim is to develop markets for organic produce whilst driving innovation and promoting sustainable behaviours at all levels within the supply chain, to increase consumer demand and thence markets for organic produce, especially in the home market, and to ensure that the primary producers are aware of market demands. The project provides 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. Fostering innovation and improving supply chain linkages
2. Consumer information and image development of organic food and farming in Wales
3. Market development
4. Providing market intelligence to improve the industry's level of understanding of market trends and means of influencing consumer behaviour
5. Addressing key structural problems within the sector.

In all elements of the work, the team are focused on building capacity within the organic sector, to ensure that the project leaves a legacy of processors and primary producers with improved business and environmental skills, able to respond to changing market conditions, consumer demands and climate change.

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1 Introduction

1.1 This final report is a summary of the progress achieved since the Sustainable Food Communities Wales project commenced in January 2011. The object of this 18 month project was to work with lead partner organisations in four discrete areas - Cardiff, Gwynedd, Newtown (Powys) and Pembrokeshire - to develop and deliver local initiatives using the approach pioneered by the Soil Association in their Food for Life programme. The initiatives combined food education, practical engagement (cooking, growing etc.) and changes in food supply/consumption in an effort to seed sustainable food communities in which initiatives and organisations linked up to deliver more than the sum of their parts. While the project was delivered as part of the BOBL supply chain programme, its primary purpose was not to lead to immediate increases in organic supply or consumption (though these were considerations in the selection of local initiatives), but to explore opportunities for driving greater community interest in sustainable food culture that would lead to communities being more receptive to and interested in organic food in the medium to long term. The project’s main target was to identify and support up to four initiatives in each of the four locations.

1.2 Initially it was intended that cross sector steering groups would be established in each area and that these groups would have responsibility for assessing and deciding which local proposals should be allocated funds. In practice, it became obvious this would prove unwieldy and instead applications were initially considered by the lead partner organisations and the Soil Association before being decided upon by OCW management.

1.3 Over the course of the project a total of 13 proposals were approved for funding, with several more either being rejected because they did not adequately meet the criteria for support or because they fell outside the relevant locations. Summaries of the initiatives undertaken can be found in the Annex to this report.

2 Summary

2.1 Although, with the benefit of hindsight, the timescale and budget agreed for delivery of this project was challenging, overall progress and tangible results have been positive. In large measure the key aims of the project have been achieved. There has been activity and engagement with lead and support organisations in each of the four locations - fuller information can be found in section 4 of this report. In each location, the programme has delivered a variety of innovative local initiatives. While not all initiatives encapsulated all three aspects of the Food for Life approach - education, practical engagement and changes in food supply/consumption - in many cases they did so or covered two of the three. In the instances of the Cardiff and Gwynedd food charters they took this holistic approach to a new level by raising significant public and institutional interest in sustainable food and in ‘normalising’ organic as a key part of the sustainable food mix. Summary reports on the initiatives will be available for others to consider via the Soil Association and OCW websites at the end of the project and show that many are both sustainable and replicable. It is hoped similar initiatives will be developed in other parts of Wales.

2.2 Largely because of the need to focus on driving the main project it was not possible to make significant early headway on promoting the Catering Mark award. There are now encouraging signs that public sector bodies are interested in moving towards gaining the
award and initial discussions have been held or are in the pipeline with several local authorities and higher education institutions across Wales.

2.3 During the project, discussions were held with a number of key strategic organisations, including the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, individual local authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association to promote the benefits of local and organic food and to address key barriers (e.g. procurement regulations). More information on this can be found at section 5.

2.4 Conclusions and recommendations from the project are covered in section 7.

3 The Sustainable Food Communities project

3.1 The Sustainable Food Communities Wales project was conceived following a feasibility study undertaken in 2010. The aim was to develop a focussed programme that would contribute to the development of a greater public interest in food, health and sustainability issues which would in turn create a food culture more receptive to organic food. This work would draw on the successful Food for Life Partnership programme in England which had demonstrated that significant increases in the consumption of healthy, sustainable and organic food were possible if people were taken on a journey in changing their food culture and habits. The recognition of the success achieved in England led to the Soil Association being commissioned by BOBL to undertake a feasibility study on how this approach might be adapted and applied in Wales. The report and recommendations produced was discussed by the BOBL Steering Group on 10 June 2010. It was agreed that a holistic Sustainable Food Communities project should be undertaken and after an open tender process the Soil Association was commissioned to carry out this work.

3.2 It was recognised this would be carried out as a cross-activity project which would help deliver across several other BOBL initiatives including:

- developing innovative distribution models;
- open organic farms;
- reaching young people and families, particularly in urban areas;
- supporting the development of public procurement markets; and
- developing the market for Welsh organic produce into food service/ catering.

3.3 The feasibility study highlighted a number of key considerations that contribute to the development of effective sustainable food communities and, as far as practicable, these were to feature in the delivery of the project. These included:

- establishing location wide cross-sector partnerships;
- using a Food Futures community consultation approach to support local initiatives;
- coordinating activity on the ground to link existing and potential partners to deliver more than the sum of their parts;
- involving key procurement institutions and other stakeholders who can drive large scale demand for, and supply of, sustainable local food;
- capturing and cascading learning to other parties and areas; and
- promoting the role of the Catering Mark in increasing demand for sustainable organic and local produce.

3.4. The feasibility report identified the four locations where this work should be carried out and the key partner organisations in each location. £50,000 of BOBL funding to support an
18 month programme (with a separate budget for supporting local initiatives) was approved and the Soil Association was selected as the delivery organisation.

4 The approach followed and summary of key activity by location

4.1 The initial expectation was that there would be a phased approach to delivery of the project with a concentration of focus on Cardiff and Newtown over the first nine months and a shift of focus toward Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire for the second half of the project. It became apparent from early discussions with partners in Cardiff and Newtown that the prospects for delivering a successful overall project would improve if all four locations were involved for as much of the project period as possible. An Advisory Group comprising representatives of the Soil Association, OCW and all four local lead partners was formed. This had the function of offering advice on the delivery of the project and critiquing the bids for financial support received under the local initiatives aspect of the project. The group met on several occasions during the project and contributed to the decision making process when proposals for funding for local initiatives were considered. Meetings were also held with individual lead partner organisations in each of the four locations as necessary. A summary of discussions with and main activity at each location follows below.

4.2 In addition to fostering local partnerships across the four project locations, the project worked strategically at a national level. This included:

- briefing Welsh Government officials (from the Health and Rural Affairs Departments) about the Sustainable Food Communities project and how this could contribute to delivery of key Government health, economic, sustainability and farming targets;
- meeting with Value Wales to discuss food procurement guidelines;
- liaising with the Welsh Local Government Association about food procurement in the public sector and to promote the Catering Mark Award;
- briefing the Public Health Wales Physical Activity and Nutrition Network; and
- discussion with the Sustainable Futures Commissioner for Wales.

Cardiff (Riverside Community Market Association)

4.3 Over the course of the project, frequent meetings were held with two key partner organisations in the City - Steve Garrett from RCMA and Katie Jones from the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens – and with complementary organisations such as Cardiff 3rd Sector Council (to discuss engagement with voluntary sector groups across the city). The SFC programme was presented at a public consultation meeting held at Cardiff University on 30 June 2011. Meetings were also held with a variety of organisations directly relating to the Cardiff initiatives outlined below, including: the promoters of the Siop Y Bobl proposal (to consider suitability for a bid for BOBL funding and to advise on prospective organic suppliers of food products); and representatives of Cardiff City Council and the Cardiff and Vale Health Board (to discuss the SFC project generally and the Cardiff Food Charter initiative in particular).

4.4 Since the project commenced three local initiatives have been approved for financial support. These are:

- the development of a Food Charter for Cardiff;
- the piloting of a mobile farm shop; and
- Orchard Cardiff.
4.5 Excellent progress has been made on the Food Charter for Cardiff. This is intended to promote collaboration between the public, private and third sectors in the city to drive a change in food culture. This work is supported by a multi-sectorial steering group which includes representatives from the Welsh Government, the Cardiff Health Board, Cardiff University and a number of third sector organisations. The Charter was developed and launched at a high profile conference held in Cardiff University on 3 April. The event included presentations from Professor Kevin Morgan of Cardiff University, Dr Tony Jewell (Chief Medical Officer for Wales) and a representative from Cardiff Council. Over 100 delegates from across all sectors attended the conference. Discussions are now continuing with Cardiff Council, the Health Board and Cardiff University on developing an implementation plan and establishing a Cardiff Food Council.

4.6 The mobile farm shop initiative is an initiative to promote local and organic food consumption by residents of some of the more disadvantaged communities in Cardiff. The pilot has still to be concluded. Following approval of funding in October 2011 RCMA successfully bid for funding from Cardiff Healthy City to run ‘Fresh, Cheap and Easy’ cooking classes in four communities in Cardiff (Butetown, Splott/Adamsdown, Riverside and Ely) and from Environment Wales to undertake a programme of research with the participants in those groups to determine the main obstacles to them and their friends/neighbours having access to a diet with more locally produced/fresh elements. The pilot Mobile Farm Shop programme has still to begin selling produce because of weather causing delays in harvesting food from the RCMA certified organic Market Garden initiative based near Cowbridge.

4.7 The Orchard initiative is concerned with raising awareness about what fruit is grown in the Cardiff area and to map fruit trees across the city. The initiative has progressed well with 179 entries now on the fruit map. Orchard Cardiff is involved in the creation of a similar mapping initiative called Farm Cardiff which aims to take the model and apply it to areas of land identified as potential growing areas in the city.

4.8 A fuller progress report on each of these initiatives is included in the Annex to this report.

Gwynedd (Sustainable Gwynedd)
4.9 Several meetings were held with the lead partner - Ben Gregory and Cynthia Hughes from Sustainable Gwynedd - to support them in progressing the SFC activity in the county. A public consultation meeting was held in Porthmadog on 5 July 2011, where the SFC project was presented and generated several prospective bids. In addition, meetings were held with Gwynedd Council and the Betsi Cadwalader Health Board on the Gwynedd Food Charter initiative; and with representatives of the Rural Regeneration Unit to talk about food cooperatives and how to maximise local sources of fresh and organic produce.

4.10. Three local initiatives have been taken forward in the County with financial support from BOBL. These are:
- the development of a Gwynedd Food Charter;
- a leisure centre allotment scheme in Porthmadog; and
- an initiative to provide school pupils with experience of running a farmer’s market.
4.11 In relation to the Food Charter initiative, three public consultation meetings were held to discuss and finalise the content of the Charter and to consider how to deliver on its aspirations. 25 people attended the initial meeting, with 20 and 15 respectively attending the subsequent ones. There were also hustings discussions held with candidates standing in the local government elections in May 2012 to elicit political support for the aims of the Charter. The Charter was launched on 6 June 2012 at the Urdd Eisteddfod. The launch included speeches in support from both Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM and the Leader of Gwynedd County Council.

4.12 The initiative to create some allotments at the Leisure Centre in Porthmadog will provide opportunities for people with disabilities and those on exercise referral schemes both to participate in physical activity and to learn about good nutrition through growing fruit and vegetables. A very well attended meeting was held in February to discuss the scheme. This demonstrated considerable local support and enthusiasm for the initiative. The meeting generated a number of positive ideas including:

- using the fruit and veg grown to help educate the local leisure centre users;
- utilising the skills of local allotment users;
- generating publicity and placing updates in the local press;
- holding a Grand Opening event; and
- exploring the possibility of participants gaining recognized qualifications

The initiative has since been successfully completed and interest has been shown from other organisations across the county to undertake similar initiatives.

4.13 The final initiative was concerned with providing students with the opportunity of learning about all aspects of setting up and successfully running a local food business. During the initiative there were to have been visits arranged to local organic farms to learn about sustainable production, and to the food produce market held in Porthmadog where they could learn about selling and consumer perceptions of local, fresh and organic produce. Unfortunately a combination of initial delays in approving the funding and subsequent complications in arranging visits to farms and working around examination dates meant it proved logistically impossible to complete the initiative.

4.14 A more comprehensive summary of progress on all three initiatives is in the Annex.

**Newtown (Mid Wales Food and Land Trust)**

4.15 A number of meetings were held with Cath Smith (Mid Wales Land & Food Trust) and Gary Mitchell (Cwm Harry Food Company) about the initiative in Newtown; and the SFC programme was presented at a public consultation event held on 8 June 2011. Discussions were also held with representatives of Powys County Council about local food initiatives in the county.

4.16 A total of four local initiatives were taken forward with financial support from BOBL

- Two innovative and linked “Growing for the Box” initiatives - one led by Mid Wales Food & Land Trust and the other by the Cwm Harry Land Trust - that introduce pupils at a local school to both the theoretical and practical aspects of food production, supply, retailing and consumption. Amongst other things the initiatives entail pupils deciding what to grow at different times of the year; planting and managing growth of vegetables at the school; and supplying produce to the weekly Cwm Harry Vegetable
The initiatives were the first to be approved for funding and have made excellent progress which is reflected in the report in the Annex. A key output was the production of a comprehensive resource pack which will be invaluable to other schools who may wish to follow suit.

- The Big Apple initiative - which aims to provide pupils at a school in Llanidloes with practical experience of local fruit production, harvesting and processing of apples into juice, which reinforce learning about food technology in school - was completed in early October. A juicing day was held and received positive feedback from the head teacher, staff and pupils alike.

- Cob in a Cob – another school-based initiative which is based on building a cob oven and then baking and cooking food using local and organic produce. This proposal is about to be completed and a final report is imminent.

4.17 Further information about each of these initiatives can be found in the Annex.

**Pembrokeshire (PLANED)**

4.18. Several meetings were held with Jane Howells and Liz Thomas at PLANED in Narberth to discuss the SFC project and to consider proposals for local initiatives. There was a public event held on 29 June 2011.

4.19 Four local initiatives have been financially supported in Pembrokeshire.

- The Tanyard Youth Initiative. This aims to address social disadvantage and exclusion by teaching young people about the realities of food – from planting through to food waste. As well as providing practical skills the initiative will generate resources that future groups can use. There is also an aspiration to establish a food cooperative. A final progress report is awaited.

- The Monkton Community Garden Initiative. This is concerned with creating a community garden at a traveller site. The aim is to provide young people and their families with the necessary information and skills to develop an area and to grow their own fruit and vegetables. The residents will decide what they want to grow and when ready they will be given advice and suggestions on how to prepare and cook the produce. In part the initiative aims to help the families to integrate into the broader community. The initiative has been successfully completed.

- Ysgol Wdig: The Growing Zone. This is an educational project focusing on organic growing of vegetables and fruit; the environmental and economic benefits of local produce; and on healthy eating habits. The project involves improving an existing fruit and compost area and creating a new growing area. This involved year 6 pupils and parents. Subsequently, practical courses for parents and relatives on all aspects of food production have been run. The initiative has recently been completed with good feedback from pupils and parents reported.

- COCA Primary School Cooperatives. This is an initiative run by Caerhys Organic Community Agriculture and which aims to deliver two primary school vegetable cooperative schemes. The aim is to help younger children learn entrepreneurial skills and foster a basic understanding of organic food production. Through the provision of certified organic vegetables grown on a local farm, the school children will be supported in running their own food cooperatives – taking orders, receiving payments and distributing the orders. The final initiative report is expected imminently.
4.20. Further information about all these initiatives is provided in the Annex.

4.21 A number of additional proposals were received from organisations in Cardiff, Gwynedd, Newtown, Pembrokeshire and from outside the project locations which were deemed unsuitable for support for a variety of reasons. In the case of a proposed agricultural network initiative in Pembrokeshire, discussions were eventually progressed between the promoters and Horticulture Wales.

5 Main outputs and results.

5.1 As will be evident from the narrative above there has been good progress in each of the four locations with a variety of innovative local initiatives being progressed. For most of these it remains too soon to reach firm conclusions about the real impact these will have on demand in the locality for fresh, organic and sustainable food. However, there is reason to be optimistic that some will make a difference. Several of the schools based initiatives - notably the “Growing for the Box” initiative in Newtown - both demonstrate what is possible and have led to tangible resource that is available to others to use to undertake similar initiatives. Likewise, the Leisure Centre Allotment initiative in Gwynedd has already attracted interest from other organisations across the county. These are very replicable ideas and it is probable similar work will be undertaken elsewhere.

5.2 The results from the Mobile Farm shop will be available shortly and the business plan that has already been produced suggests a reasonable expectation that this can become a sustainable business model.

5.3 Perhaps the most significant initiatives will prove to be the Food Charters, now launched in Cardiff and Gwynedd. These have considerable potential to become a framework for more sustainable food systems in both locations. However it remains too soon to determine the true impact these will have and over what timescale improvements will be seen. It will be important for resource to be found in both cases in order for implementation plans to be developed and then monitored. It also remains to be seen to what extent other areas of Wales will wish to follow a similar course.

5.4 It had been anticipated that a key aspect of the project would be to work closely with public sector bodies in Wales in order to encourage applications for the Food for Life Catering Mark award. This was expected to drive significant increases in the procurement of local, organic and sustainable food. For a variety of reasons, particularly the reluctance of local and health authorities to contemplate any change in approach to public procurement exercises and the lack of time to pursue these discussions more vigorously, there has been comparatively little real progress to show to date. That said, there are now some encouraging signs that some public sector bodies are beginning to demonstrate an interest in pursuing the award. Meetings have recently been held or are in prospect in the immediate future with several local authorities – Ceredigion, Caerphilly, Flintshire and Vale of Glamorgan – and with several universities – Aberystwyth (who have now applied), Glamorgan, Newport and Swansea. Discussions are underway with the central purchasing body for all Higher Education institutions in Wales which will hopefully lead to other colleges making applications in due course. A bilingual leaflet explaining the Soil Association’s Food for Life Catering Mark is available from OCW.
6 Analysis and conclusions

6.1 It has proven to be very challenging to deliver the expected outputs within the ambitious timescale allowed given the comparatively limited delivery resource available, and the degree of reliance on partners in the third sector. Specifically, there has been inadequate time to forge and consolidate sound relationships; engage with other organisations in each of the locations; solicit proposals for local initiatives and then to consider, approve, deliver and evaluate these; and to foster more strategic relationships and promote the Catering Mark. Although in large measure the project has been a success the true impact is still to be felt – for example it remains to be seen whether the Food Charters can be transformed into comprehensive action plans and if other local initiatives prove to be sustainable or capable of replication as anticipated. With the benefit of hindsight it would therefore have been beneficial if a longer project period had been established at the outset.

6.2 The process for determining which local initiatives to fund evolved as the project progressed. It had initially been felt local steering groups would take this responsibility once the application form supplied to initiatives had been completed and submitted. The eventual approach was for BOBL management to take decisions following consideration and recommendations by all local partners. In reality the preliminary consideration of proposals rarely generated any reaction – with few insightful contributions offered. The determination of individual bids proved more protracted than expected and this has attracted some criticism from those applicants and, in at least one case, directly contributed to problems in completing the initiative.

6.3 A possible way to address the issue of evaluation of the impact of the project might be to consider commissioning some sharp focussed follow on study. This need not be anything more than a short term (3 month?) project commissioned in say six months’ time which would specifically address what has happened with the local initiatives supported and explore – so far as it is possible to do so – what the impact has been on demand for local and organic food; whether the anticipated replication has occurred; and whether others have been inspired to develop similar projects.

6.4 In relation particularly to the Food Charter work in Cardiff and Gwynedd, it would be a shame if the potential for making a real difference to food culture in the locality was not realised. To that end, if there is any unutilised resource that could be deployed in support of driving delivery of the action plans now required, or to assist where proposals come forward in other areas of Wales consideration should be given to offering financial support. Thought might also be given to funding a national conference in spring 2013 when the progress made on both current Charters can be reviewed and encouragement offered to those interested in developing parallel Charters elsewhere in Wales.
7 Recommendations.

7.1 Commission a follow on focussed study
As observed above the majority of the local initiatives financially supported have barely been concluded by the time this end of project report is prepared. It is, therefore, difficult to draw any conclusions as to the medium to long term impact or sustainability of these ideas, several of which are innovative and potentially far reaching. Rather than simply accept the final initiative reports on these it is recommended that funding is earmarked to allow for a focussed but light touch follow on study in 6 to 9 months’ time to more fully evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

7.2 Support for a conference in 2103 to review impact of Food Charters
Support has been generated locally in both Cardiff and Gwynedd for the idea of a Food Charter. At the Cardiff launch conference it was suggested that it would be well worth holding a conference in about 12 months’ time to review progress and to refresh energy and commitment. There would be advantage in holding an event to which key organisations from Cardiff, Gwynedd and other areas of Wales might be invited – this would potentially serve as a catalyst to generate new Charters as well as helping to drive continued momentum in terms of implementing those now in place.

7.3 Regional events to cascade learning
There could be advantage in holding events in key areas where those who have successfully delivered local initiatives could present their experiences (including improvements that can be demonstrated as a result). This would be an opportunity (at a modest cost) to encourage other communities to pursue their own local approaches toward local and sustainable food programmes.

7.4 Public procurement
In terms of making significant improvements in local food supply in the short term, it is imperative more is done to promote the virtues of local and sustainable food to those who take decisions on public purchasing of food. Examples of good practice should be highlighted to those taking decisions. OCW should engage more with Value Wales to ensure centrally produced advice and guidelines for public bodies are as sympathetic as possible toward fresh, seasonal, local and organic food.1

7.5 Support for Soil Association in its work to promote Catering Mark to public and private sector organisations in Wales
As referred to in paragraph 5.4 above, progress is beginning to be made with some local authorities and academic institutions in Wales. This is encouraging. The Soil Association is leading on this promotion work but, in light of the potential benefit for organic produce from Wales, close liaison with OCW and others must continue and whatever practical support OCW / BOBL can give should be deployed to ensure this momentum is maintained and that penetration across into the private sector is also achieved.

7.6 Develop strategy for closer engagement with Welsh Government Ministers
In addition to the obvious linkage to the Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food

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1 The BOBL Project has funded a report on public procurement in Wales. *The Welsh Organic Fruit and Vegetable Sector and Public Sector Procurement in Wales*. The report focuses on organic produce but the issues considered are relevant to all organic and local food.
and European Programmes, there are several Ministerial portfolios where food features — notably health, education, environment and local government and communities. There is recognition of the cross cutting nature of food in the Food Strategy for Wales (Food for Wales, Food from Wales). All opportunities should be seized to promote the SFC concept to Ministers and Assembly Members, and there should be a strategic approach to engagement developed (in consultation with the OCW Press and Public Relations consultants) to maximise the prospects of political support.

8 Annexes

Reports on individual initiatives (separate documents)
The reports on individual initiatives have been published separately. Please click on the link below to open a title page with a summary of the projects.

Sustainable Food Communities - Annexes