

Food (Wales) Bill – Views of Caerphilly County Borough Council

The Food (Wales) Bill has the potential to impact on several council service areas. It could also affect the work of both the Gwent Public Services Board and the Regional Partnership Board who currently preparing the regional Well-being Plan and Area Plans respectively.

Goal	Description
Economic well-being	Creating new economic opportunities through promotion of locally produced food. Promoting sustainable economic, social and community development. Encouraging better links between food producers, processors and consumers.
Health and social	Reducing malnutrition, food poverty and food insecurity. Reducing obesity. Encouraging equitable distribution of healthy and sustainable food within communities. Promoting the social well-being benefits of food, for example through community growing and allotments. Promoting the importance of consuming healthy food for improving physical and mental health and well-being
Education	Increasing the quality and accessibility of educational provision on food-related issues. Developing food skills to ensure better, healthier diets and well-being.
Environment	Lessening environmental impacts of food production, processing and consumption. Enhancing and regenerating the natural environment through food production. Restoring and maintaining biodiversity and habitats through food production. Promoting a food system that mitigates and adapts to climate change, and minimises Wales' global environmental footprint
Food waste	Reducing food waste across the food system, including by food producers, processors and consumers

1. Over the past 14 years the rural development team has supported and worked alongside the commercial and social food sector within Caerphilly.
2. During this time the food sector in Caerphilly, and across the wider south east Wales region, has become increasingly important to our communities, landscape, and economy.
3. Wales is defined, and often promoted, based on its natural environment, high quality produce and welcome. However, agricultural production of higher value foods should not be prioritised over traditional food production. A significant proportion of Caerphilly County, similar to Wales as a whole, is defined as upland areas with poor / marginal land classification centred around grass crop for beef and lamb production.
4. Land use of this type is well suited to the local topography and climatic conditions and relies on lower inputs than other more intensive agricultural production. This also maintains and creates the identity of Wales visible to residents and tourists. Threats to traditional agriculture are varied and alternative or higher value arable crops aren't always suitable within upland environments.
5. Through the development of its Local Development Strategy and administration of the Cwm a Mynydd Local Action Group; comprised of members of the local farming community, third sector, training providers and local businesses, the council has consistently supported the local farming and food sector.
6. Interest in the production, procurement and distribution of locally sourced food has grown over recent years and global impacts to food supply chains have strengthened the need to ensure and support the development of safe, healthy, secure, and equitable food systems.
7. Communities within Caerphilly, like other areas, has seen increasing pressures placed on the cost and availability of food for many. Information received from the social food sector shows increasing demand for emergency food over recent years, a trend that has increased since autumn 2022. The same feedback also outlines lower donations to food banks and underlines the precarious nature of food and nutrition to many in our communities.
8. Caerphilly, in partnership with Torfaen County Borough Council and Monmouthshire County Council delivered a pilot food programme – Food4Growth – to invest in community and business led food development across the region. This collaborative approach highlighted the commonality of demand and need across three distinct areas and supported innovative community food investment from surplus share schemes to community horticulture skills. Economic investment in to small and medium sized food businesses highlighted labour and skills shortages within the food production industry and a desire to invest in new technology to increase production.

9. Through our work, the rural development team within Caerphilly County Borough Council, have worked on several actions to promote healthy agriculture, shorter supply chains, and foster innovation and democratic access to, and within the food sector. This has been enabled through the community led rural development principles that link rural communities, environment, farming and land use, culture and basic services and needs together in a holistic programme. The loss of support for the LEADER approach to funding and supporting integrated and cross sector support for rural areas will be felt going forward. We would encourage the creation or continuation of a structural and integrated programme, delivered locally in partnership with those that have a stake in the functioning of their areas as a priority for consideration within any national strategy.
10. As a local authority outside of the traditional 9 rural areas, Caerphilly CBC's rural development team would like to see successor funding arrangements recognise that rurality occurs beyond the borders of the 9 rural counties.
11. As the consultation outlines, food goals need to be measurable and achievable within a defined timescale. The production of food must be viewed alongside the viability of farm and rural communities to maintain and protect the natural landscape that characterises and defines rural and semi-rural areas and communities of Wales. The principle of food production on, or for, a commercial scale needs to be recognised as a public good that creates a Wales that meets its own food needs in a balanced and ecologically sound way.
12. The Food Bill and the Commission should recognise the role of the farming community (private sector land managers) and wider market forces that drive land use. This can be beyond the scope of many public bodies to influence, particularly following the transition from legacy EU Structural funds and the Common Agricultural Policy. Pressures on productive land are increasing and food production needs to be addressed within the Bill and by the Commission to balance the competing demands, for food, energy and biodiversity, on productive land across Wales.
13. A national focus around food production and accessibility can benefit Wales. A national commitment to secure sustainable food from a Welsh Food Commission can create priorities that cut across public, third and private sectors and meet the needs of current and future generations.
14. The Commission should work with public bodies on the development and implementation of local food plans and priorities and ensure that productive capacity of different areas is recognised and balanced regionally and on a landscape basis. Discussions and collaborative working between neighbouring authorities should be encouraged to avoid duplication or contradictory priorities within regional landscapes and catchments. Changes in land use that lead to the loss of primary productive land should be considered in the Commission's contributions to Senedd Cymru reporting.

15. The next round of Well-being Plans are nearly completed and any development of local food plans should be mindful of this to ensure that the aims are aligned and support collaborative, partnership working.
16. The Food Bill should consider the impacts of land use and production of food on the ecology of the biosphere as well as the impacts of aggregate development on biosphere and ecological systems, rather than single developments. Public bodies can only follow current guidance.
17. The development of a national food strategy, linked to sustainable development principles, UNSDGs and WFGA is supported. The strategy should consider the whole-life cycle of production notably fertilisers and the wider effects these have on food and environmental quality. Recognition of the part production practices, and crop choices play on the environmental impact and viability of rural environments should be given significant weight in the ability of a nation like Wales to feed itself sustainably. We recognise that it is more damaging to grow some crops than not have them and would want the national and local strategies to prioritise and encourage appropriate food production.
18. Consideration should also be given to the carbon impacts of the production, distribution and disposal of food to enable Wales to meet its zero carbon targets and aspirations.
19. The production of food must be viewed alongside the viability of farm and rural communities to maintain and protect the natural landscape that characterises and defines rural, semi-rural and urban fringe areas. Food production should be supported and maintained as a public good to enable Wales to meet its own food needs in a balanced and ecologically sound way. Food production, and use of the landscape to produce food, plays an intrinsic cultural role in community specific and national identity.
20. Agricultural activity and food production in urban and rural areas can and does have a significant impact on biodiversity and the functioning of healthy and sustainable ecosystems. A functioning and resilient biosphere underpins productive agricultural and food production and needs to play an integral role in the Food Bill Wales and the Commission's activities. The Welsh Food Bill should be reviewed against how it is enabling the improvement and creation of a healthy Welsh environment and biosphere.
21. Engagement and education around food, ecology, fundamental rights and rural culture should be promoted and continue to highlight the links between the five issues, as each are interlinked and fundamental to the functioning of our communities.
22. Food production should be democratised and measures to support new entrants into food production supported, particularly where this will benefit rural communities across Wales by creating more local employment and enabling younger people to remain in their own communities.

23. A National Food Strategy should actively support the use of planning tools to enable smaller food producing units and holdings to increase production.
24. Community supported agriculture and mechanisms to support existing farms to support or host community growing initiatives on their land should be explored through a future domestic rural or agricultural policy that recognises land availability as a barrier to increasing community food schemes.
25. Engagement and support of wider and broader use of allotments and other community growing initiatives should be explored and supported, including for example a broadening on the functionality and sale/distribution of produce to surrounding communities and the role that they play in providing food for many in our communities.
26. The national Food Strategy should support and encourage finance to explore no till, non-soil based and other novel food production in urban, peri-urban and post-industrial areas to increase production closer to demand centres and increase production of value-added crops.
27. The national food strategy and commission need to be mindful of the role agriculture plays in monitoring and prevention of spread of pathogens within the environment.
28. A national food strategy should consider food production and its importance to Wales in planning policy.
29. Caerphilly, like other areas is already developing food plans, commissioning food mapping and becoming a sustainable food place. The Commission, national strategy and local food plans should recognise and consider the extensive work already undertaken and avoid any contradiction or duplication of effective existing work and there is benefit in the support of linking local food plans into looser regional collaboration.