

**Senedd Cymru**  
**Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig**  
**Economi Gwyrdd**  
**GE25**  
**Ymateb gan: Ffermydd a Gerddi Cymdeithasol**

**Welsh Parliament**  
**Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee**  
**Green Economy**  
**GE25**  
**Evidence from: Social Farms & Gardens**



## **Social Farms & Gardens Response to Green Economy Consultation (7 March 2024)**

Social Farms & Gardens is a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow together. Our vision sees people and communities reaching their full potential through community growing and nature-based activities as a part of everyday life.

We are a team of 12 staff representing over 350 member organisations in Wales. Members include community gardens, CSAs, allotments, community orchards, school gardens, Incredible Edible groups and many more.

### **We believe that the priorities for a green economy in Wales must be:**

- Social justice
- Resilient local communities

Resilient Green Spaces ([www.farmgarden.org.uk/resilient-green-spaces](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/resilient-green-spaces)) demonstrated the power of small investments of fairly unrestricted funding to local communities to invest in green infrastructure and resources to support their local green economy. We planted community orchards, built skills of orchard maintenance and provided equipment to store and process fruit that can be sold for reinvestment in the community. Working with Gwynedd County Council we trained and equipped community groups to take ownership of their public green spaces and develop them for people and nature. Where local groups and individuals are: facilitated to network with peers in other areas; resourced to allocate time to community action; and empowered to take decisions based on their local knowledge and assets, they are incredibly cost-effective at laying the foundations of a local green economy.

Through our Camau Gwyrdd ([www.farmgarden.org.uk/camau-gwyrdd](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/camau-gwyrdd)) project, we are supporting target groups who tend to be less engaged in taking “climate action” to take their first steps of climate action. It must be noted that these target groups are not those who are having the largest negative impact on our environment. Taking climate action requires us to all believe that we have the power to make a difference – be this in our personal, community or paid-employment sphere.

Investment in initiatives that are available to all such as public transport, libraries (books, tools, etc), community green spaces, community kitchens, means that everyone has the opportunity to take climate positive action and to access opportunities to upskill, access resources and enable community-building. Community building is essential for producing resilient neighbourhoods that are reliant on sharing skills, assets and resources and the foundation of a green economy.

We are working with fruit and vegetable producers in Carmarthenshire to set up a Machinery Ring which will contribute to reduced risk for growers to increase production, for farmers to diversify and to build community between growers. Our aim is to enable the public sector to purchase from an increased supply of local produce that is grown agroecologically. [www.farmgarden.org.uk/news/carmarthenshire-growers-collaboration-increase-countys-fruit-veg-supply](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/news/carmarthenshire-growers-collaboration-increase-countys-fruit-veg-supply)

### Key Barriers

A green transition is long term. Short-term funding is leading to wasted opportunities for wiser investments in capital assets and skills.

Businesses need security and assurance to make step changes. Investment and legislative developments to support a green economy must be taken in line with other initiatives such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme to offer a holistic, value-driven approach.

We know that a green transition in some sectors will come at a cost, but this will deliver cost savings in other areas. For example, a transition to a more plant-based, nutritious diet in public settings (schools, care homes, etc) will see huge cost savings in health, increased income in the local foundational economy and improvements to biodiversity and net zero. We need more data to support the savings at a cross-sector level and power for departments to reap the rewards that aren't confined to one area, this is particularly important where public sector funding is limited and reducing.

Our Sustainable Food Procurement for Local Prosperity pilot missed an opportunity to influence the food that growers were producing because we were only able to operate during one growing season. This impacted the opportunity to evidence through the pilot itself, but also the potential to handhold growers/farmers to make the transition into growing fruit and veg that our public sector needs. Our final report makes a range of arguments that set how public food procurement can be used as a driver for economic development in Wales. [www.farmgarden.org.uk/sustainable-food-procurement-hubs](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/sustainable-food-procurement-hubs)

### Supply Chain

We need wiser investment that encourages **reduce, re-use, recycle, recover, repair**.

Research shows that even purchasing items that help people engage with the environment can be costly in terms of carbon, such as raised beds in a short-lived community garden.

Considering embedded carbon within public sector procurement guidelines – allowing for recycled, second-hand, refurbished goods. Delivering longer contracts to ensure resources are used for their full lifetime.

We're a rural nation. We need support for local business that enables short resilient supply chains such as local processing units, peer training and networking, local trading opportunities including digital. Open Food Network UK offer an open source trading platform for producers and food hubs that also provides the opportunity to aggregate produce for wholesale <https://openfoodnetwork.org.uk/>

### **Skills Challenges**

We need to bring everyone on the journey – eg. Catering staff. Food for Life are offering training in Scotland to catering staff that isn't "how to cook a carrot", but is teaching sustainability, empowering the catering staff to take pride in their role with then public food system that has a more positive carbon and environmental impact, as well as healthy. Access to healthy diets is fundamental for enabling a healthy, productive workforce.

Social Farms & Gardens, with partners, is calling for investment in edible horticulture skills. If we are to meet our future needs in terms of fruit and vegetable production, we need more skills in this sector. We commissioned this report that maps existing horticulture training pathways

[www.farmgarden.org.uk/sites/farmgarden.org.uk/files/mapping\\_of\\_existing\\_horticulture\\_training\\_provision.pdf](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/sites/farmgarden.org.uk/files/mapping_of_existing_horticulture_training_provision.pdf)

Our research on behalf of WCVA at the end of 2022 for the Nature Service Wales also found that longer term funding for core infrastructure to support key sectors such as community growing is fundamental to enabling development in these sectors and genuine community resilience and support future generations. Constantly chasing new funding for new initiatives is a drain on resources that could be better used to develop a secure local asset that provides opportunities for health, social cohesion, environmental enhancement, education and place-building.

### **Working in Partnership**

Just as with food, there needs to be a long-term, holistic approach to the green economy. Joined up thinking, sharing resources, investing in initiatives that deliver multiple benefits. Investment should be made through listening to communities, giving time, building on assets and networking for peer learning. Social Farms & Gardens regularly receives feedback from groups throughout Wales on the importance of being part of something bigger – this builds confidence, inspires, shares knowledge, identifies assets and opportunities, and reduces misplaced investment.