

# FOOD POLICY ALLIANCE CYMRU: DOES WALES NEED A FOOD BILL?

## PURPOSE

This briefing paper from Food Policy Alliance Cymru (FPAC), ahead of the Senedd debate on the Food (Wales) Bill on 24th May 2023, is designed to highlight some of the points raised through Stage 1 and to help illustrate why there is strong support for a Food Bill in Wales from stakeholders.

## KEY MESSAGES

- New primary legislation is required to deliver comprehensive, long-term food system change
- The Senedd committee process exposed the need for a more coherent and accountable framework for food policy
- The costs of administering a Food Bill are dwarfed by the costs of externalities (hidden costs) generated by the Food System, for example the costs of obesity to the NHS or the costs to citizens of removing pollutants from water courses
- We need a National Food Strategy anchored in legislation for Wales to avoid failures in policy making for the long term
- The Food (Wales) Bill would make food policy more efficient and accountable
- Food is Foundational but our Food System is unequal – due in part to lack of policy coherence and accountability
- Production, Consumption and our Global Responsibility are not aligned in Wales' Food System
- The Draft Food (Wales) Bill would need an amendment to avoid overlap with the functions of the Food Standards Agency (Wales)

## **1. PRIMARY LEGISLATION IS REQUIRED TO DELIVER COMPREHENSIVE, LONG-TERM FOOD SYSTEM CHANGE**

Under the current circumstances and within a UK context it would seem both pragmatic and strategic for the Senedd to build a more resilient and long-term statutory framework for its food policy. Recent experiences from Westminster demonstrate that without legislation to enforce, and the lack of a mechanism such as a Food Commission(er) to influence, even well researched, thoroughly consulted upon and supported Food Strategies (Henry Dimbleby's National Food Strategy[1]) can be largely ignored or de-prioritised by Government.

Many of the central policy fields that impinge upon our food system (i.e. trade policy, regional economic policy, environmental policy, food and farming policy) are now becoming more (rather than less) vulnerable to partisan party politics and the relatively short political cycles. Despite announcements for UK Government to scrap the 'sunset' clause due by the end of 2023, UK wide de-regulation of remaining EU regulations are still a possibility.

Primary legislation for Wales that puts the food system in the driving seat (rather than the back seat of other policy areas) provides an opportunity to build a consensus on a collective vision for our food system in Wales. It would enable planning and strategic development to build a more resilient and long-term statutory framework for food policy in Wales operating under the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. A framework which would operate in and beyond political cycles and become solid, principled, long-term and institutionally embedded, for building food system resilience.

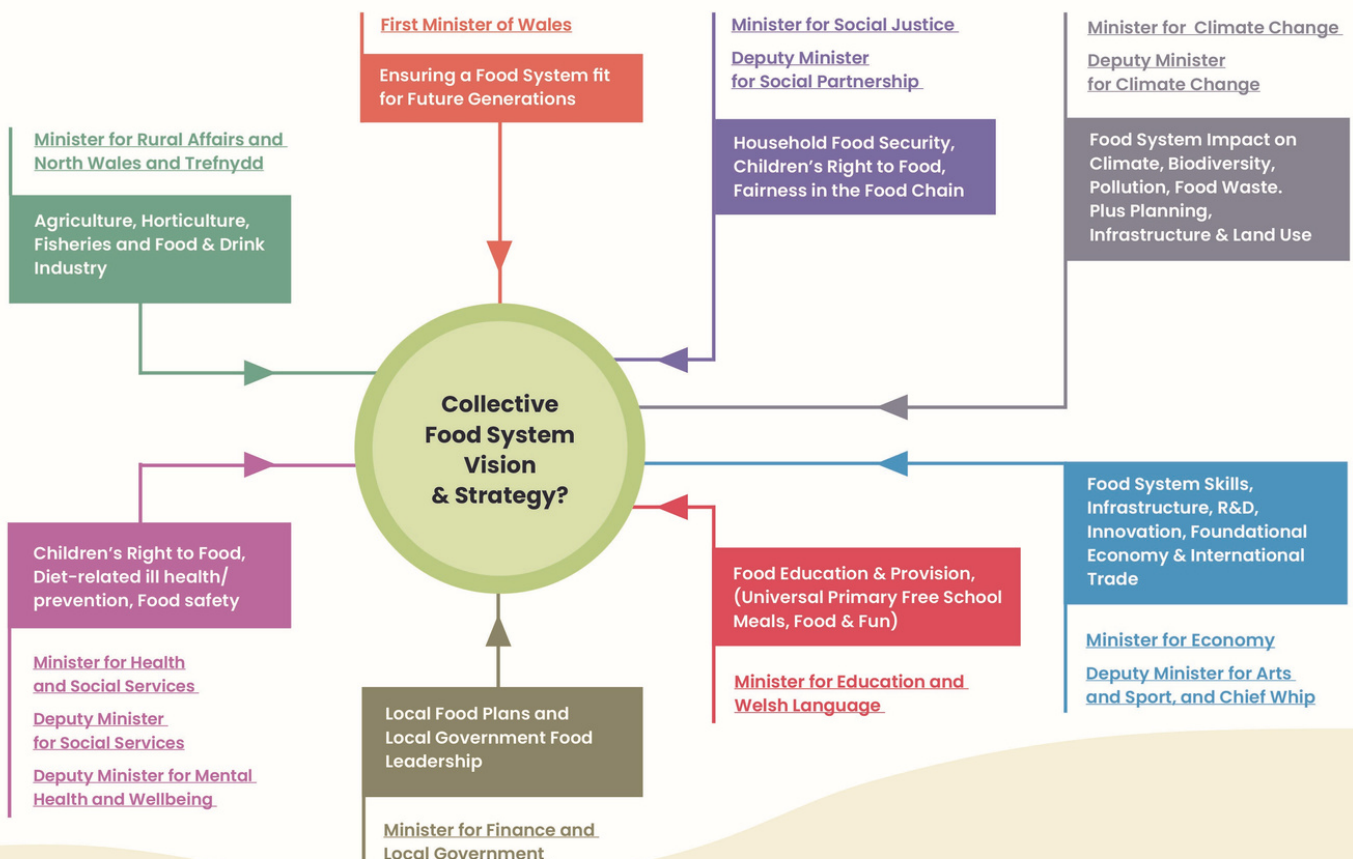
Guided by legal advice, FPAC strongly believes that:

- Specific legislation is required to create the legal framework for strategic food policy and planning in Wales
- The Well-being of Future Generations Act does not provide the strategic food policy and planning framework proposed by the Food (Wales) Bill, and it would not be undermined by this Bill. The food goals proposed in the Food (Wales) Bill are not inherently within the scope of the well-being goals of the WFG Act as the latter are defined in only general terms and none of the well-being goals and indicators contain any meaningful engagement with "food".
- Joint-working between the proposed Food Commission and the FG Commissioner could be achieved through simple amendment to the Well-being of Future Generations Act

## 2. SENEDD COMMITTEE PROCESS EXPOSED THE NEED FOR A MORE COHERENT AND ACCOUNTABLE FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD POLICY

Our Food system is highly complex and cuts across nearly every Ministry within the Welsh Government. That the Senedd Committee process was centred around one Minister is clear evidence that a more coherent and accountable framework for food policy is needed in Wales given that food is the responsibility of a number of Government departments (Figure 1). For example, the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing is responsible for Food Safety, The Food Standards Agency and Healthy Weight Healthy Wales (Obesity Strategy). The Minister for Education is responsible for the rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals, an important programme for Government and Plaid-Labour Cooperation Agreement commitment. The Minister for Economy is responsible for the Foundational Economy and International trade (noting that the Minister did take part in one evidence session) – a particularly important area of influence within the UK space where trade deals have the potential to impact on production standards and farming livelihoods. And the Minister for Climate Change is overseeing the Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group[2] with the first piece of work set to ask the question “How can Wales Feed Itself”?

**Figure 1 – Cross Government Responsibility for Food (main areas highlighted)**

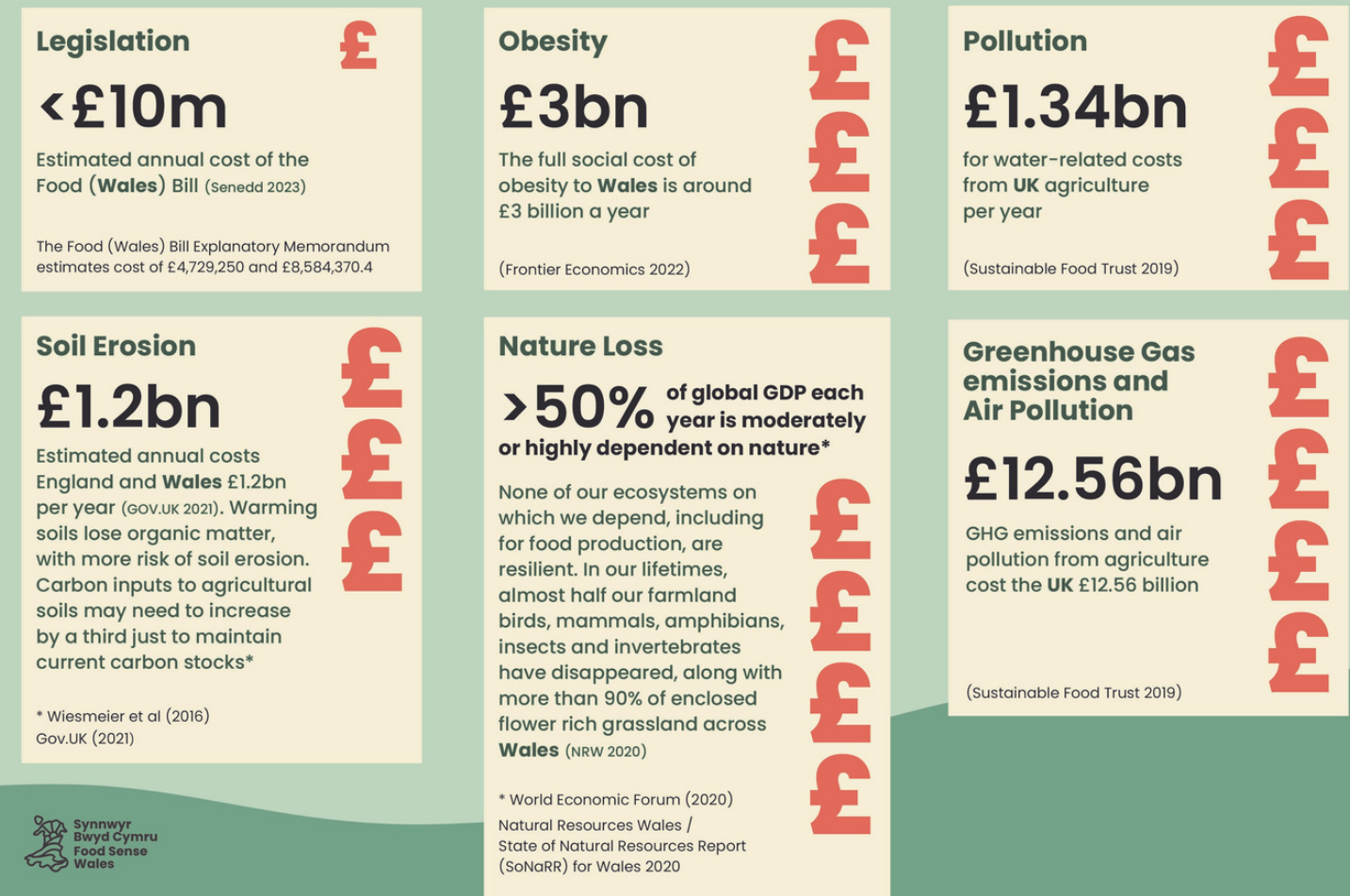


### 3. THE COSTS OF ADMINISTERING A FOOD BILL ARE DWARFED BY THE COSTS OF EXTERNALITIES (HIDDEN COSTS) GENERATED BY THE FOOD SYSTEM.

One of the central problems of current food systems is that many of the costs of food production are externalised. Externalities and other market failures lead to unintended consequences for present and future generations, destroying nature and perpetuating social injustices such as poor working conditions, food insecurity and ill-health. The Sustainable Food Trust<sup>[3]</sup> has estimated that each £1 spent on food in the shops, consumers incur extra hidden costs of £1. The costs of delivering the proposed legislation should be considered in light of the costs which could be mitigated. The data for these external costs (especially at a Wales level) are not freely available but those outlined below will provide the reader with a sense of proportion.

**Figure 2 – Costs of investing in a Food Bill**

#### Costs of investing in A Food (Wales) Bill – Can we afford not to?



#### **4. WE NEED A NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY ANCHORED IN LEGISLATION FOR WALES TO AVOID FAILURES IN POLICY MAKING FOR THE LONG TERM**

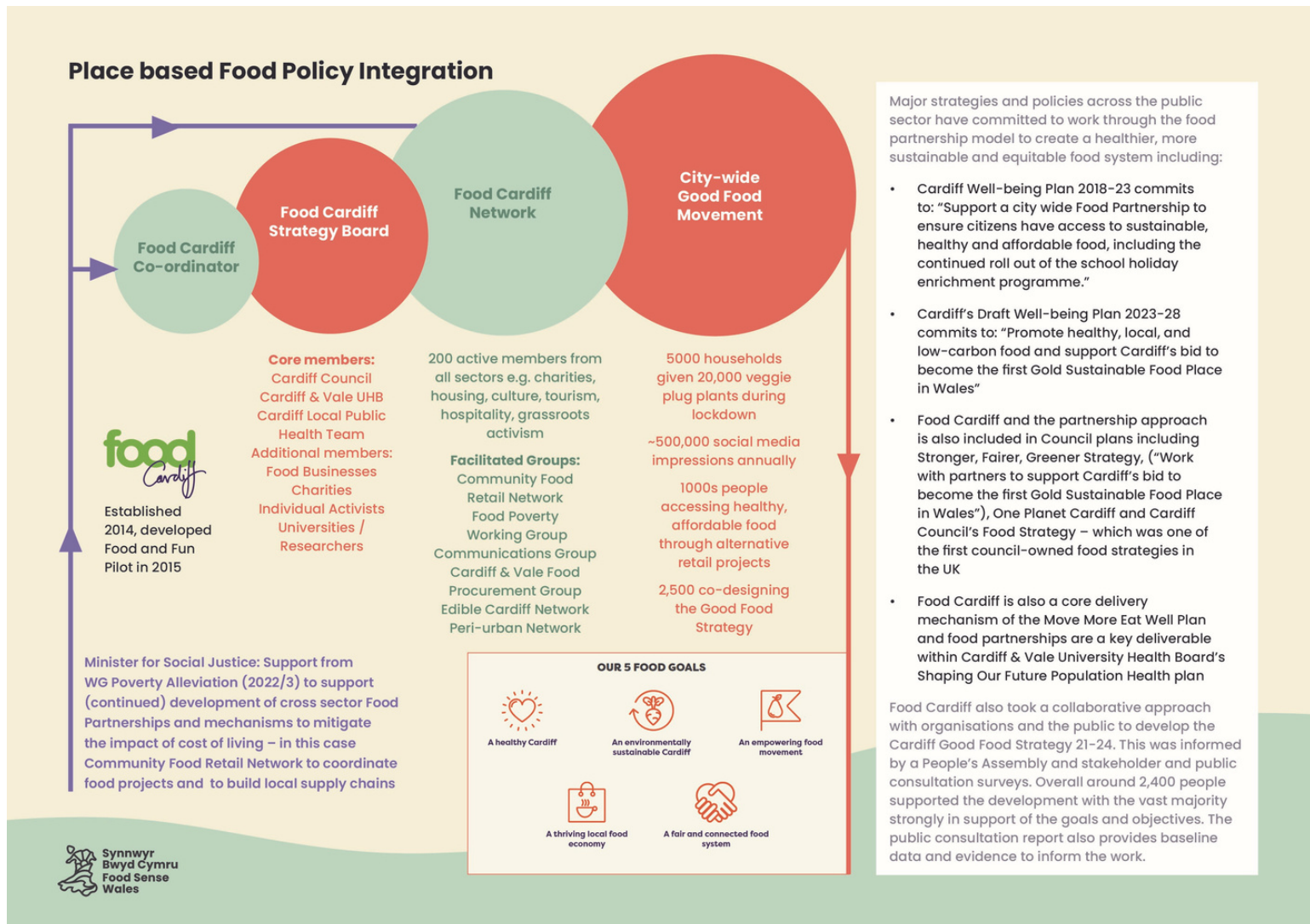
A list of policy areas on food is not the same as policy integration. An overarching vision, a National Food Strategy with accountable targets and a mechanism to channel food system stakeholder intelligence (a Commission) would help prevent contradictions such as developing an Industry Drinks strategy that includes alcohol, alongside a Public Health drive to reduce alcohol consumption, or missed opportunities (which are now being addressed), such as embedding reliance on food aid, rather than cash first approaches and investment in local supply chains for example.

Two further examples were raised through the Senedd committee evidence sessions:

- The proliferation of Intensive Poultry Units (IPUs) and their devastating impact on Welsh rivers[4] (e.g. Lancaster University found that 60–70% of pollution in the River Wye can be attributed to agriculture). Welsh Government is now proposing to incentivise sustainable farming practices, through the Sustainable Farming Scheme; however it is not clear if the scheme and the Agriculture (Wales) Bill would support farms that contain intensive poultry units or other types of poultry farming within catchments where farming intensity is now operating beyond safe environmental limits.
- Big Bocs Bwyd, an innovative idea funded by Welsh Government to bring an alternative form of food education and food aid into the school setting, was conceived in isolation of wider food policy leading to unintended consequences (such as challenges with planning applications for containers, potential to exacerbate health inequalities through provision of unhealthy food and competition across established projects for surplus food) and missed opportunities within Government (such as meaningful links to Food and Fun, Nutrition Skills for Life, Income Maximisation Plan and the development of local supplies chains). In a letter to the ETRA committee, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd provided an example of how, through the development of local food partnerships, some of these issues are being addressed[5]

The cross-sector food partnership, Food Cardiff, has co-produced a Food Strategy that acts as a good example of policy integration, demonstrating community level participation in developing a strategy and linking with major policies across the public sector whilst building relationships with the private sector.

**Figure 3 – Place-based Food Policy Integration**



## 5. A FOOD BILL WOULD MAKE FOOD POLICY MORE EFFICIENT AND ACCOUNTABLE

The Food Bill would create more efficient and accountable mechanisms that would arguably reduce the administrative burden and aid cross-government working. Coordinating all the different departments involved in the delivery of the Universal Primary Free School Meal commitment has been highly complex for example. Officials have had to navigate across multiple departments; Education, Food, the Economy, Social Justice and Local Government – would this process have been more efficient with the framework of a Food Bill?

The time needed to deliver the Food Bill has also been raised. We believe that the Food Bill could be developed “in Action” with elements being developed in tandem with the legislative process. A Network of Food Partnerships (for example Figure 3) is already evolving with Welsh Government support and a “Shadow Commission” could be established to build on work already underway within Government (e.g. with the Community Food Strategy).

## 6. FOOD IS FOUNDATIONAL BUT OUR FOOD SYSTEM IS UNEQUAL - DUE IN PART TO LACK OF POLICY COHERENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The efficiency and accountability that primary legislation would bring could help mitigate the inequality resulting from current structures in our food system. Power is held by a few global corporations and growing profits benefit the same, whilst communities and Governments pay the price for externalities such as inequalities in diet-related health, climate change, poor working conditions and nature loss as illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 4). A National Food Strategy would seek to address these issues to the best of our ability locally and influence on an international stage.

**Figure 4 – Power and Inequity in our Food System**



## **7. PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND OUR GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY ARE NOT ALIGNED IN WALES' FOOD SYSTEM**

What we produce in Wales and what we consume are not aligned. Connecting food with our culture and heritage, opportunities with the new curriculum and incentives within the Sustainable Farming Scheme, could all be part of a National Food Strategy that aligns diets more closely with what we should be producing in Wales for human and planetary health. For example, we produce sufficient red meat (lamb, beef, pork) in Wales for our (Government recommended) dietary requirements[6] but we only consume 5% of lamb produced and 5% of beef produced within Wales[7]. We export much to the UK (60% lamb and 80% beef) and the rest beyond (lamb 35%, beef 15%). Meanwhile we import meat from other countries and import feed for Welsh livestock which often comes from countries at risk of deforestation (e.g. Wales imports 190,000 tonnes of soy a year, and nearly 80% is fed to livestock. Much of the land used to grow this commodity is at risk of deforestation and social exploitation[8]). On the other hand we are only producing 3% of the fruit and vegetable requirements for Wales[9] and as part of the UK we are importing 54% of fruit and vegetables from climate vulnerable countries ([SHEFS 2020](#)[10]).

## **8. THE FOOD BILL OVERLAPS WITH THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (WALES)**

We believe based on legal guidance sought, that the proposed Food Commission's advisory function relating to 'food safety and consumer protection' should be deleted from the Bill as this responsibility falls to the Food Standards Agency as currently defined. However, if the Bill progresses there is an opportunity to consider how both the Review and Reform of Food Business Regulation[11] and the planned review of the FSA in Wales announced by the Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing[12] would fit alongside / integrate with any National Food Strategy for Wales.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Food (Wales) Bill has the potential to build a Welsh vision of the food system, from the ground up and to create the top-down structures for ensuring that Ministers and government departments are creating policy synergies that align with that national vision. This is critical not just for the people of Wales now, but for future generations, who should be able to access and enjoy healthy foods, sustainably produced on Welsh farms that use practices that care for people and the planet, safeguard Welsh culture and heritage, and contribute to net zero targets.



## **ABOUT FOOD POLICY ALLIANCE CYMRU**

Food Policy Alliance Cymru is a coalition of organisations and stakeholders building and promoting a collective vision for the Welsh food system.

Through collaboration, engagement and research the Alliance aims to:

- Co-produce a vision for a food system in Wales that connects production, supply and consumption and gives equal consideration to the health and wellbeing of people and nature.
- Advocate for policy change to address climate and ecological emergencies, the public health crisis and the rise in food insecurity.
- Ensure Wales is linked to UK policy, research opportunities and the broader global system.

The following members of Food Policy Alliance Cymru have contributed to this response:

- Food Sense Wales
- Social Farms & Gardens
- Landworkers' Alliance Cymru
- Urban Agriculture Consortium
- Nature Friendly Farming Network Cymru
- WWF Cymru
- RSPB Cymru
- Soil Association Cymru
- Dr Angelina Sanderson Bellamy, Association Professor of Food Systems, UWE Bristol
- Prof Terry Marsden, Cardiff University
- Simon Wright, Director of Food and Rural Economy, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

This consultation may be published on [Food Policy Alliance Cymru – foodsensewales.org.uk](https://foodsensewales.org.uk)

Any queries can be directed to [foodsensewales@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:foodsensewales@wales.nhs.uk)

Food Policy Alliance Cymru has also recently produced an explainer video on Food Systems. You can watch the video [here](#).

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- [2] Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group (2023) <https://netzero2035.wales/>
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- [4] Wales Online (March 2023) [walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/river-wye-pollution-high-court-26476772](http://walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/river-wye-pollution-high-court-26476772)
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**Figure 4:**

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