



RSPB Cymru Evidence to the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Rethinking Food in Wales

September 2017

1. Introduction

- 1.1 RSPB Cymru welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Committee's inquiry into Rethinking Food in Wales.
- 1.2 The following sections set out our vision for sustainable food, farming and fishing systems in Wales and what it means for nature and the environment, food producers and society.

2 What is your vision for the future of food in Wales and what needs to be done to achieve it?

- 2.1 RSPB Cymru's vision is for a sustainable food, farming and fishing systems that are good for the environment, give nature a home, benefit society and are fair to food producers.
- 2.2 Food production depends on the environment. Systems which deplete or pollute the very natural resources on which food production itself depends - soil, air, water, biodiversity - are in no one's interest. Current unsustainable food production practices have led to the deterioration of our natural resources. Soils have been depleted, water courses degraded and polluted, habitats lost (on land and at sea), and nature has struggled to cope with the pace of change leading to widespread declines in species. Indeed, 12% of farmland species in the UK are threatened with extinction.¹ In Wales, since 1970 we have seen declines in 57% of our vascular plant species, 60% of our butterfly species and 40% of our bird species.²
- 2.3 We want to see sustainable systems of food production in Wales that sustain and restore biodiversity as well as producing safe, healthy food; protect the natural resources of soil, air and water (fresh and marine waters) that society and food production itself depends on; reward and value food producers (through public policy, markets and consumer choice) for the work they undertake that helps to sustain nature and protect environmental resources.

¹ State of Nature 2016 https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/State%20of%20Nature%20UK%20report_%2020%20Sept_tcm9-424984.pdf

² State of Nature 2016 Wales http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/stateofnature2016_wales_english_1_sept_pages.pdf

How can we rethink food so that we have:

3. Healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable

- 3.1** It is often suggested that we need to simply produce more to help tackle food security. However the issue of food security is far more complex than this. Post war policies, including the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) encouraged over-production yet this approach failed to alleviate global hunger. The world already produces more than enough food for everyone - the issue is that it is not distributed evenly - 1 in 9 people suffer from chronic undernourishment³ whilst approximately 25% of the world's population is overweight or obese⁴.
- 3.2** We can only achieve food security by improving access to good, healthy food and safeguarding the natural resources on which production depends so that we are able to meet the needs of future generations better. Investing in a resilient food system is crucial to securing our food supply in the face of the shocks to the system likely from climate change, rising populations and dwindling resources. One of the easiest 'wins' in reducing the environmental impact of food is to reduce waste at all stages in the food chain. Currently, 30-50% of food is wasted⁵; although we can't expect to reduce that to zero, it is estimated that it could be halved.
- 3.3** In an era of convenience food, people are becoming more and more removed from where their food comes from. The less people understand their food and the impact that their food choices have on nature, the less likely they are to make different choices to help nature and the environment. We need to help reconnect people to where their food comes from and build a better understanding of our modern food system in order to inspire consumers to make more wildlife friendly choices and reduce the environmental damage associated with unsustainable food production/consumption.
- 3.4** Our national diet has become a political topic in recent years. Not only is our food production responsible for environmental damage on a huge scale all across the globe, not just here in Wales, but it is also clear that our food choices are affecting our health. Indeed, in Wales around 63% of men and 56% of women are either overweight or obese⁶. We recommend following the 8 Principles of a Healthy and Sustainable Diet developed through the Green Food Project⁷:
- Eat a varied balanced diet to maintain a healthy body weight
 - Eat more plant based foods, including at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day
 - Value your food - ask where it comes from and how it was produced

³ United Nations Food & Agriculture Organisation <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2014/en/>

⁴ World Health Organisation <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>

⁵ Gustavsson et al. 2011 "Global food losses and food waste" <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/mb060e/mb060e00.pdf>

⁶ Carl Baker - Obesity Statistics 2017 <researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN03336/SN03336.pdf>

⁷ Garnett & Strong 2014 "The principles of healthy and sustainable eating patterns" Published on behalf of the working group, by the Global Food Security programme

- Choose fish sourced from sustainable stocks
- Moderate your meat consumption and enjoy other sources of protein as well as meat
- Include milk and dairy products in your diet and/or seek out plant based alternatives
- Drink tap water
- Eat fewer foods high in fat, sugar and salt

4. Sustainably produced food with high environmental and animal welfare standards

4.1 As we leave the EU it is important that we adopt ambitious standards that are at least as high as those set out in existing EU law. In Wales, these standards will need to comply with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Environment Act 2016. Strong regulatory protections are essential in protecting the environment and interests of society. We will also need to agree where we need common standards or frameworks across the UK which will be key to maintaining a level playing field for producers and avoid a rush to the bottom. High standards provide confidence in Welsh produce. Any post Brexit frameworks that underpin food production must adopt a “public payments for public goods” approach. Food producers must be encouraged to do so in ways which provide wider public goods or benefits, e.g. reducing greenhouse gas emissions, restoring ecosystems and enhancing biodiversity, managing water and reducing flooding.

4.2 Food production in Wales is part of a much larger, and increasingly globalised, food system. We cannot therefore look at Wales in isolation. Food production here increasingly relies on resources from overseas. We also produce food for export and import large quantities. To create a globally responsible Wales⁸ we must ensure that we understand and seek to minimise our environmental footprint overseas as well as in Wales. For example, in Wales about 75% of the total agricultural area is used for livestock production but in addition, the sector has a vast footprint of ‘ghost acres’ in the tropics. Vegetable based protein for livestock feed in the UK is primarily sourced from soy bean imported from South America where large areas of land are needed for its production, which in turn drives deforestation and biodiversity loss worldwide.⁹ Reliance on this source is problematic from an economic, food security and environmental impact perspective. We advocate producing less but *better* quality meat, and encourage sustainable, environmentally friendly, [pasture fed](#) meat from Wales with less reliance on imported agricultural feed. Looking at alternative sustainable sources of ‘home-grown’ protein for livestock feed can also reduce these effects.

4.3 It is possible to have thriving nature alongside modern productive farming and food production systems. Farming systems in some parts of Wales remain of

⁸ One of the 7 Well Being Goals as per the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

⁹ IBERS Aberystwyth University <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/posts/case-alternative-protein-sources-animal-feed>

High Nature Value¹⁰ and are strongholds for some species of wildlife. These systems where animals are grazed in extensively managed pastures can support birds such as lapwing and curlew and many species of flowering plant. At RSPB Ramsey Island for example, Welsh mountain sheep graze the island's fields throughout the year. This traditional management is essential for the eight pairs of chough breeding there (Wales holds over 50% of the UK population of less than 400). In 2016, under the Farm to Fork initiative, RSPB Ramsey Island sold all 66 of their male lambs to St Davids Kitchen in Pembrokeshire (only 3 miles away), highlighting the positives of environmentally friendly farming and local sourcing and markets. Public policy, markets and consumer behaviour must all value and reward land managers for the public goods and environmental services they provide over and above food production.

- 4.4** Currently, market or consumer behaviour doesn't reward positive environmental management, beyond a few specific examples. Labels such as Fair to Nature, Leaf Marque, Organic and Pasture Fed (or Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) labelling for seafood) are a good way to determine if the food you buy has been produced in a more nature friendly way. Creating more brand awareness around Wales' local, nature-friendly, sustainable produce and encouraging wildlife/conservation/environmentally friendly food certification can also help food producers to become more profitable and sustainable, improving efficiency, reducing input costs and enhancing income streams through diverse activities. Government, industry and corporate backing for these emerging market systems will help to prevent them from becoming marginalised and trivialised. It is also important that land managers and fishermen receive a fair share of the profit generated in the supply chain, creating more resilient food businesses. The ability to influence scheme and retailer standards is likely to be very strongly linked to public attitudes around food. Creating greater public demand for more sustainable food can in turn drive increased interest by retailers/standard owners to incorporate meaningful environmental standards.
- 4.5** It is also imperative that Wales's public bodies, including the Welsh Government, lead by example by ensuring that their procurement of food is sustainably sourced.
- 4.6** Farmers, food producers and those who work the land need to be supported by quality education, training and advice to manage that land sustainably and in ways that benefit wildlife. The environmental content of the current suite of education and training is very limited and some land managers receive none at all. For a sector that needs increasingly to embrace innovation and new technologies, be more market orientated and adopt more sustainable farming methods - this is a concern. Environmental management must be put at the heart of all formal qualifications and training courses if farmers of the future are to be well equipped to deliver environmental outcomes.

¹⁰ Often referred to as High Nature Value (HNV) farming these farms often operate in the most marginal agricultural land, under difficult social and economic realities such as in the upland regions (but they occur throughout Wales).
<http://www.highnaturevaluefarming.org.uk/hnv-farming-in-wales/>

4.7 In order to realise the Wales Seafood Strategy¹¹ vision of a "thriving, vibrant, safe, and sustainable seafood industry for Wales", it is critical that the Welsh and UK Governments work together once the UK is no longer a member of the EU. The Fisheries Bill due in 2018 must ensure the following vital components of fisheries management for sustainable fishing and food production to be achieved:

- A legal requirement to fish below the fishing mortality associated with producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) by 2020 in order to restore stock biomass above the MSY level. Fishing limits must also adhere to the best available scientific advice.
- Allow for the creation and effective management of an Ecologically Coherent Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
- Delivery of an effective ban on discards which includes full documentation and control of total catches.
- Mechanisms to work across borders in order to achieve agreed policy objectives for managing shared fish stocks.
- Measures to ensure compliance and high levels of confidence in the achievement of domestic and international objectives, including combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing.
- Investment to underpin key operational systems such as data collection, monitoring and enforcement.
- Development and implementation of new fisheries laws should also include clear processes for the engagement of stakeholders in line with the UK's international commitments under the Aarhus Convention¹².

5. Conclusion

5.1 Food poverty and food security can only be addressed if the soil, air, water and other natural resources that underpin food production, and are the foundation of healthy ecosystems, are of good quality. As well as producing sustainable amounts of quality food, sustainable agriculture and fisheries can provide a whole host of other public services, such as providing nature a home, carbon sequestration, safeguarding water quality, alleviating flood risk and creating beautiful landscapes. Food producers should be valued and financially rewarded for the work they undertake that helps to sustain nature and protect environmental resources. This would encourage the production of high quality, sustainable, environmentally friendly goods in Wales, in turn helping us create a more resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales.

¹¹ http://www.seafish.org/media/1659099/wales_seafood_strategy.pdf

¹² The Aarhus Convention establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. These include access to environmental information held by public authorities; the right to participate in environmental decision-making; and the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions.