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# Evaluation of Future Farms in Business Phase 3

Draft Final Report

December 2024



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The BRO Partnership (BRO) was appointed by Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) in July 2024 to undertake the evaluation of the Future Farms in Business pilot project, based in Powys. The evaluation was completed in January 2025 and this report summarises the methodology and key findings from the study.

The evaluation focused on two key questions:

- Capturing learning from the pilot itself.
- Assessing how the experiences of the pilot can influence the promotion of further support for agroecological food production.

Specifically, the evaluation report captures the opportunities, challenges, successes and learning points for different groups, including:

- Local Authorities wishing to maximise the potential of their land assets.
- Those seeking to open up access to land for agro-ecological, regenerative food production for local markets.
- Land workers and land seekers.
- Other landowners - public and private.

A separate Executive Summary captures the essence of the work undertaken, the lessons learnt and the potential to roll-out the Future Farms in Business approach on a much larger scale across Powys County and Wales as a whole.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Future Farms in Business is the third phase of an initiative supported by the Future Farms Partnership which consists of:

- SF&G
- Our Food 1200
- Landworkers' Alliance (LWA)
- Ecological Land Cooperative
- Shared Assets
- Black Mountains College (BMC)
- Gwlad Consortium
- Cultivate - North and South Powys Sustainable Food Places Partnerships
- Lantra
- Powys County Council (PCC)
- Eco Dyfi - Pathways to Farming
- Nature Friendly Farming Network.

This third phase aimed to:

- Secure and implement a planning application for three dwellings on a farm estate owned by PCC.
- Recruit growers to set up new horticultural enterprises and take on the accompanying dwellings.
- Increase local networking between growers and their potential market.
- Advocating for more small-scale, nature-friendly horticulture enterprises in Wales.

The previous Phases included:

#### **Phase 1**

A market feasibility study for micro-holdings to support a horticulture enterprise with a dwelling in Powys as part of a small collection of neighbouring enterprises.

#### **Phase 2**

Development of Planning Guidance for PCC interpreting the existing Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6 and submission of a planning application for the building of three temporary dwellings on a site in the village of Sarn, Newtown, linked to viable horticulture businesses on the site (each around 5 acres).

**Phase 3**, which was the focus of this evaluation, is structured in four interrelated workstreams:

1. **Grower Journey:** Seeking expressions of interest from potential growers to live and work on the site, selecting growers, training opportunities (potential and delivered).
2. **Site Development:** Subject to planning approval, undertake first stages of the build (utility connections/ alternative provision, access, hard standings, packing shed).
3. **Messaging & Replication:** This project is a practical example of one approach to creating rural enterprise opportunities for local people, through increasing the demand and supply of fruit and vegetables needed to meet our nation's dietary needs.
4. **Network Building:** Supporting new growers through a wider network and working with potential customers (including public sector) to help drive demand for fresh produce.

Once Phase 3 has been completed, the Partnership has identified the following next steps, which will need to be funded separately:

- Further infrastructure development on the site in Sarn to meet the needs of the micro enterprises, which will focus on building three temporary houses under a 5 year planning permission. Funds for this, amounting to around £250,000, have already been secured through the ACP3W grant operated by Powys CC.
- Reflection, refinement and replication of the model elsewhere in Wales.

- Ongoing support to develop the market for local fruit and vegetables across Wales.
- Support to upskill existing and new growers with a particular focus on agroecology.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted included:

- Initial meeting with client to agree scope and milestones for the evaluation.
- Literature review of relevant background reports.
- Development of a Logic Model, which was agreed with the client (see Annex 1).
- Creation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. There are two parts to this:
  - The collection of data required to meet the Funder's requirements. A set of tables capturing this information is set out in Annex 2.
  - Structured interviews conducted by BRO, which include members of the Partnership and a range of external stakeholders. The list of organisations interviewed is included in Annex 3.
- Attending a site visit on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024 when members of the Partnership provided information for potential growers. Notes from this visit are included as Annex 4.
- Attendance at Partnership Meetings.

#### 3.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

There are three basic questions that the evaluation assessed:

- Has the pilot been carried out in accordance with the funder's requirement and what lessons have emerged?
- What should the Partnership do next?
- What are the wider policy implications?

The brief required at least 8 one-to-one interviews with the key members of the Partnership. This has been supplemented with further interviews with external stakeholders, ranging from Welsh Government officials, through to other Local Authorities and interested organisations and individuals.

Internal Stakeholders (8)	Evaluation Questions	External Stakeholders (9)
Governance and Coordination WP 1 (Growers Journey) WP2 (Site Development) WP 3 (Messaging and replication) WP4 (Networking)	<p>1. Was the Pilot a success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were you hoping the pilot would achieve?</li> <li>• Did it meet your expectations?</li> <li>• What worked well?</li> </ul>	Powys Planning Dept Pathways to Farming / ecodyfi

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was challenging?</li> <li>• What are the key lessons?</li> <li>• What would you have done differently?</li> </ul>	
SF&G Food 1200	<p><b>2. What next for the Partnership?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contingency planning</li> <li>• Additional funding</li> <li>• Community engagement</li> <li>• Building the market</li> </ul>	LWA Lantra
	<p><b>3. What are the policy implications and possibilities of replication?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate and term opportunities/challenges?</li> <li>• Are there different models to explore?</li> <li>• Key actions needed</li> <li>• Investment/financial backing</li> </ul>	WG Official - Food and Drink / Horticulture Planning Group / Community Food Strategy Menter a Business NFU Carmarthenshire CC

## 4. KEY FINDINGS

### 4.1 Findings from interviews and site visit

#### Planning and other legal challenges in delivering the Pilot

It is important to recognise that the Phase 3 of the Future Farms in Business Pilot is a continuation of previous efforts, notably the securing of Planning Guidance for accommodation relating to horticultural businesses in Powys.

At the time, it was anticipated that this would lead to a relatively rapid turnaround on the planning application for the infrastructure and temporary accommodation for 3 farms at Sarn, but this was not the case. The planning application was submitted in April 2024 - and it was late October 2024 before approval was granted. Since the allocated Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), which was funding Phase 3, had to be spent by the end of December 2024, the delay in the Planning approval was bound to have a severe knock-on effect on the overall delivery.

Once Planning was secured in late October 2024, there were further challenges in ensuring that the lease for the site was agreed with Powys CC's legal department, and again this was a cause for concern in terms of the time available for spending the available funds.

Compromises were reached and a small extension in the delivery timeframe until February 2025 was agreed with Powys CC, all of which were essential in ensuring that the project was able to be completed to budget.

It is also worth stressing that Sarn was not the original site for the project and that a previous farm holding in Montgomeryshire was originally considered. However, it was not possible to progress with this original site. Therefore, there was relatively

little time to find an alternative site within the timeframe of the available SPF grant.

The choice of Sarn for the pilot was therefore a necessity, since there were no alternatives available at the time. Sarn was not an easy site to develop, since there was a brook which dissected the land and required some form of bridge to traverse; and there was a need for services in terms of water, waste management, along with highway visibility splays, provision of broadband and telephone, solar panels etc. All of these items were expensive to develop on a greenfield location. In many ways, it was a “worst case scenario” - a challenge to which all concerned rose effectively.

### **Liaison with the local community**

The limited time available coupled with the fact that Sarn was the only suitable location for the pilot may have created a feeling that the project was being ‘imposed’ on the local community. This, perhaps, contributed to a planning objection being put forward by the local Community Council.

There is a back story here, in that previous planning decisions had led to the building of a large number of new homes in the area and there was still a degree of resentment around this.

It should be noted that there was also support for the project and it was by no means a case of blanket opposition. In reality, there was insufficient time or resources to engage with the local community and to build in their needs from the start. There was also a hiatus between the original community consultation and the long wait before the planning permission was eventually granted, some five months later - and during this time there was little or no point in going back to the local community for further discussions.

Once planning permission was granted, it was possible to pick up this aspect again and two of the organisations were invited to attend November's Community Council meeting to discuss the project and its aims. Although still concerned about the viability of the micro-enterprises, local residents were committed to support the new young entrepreneurs who would be taking on the sites and were pleased to hear that local people had applied for the opportunities. It should also be noted that the local County Councillor was invited to Partnership Meetings, but was unable to attend.

### **Developing new markets**

The main objection being put forward by the local Community Council was that, despite evidence put forward by the project partners, the 3 rural horticultural businesses would not be viable and after the 5 year temporary planning permission had expired, these would become new homes in the countryside.

For the Partnership therefore, and notably for Our Food 1200 who will take over the lease of the three farms, it is absolutely essential that the 3 growers are successful. In order to give them the greatest chance of success, a separate study has been commissioned to explore the possibilities of these 3 farms, and indeed other farm businesses in Powys, supplying food on a regular basis to Birmingham City Council wholesale markets. This is a very significant development and has the potential to change attitudes and support far more horticultural businesses in the area.

It's still early days to assess whether this marketing study on Birmingham is influential, but the potential is undeniable. That said, it will take time before food can be produced at the scale at which Birmingham might require, and in the meantime securing more local markets will also be important.

The Birmingham marketing study, which is being funded separately from this Phase, is being noted by other farmers in the area and the Farming Unions have already expressed interest in the approach.

### **Finding suitable growers**

One of the original driving forces for the Future Farms in Business pilot was to ascertain that there was a demand for finding suitable land to set up commercial horticultural businesses for new growers.

An initial advert for the 3 potential grower opportunities on the Sarn site led to 1 of these being offered a place. At this point, some doubt might have been raised on the chances of finding other suitable growers for the site, but a second advertisement led to 10 applications and 6 of these were considered strong enough to be interviewed.

The second round of interviews were again held in Sarn but also included a facilitated “collaboration workshop” element. Whilst the growers would operate separate businesses, it would be essential for them to work collaboratively to manage the site and to enable efficiencies of production and non-competitive routes to markets. The interviewees found this a useful process to explore the site’s potential for their business plans and opportunities for cooperative working and marketing.

It is perhaps worth highlighting here some of the challenges for the Partnership, in that they are setting up infrastructure for a greenfield site without necessarily knowing who the growers would be, or what they would want to grow. This was one of the constraints of the pilot and coupled with the very tight timescale it inevitably led to intense work pressures in delivering some elements of the overall project.

## Strength of the Partnership

What is very evident from attending the Partnership Steering Group and the site visit, along with speaking to individuals from the different organisations involved, is that there is enormous goodwill within the group. There is a real commitment and determination to make the pilot a success and to learn lessons on how the approach could be replicated.

It is also very clear that the Partnership has a wide range of skills, expertise and contacts - and through excellent communication they are able to mobilise their respective activities efficiently and effectively. This is very clear in the way that the Partnership has evolved, from initially being a group working more organically, exploring potential approaches to then focussing on the delivery of specific Work Packages, with separate leads acting on each one. The weekly check-ins become a very useful mechanism to coordinate and keep everyone informed and they also helped to ensure that no aspects of the overall project were being left behind.

The Partnership has evolved therefore, and is continuing to do so, building on the initial two Phases. As Phase 3 is complete and the focus is turned more towards the building of the three temporary housing units, along with the wider advocacy work, there will inevitably be a need for the Partnership to evolve further and bring in new organisations.

## 4.2 Policy tracking and implications

### Funders' policy requirements

This Phase of the whole Future Farms in Business project is funded through the Mid Wales Regional Investment Plan UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) 2022-25.

As set out in the SPF guidance, Ceredigion and Powys will deliver their SPF allocations under four main investment priorities listed below.

- Communities and Place
- Supporting local business
- People and Skills
- Multiply (adult numeracy).

The Future Farming in Business project is funded under the “Supporting local business” priority. The project has been fulfilling the aims of that priority in 4 ways:

- Identifying Powys Farm Estate land suitable for micro-holding division and site-infrastructure creation. Sarn was one of two farms put forward by Powys CC, and the Future Farming in Business Partnership has strong collaborative relations with the Council’s Farm Estate division to continue this process.
- Increasing the number of Powys micro-enterprises - 3 have been created.

- Creating replicability and scalability of the Future Farms concept. Powys CC has some 135 County farm holdings, and the total number in Wales is c.970. The Sarn pilot is already attracting wider attention.
- Demonstrating net-zero, carbon-positive, biodiversity-enhancing development of Powys' rural economy - the agro-ecological approach is designed into Future Farms concept.

The grant was specifically awarded under Intervention W22:

*“Investing in enterprise infrastructure and employment/innovation site development projects. This can help to unlock site development projects which will support growth in places.”*

Part of unlocking the site development has been the innovative work done by Powys CC and Future Farms in Business to create the right local Planning environment, as described later. As noted above and elsewhere, the project has been delivering on more than that single, key intervention.

The Future Farms in Business project addresses one of the key issues identified in the Mid Wales Regional Investment Plan. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of the Powys economy, but there is a need to tackle the declining and ageing population with infrastructure, and other measures, to support new entrants. This accords with numerous Welsh Government statements on the rural economy. The competitiveness of the economy is seen, in part, as depending on the appropriate supply and location of employment land and premises to meet business needs.

Future Farms in Business has approached this by:

- Providing on-site, starter accommodation giving access to younger people who struggle to find affordable housing in rural areas (this will be the next Phase in the project).
- Working with training providers (mainly Pathways 2 Farming, Lantra and BMC), to ensure new farmers have access to relevant learning and mentorship.
- Putting in place short, medium and long term marketing opportunities for fruit, veg and related products that the new micro-enterprises could grow and sell.

The UK SPF also requires applicants to be in accordance with relevant Regional and National policies which inform the Regional Investment Plan. The original grant application makes numerous connections with a raft of Welsh Government policies, e.g. Net Zero and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WFGA). Observation of the Future Farms in Business process and outputs to date confirms such policies are considered in practice. The programme and its partners are contributing to emerging national, as well as local, planning policy and legislation. It also feeds into modifications of the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), and is contributing to the forthcoming Welsh Government Community Food Strategy.

## Powys CC's Strategic Policies

The Powys CC Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan: “Stronger, Fairer, Greener” (April 2024) does not deal specifically with job creation or related matters, except in the context of its own organisation and employees. Powys CC mainly delivers its employment and training strategies through the Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership (which has an Agriculture Cluster Group), under the auspices of “Growing Wales, the Mid Wales Regional Investment Plan” mentioned above.

However, in one of the Plan’s referenced accompanying strategies, the Powys CC Asset Management Strategy, we can see the following actions recommended for supporting economic growth and regeneration, where Future Farms in Business is helping directly to deliver:

- Jobs creation/retention.
- Seeking new opportunities to use land and buildings to add value to existing offer.

Future Farms in Business, through its agro-ecological approach, and systematic attempts to function as an exemplar for low/zero carbon food supply, clearly gives effect to at least two other Powys CC policies: the Strategy for Climate change - Net positive Powys 2021-2030 and the Powys Nature Recovery Action Plan.

However, the key policy issues have arisen around Planning in Powys CC, in the context of Welsh Government Planning regulations, guidance and policy development, as described below.

## Welsh Government's current policies

Early in 2024, Food & Drink Wales, on behalf of the Welsh Government, published “A review of actual and perceived barriers to the expansion of the Welsh Horticultural Sector as presented by the Planning System.”

The Food & Drink Wales report on Barriers effectively lays out a “Charter” or manifesto for the changes that would be beneficial, and these could form the basis of continuous development of the Sarn pilot principles in the Planning sphere:

- Removal of the 5-hectare threshold as a differentiator for permitted development rights or requiring planning permission.
- Greater use of Temporary Planning Permission for horticultural sites to allow time to prove the viability of the business.
- Allowing planning authorities to grant planning permission for dwellings on horticultural sites more readily, but combined with stronger conditions to ensure that the site remains in production within a land-based business.
- Updating Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6: "Planning for sustainable rural communities" to put emphasis on the Welsh Government's policy goal to increase small-scale horticulture in Wales.

- Updating Supplementary Planning Guidance which promotes greater consistency across local planning authorities considering planning permission for onsite infrastructure buildings for horticultural enterprises.
- Updating Supplementary Planning Guidance which promotes greater consistency across local planning authorities considering planning permission for residential dwellings for staff working on horticultural enterprises.
- Ensuring that the Welsh Government’s goal to increase small-scale horticulture in Wales is explicitly expressed in the National, Strategic and Local Development Plans.

To understand the wider picture of the planning system experiences of the horticultural enterprise sector, part of the research conducted in October 2023 included a quantitative on-line survey with 49 growers across Wales (13% of the total growers we currently have). None had applied for a dwelling. Indeed, hardly any planning applications across Wales related to building a rural horticulture enterprise dwelling.

Welsh Government TAN 6 *Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities* (issued originally in July 2010) was intended to support what is called “One Planet Developments”, but this does not appear to have encouraged new horticultural enterprises, which might need to incorporate on-site accommodation. However, the report did note that in the same period reviewed, there were enforcement issues, where structures had been erected or people were living on horticultural sites without planning permission. The report concluded that:

*“TAN6 (Technical Advice Note 6) was widely acknowledged by both growers and planning authorities to be out of date and not reflecting contemporary ambitions to expand the horticultural sector in Wales.”*

The very low number of horticultural applications from across Wales reflects the small size of this sector compared to other farm enterprises; and strongly suggests that Planning regulations remain a barrier to new homes and workers in horticulture - in a sector which really needs to increase in size rapidly. It also means that Planning Officers have little experience of this sector, particularly the smaller enterprises.

The research therefore recommended “...*the updating of supplementary planning guidance to give better support to the ambitions for expansion of the horticultural sector in Wales...*”

### **Powys CC’s Planning Policy**

The issues identified in the Food & Drink Wales report were already of interest to some of the partners in what became the Future Farms in Business partnership. As explained elsewhere in the report, the success of the project depended on a

progressive Planning approach from Powys CC, allied with a willingness to deploy some of the Council farm estate.

In 2023, two Powys County Councillors from different political parties (one employed part-time with Social Farms & Gardens), began to explore with the Council what changes could be made, particularly in the sphere of Planning. On the back of this, many initial discussions led to concrete suggestions as to how County Council policies could become more supportive. Following collaborative work with the Future Farms Partnership, and consultants TerraPermaGeo, over two years, in May 2024 Powys CC published new planning guidance, [Rural Enterprise Dwellings for Small-Scale Horticulture](#).

The Council wished to expand upon existing National Planning Policy and Guidance for Rural Enterprise Dwellings to address the specific circumstances of small-scale horticultural enterprises, recognising that:

*“Agro-ecological approaches to farming, and re-localising food production can both make valuable contributions to addressing the climate and nature emergencies and strengthen local food-chain resilience.”*

That new guidance enabled the Council to grant planning permission for the new farms at Sarn, which was the key output required from this Phase 3 of the Future Farming in Business project. Powys CC are likely to strengthen their approach in 2025 by adopting Supplementary Planning Guidance, which will involve further community consultation.

A session hosted by the partnership to explain the guidance and the reason for it being developed, aimed at planners attracted over 80 participants in January 2025 from Local Authorities and National Parks across Wales.

Overall, the collaboration between Powys CC and the Future Farms in Business Partnership has been an excellent example of co-design, and co-production, embracing most of the WFGA's 5 Ways of Working, and several of the 7 core Goals of sustainability.

### **Political Perspectives**

The sale of County Council owned farmland to cover revenue shortfalls has been a matter of heated debate in Wales, including in the Senedd. This was most recently debated at a Plenary session (16/10/2024). The Conservative Party motion called for a moratorium on Council or Welsh Government farms being sold - 6 of the 22 local authorities have already disposed of their County farms altogether.

The Conservatives made the point that:

*“Council-owned farms offer more than just a livelihood. They provide young people with a chance, a chance to get on that farming ladder”.*

Plaid Cymru proposed a national conference to produce a comprehensive strategy for utilising the Local Authority and Welsh Government holdings.

Various speakers pointed out the food security and carbon reduction issues which could be partly tackled through innovative use of the public estate - the lack of Welsh-grown fruit and vegetables being a point made strongly.

The Liberal Democrat representative commented that:

*“...we learnt from Edward Morgan of Castell Howell that 10 tonnes of carrots grown on 1 acre of land in Ceredigion are improving the schools meals of pupils in Bridgend.”*

Huw Irranca-Davies MS, speaking as Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, commended the Sarn project as an example of innovative County Farm management.

*“With Sarn farms in Powys, the Our Food 1200 project, with Powys CC being a key partner, gives opportunities for individuals to start their own agro-ecological fruit and veg enterprise on county-owned land, with an initial five-year tenancy and the potential for a long-term lease”.*

The above demonstrates all-party support for the broad approaches adopted by the Future Farms in Business Partnership, a favourable policy-forming environment in which to promote messages combining carbon reduction with local food supply and security (especially fruit & veg), with accompanying and rural employment benefits.

Opportunities to engage in the policy debate are currently arising through the continuing development of the Welsh Government’s Community Food Strategy and SFS. More directly, there is now the prospect of new National planning guidance.

### **Welsh Government response**

Welsh Government is understood to be considering Powys’ initiative as a model for all of Wales (as per the Deputy First Minister’s favourable comments in the Senedd debate above). A written statement was issued by Huw Irranca-Davies and Rebecca Evans MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, on 118<sup>th</sup> December 2024, stating the Welsh Government’s commitment to *“support planning authorities, horticulture applicants, and their agents in developing successful horticulture enterprises”*. The statement went on to outline the Government’s ultimate goal *“to foster a larger, vibrant horticulture sector through a balanced approach that integrates planning with other supportive initiatives, driving sustainable growth and innovation in the industry”*.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation has covered the following three key questions:

### 5.1: Has the pilot been carried out in accordance with the funder's requirement and what lessons have emerged?

The Future Farms in Business pilot, which is the third phase of a wider initiative aimed at encouraging more of the Powys County Council's farm estate to be used for horticulture and agro-ecological growing, has undoubtably been a success; it has meet all of the funders targets and requirements, whilst establishing three growers on the Sarn site who will be supported by a strong partnership to ensure they become thriving enterprises.

This success has been achieved despite a number of serious challenges, notably the delay in obtaining planning permission for the accommodation and infrastructure on the site. When this was finally secured, the tight funding period was very challenging. Indeed, undertaking such an initiative through the one year funding available through the SPF was in itself very ambitious - and this is why the delay in planning and later in agreeing legal permissions was so crucial. Fortunately, the extension to the project enabled the necessary funds to be spent in time, ensuring that the project stayed on track.

Within this context, there was perhaps insufficient time available to undertake the community consultation and to ensure that local residents had a greater stake in the initiative. Once the planning permission was secured then further attempts were possible to engage with the local community and particularly the Community Council. At this stage it was also clear that the Sarn site would be offering opportunities for local growers and this is undoubtably a positive outcome. More co-production would be beneficial in development of future sites, and would be especially possible if landowners and local residents are able to propose potential locations and growers are able to get involved at this initial stage.

The initial advert to find suitable growers only generated one successful applicant, but the second window clearly showed that there was more than sufficient demand from potential growers in the area.

The marketing work initiated by Our Food 1200 in looking at the potential of selling fresh horticultural produce to Birmingham City Council offers considerable potential which goes way beyond the 3 growers on the Sarn site. That said, it will take time to develop the full potential of this market and overcome logistical issues in transporting produce. Therefore there may well be a short term imperative to secure local markets.

Throughout the Pilot project what is very clear is the strength of the Partnership. The Future Farms in Business work has brought together a team with an extensive range of skills, contacts and enthusiasm. The regular full Partnership meetings and the weekly check-ins have been very valuable in keeping all the organisations up to date and involved in all aspects of the work.

The link between SF&G and Food 1200 is of particular note and the pilot has shown the value of their collaboration. The next phase of the initiative will see Food 1200 taking over the overall control of the Sarn site, as they negotiate with Powys CC and provide a framework for the 3 growers. There is a small amount of risk in all of this in that Planning Permission has been obtained for 5 years and subject to the three enterprises being successful. The worst case scenario here is that some or all of the businesses fail and that the Planning conditions demand that the land is reinstated. This would be very costly and no grants would be available to undo the previous building works. It should be stressed though that the Partnership and particularly Our Food 1200 are fully committed to minimise this risk.

## **5.2: What should the Partnership do next?**

There is already a desire to keep the main Partners working together, at least in some form. Inevitably though, as this phase of funding comes to an end, some of the Partners will have less capacity to be involved going forward. That said, it should be still possible to keep all partners fully informed and at the same time to seek further opportunities for developing similar projects.

The Sarn pilot is just the first step in encouraging more Council owned land to be used for horticulture. This particular site, which had no infrastructure or accommodation in place, was always going to be a costly option - and it could be argued that if this initiative can be successfully established here, then it will be a lot easier elsewhere.

In looking at other sites though the Partnership will need to consider different models since some growing opportunities will either not require accommodation or there may be provision there already. In Annex 5 we have set out some examples of slightly different models based on case studies from a variety of locations ownership and settings across Wales.

In taking the work forward the evaluation brief asked for consideration to be given to four audiences:

### **Local Authorities wishing to maximise the potential of their land assets.**

There is already some interest amongst other Local Authorities in Wales in the work being taken forward by Powys CC and in particular the Sarn Pilot. This is coupled with the Welsh Veg in Schools initiative and the Sustainable Food Partnerships which are now in place across many areas. The success of the Future

Farms in Business approach therefore provides strong evidence to advocate similar approaches across other parts of Wales. Key to this will be ensuring that there is strong and consistent demand for the produce and at the right price. Public procurement is therefore of key importance.

Even for those Local Authorities who do not have any Council owned farms, there may well be potential for them to use other smaller pockets of their estate for food growing, either through Community Asset Transfer or working with others to help establish both community food growing and commercial enterprises. Powys CC's Planning Guidance is therefore very relevant in terms of rural enterprises.

### **Those seeking to open up access to land for agro-ecological, regenerative food production for local markets.**

There has been considerable external interest in the Sarn pilot - and this is evidenced by debate and statements made in the Senedd. As suggested in the next section on Policy Implications, enough momentum has now been generated by the work in Powys, and particularly at Sarn, to stimulate wider promotion and consideration by a host of organisations and stakeholders.

### **Land workers and land seekers.**

The Sarn pilot has clearly shown that there is demand for land amongst potential food growers and this is reinforced by previous studies undertaken by the Landworkers' Alliance.

The wider promotion of the Future Farms for Business pilot will therefore hopefully generate a lot of interest amongst those seeking land - and this in turn will encourage more Local Authorities and other public sector land owners to consider releasing more land for horticulture.

If land can be proposed by growers themselves this would help to alleviate many of the concerns raised by local communities about the viability of sites and the imposition of models from above. A future project could help to support grower led projects to partner with organisations to deliver sites at reduced risk.

### **Other landowners - public and private**

As indicated above and in the Complementary Models set out in Annex 4, there is considerable potential to promote the concept of Future Farms in Business to other landowners in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

## **5.3. What are the wider policy implications?**

The development of the Future Farms in Business Model at Sarn has been largely based on taking advantage of specific and time-limited opportunities, not least the short term funding available through the SPF. That said, the pilot work has taken place within the context of emerging policy and funding related to food growing and the agricultural sector in Wales, and indeed within the UK as a whole.

There is now a growing realisation that food security will become increasingly important. This is evidenced by the initiative put forward by Birmingham City Council in wanting to purchase a greater percentage of the fresh food that they acquire from within their immediate hinterland. Such a move by a large public sector organisation is very forward thinking, in that although they may have to pay a higher price for produce in the short term, over a longer period they may well be in a far more secure position, with more consistent local supply which is likely to be more reliable than imports from countries such as Spain which has already been affected by climate related droughts and severe flash flooding.

Within the context of the WFGA and the current refinement of the SFS, as well as the emerging Community Food Strategy, there is perhaps a unique opportunity for SF&G and others, notably Our Food 1200, to encourage greater interest in this aspect. Key to further roll out of agro-ecological growing in Wales has to be demand, and to meet demand you have to ensure sufficient supply, or the right quality and at the right price. But within Wales there is opportunity to tweak public procurement to favour local suppliers - and if this is done in a consistent and progressive manner there is every chance to build a successful commercial horticultural sector in Wales. For instance, a considerable amount of funding will be allocated to the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) and within this the Northern Valleys Initiative. But for the more remote Valley communities it is unlikely that such funding will help to establish high-end technical enterprises and jobs, or even tourism that contributes to the local economy. But these areas could with the right support and training provide commercial food growing opportunities which would serve the schools, care homes, hospitals and other public sector organisations with the SE Wales hinterland.

Horticulture is a big business and there are enormous economic and social benefits that could be generated in Wales if the right opportunities are developed. The Sarn pilot is but a small step in this direction, but it is a meaningful one.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continuing the work of the Partnership and the support available to Our Food 1200 and particularly the three growers at the Sarn site. Ensuring their long term viability will be essential. Key to this will be the further development of new marketing opportunities, particularly from significant buyers such as Birmingham City Council.
2. Widespread promotion of the evaluation of the Sarn pilot, highlighting the initial success of the project and its potential for widespread application. This will require close liaison and collaboration with key players such as the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association.

3. Undertaking a scoping study of other models that are similar to Sarn in that they share the same overall aim, but could be delivered in a variety of ways to reflect local circumstances. This includes possibly looking at rural housing issues. Annex 5 sets out some initial thoughts on this.
4. Learn from the difficulties in appointing growers, establishing a clear, equitable and efficient application process. This would ensure all applicants can be assessed on a level playing field and allow the Partnership to attract the best new growers to any future project.
5. Work more closely with local communities to get their buy in at an early stage. This would alleviate any mistrust and mis understanding about proposals and help growers to develop a better relationship with the community.

## ANNEX 1: LOGIC MODEL

FUTURE FARMS IN BUSINESS (Phase 3)					
<b>AIMS:</b> Powys is leading the way in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable resilient farm estate diversification</li> <li>• Tackling barriers to food security, and</li> <li>• Supporting new micro-enterprises</li> <li>• Developing learning from the Sarn Pilot which can be replicated elsewhere</li> </ul>					
RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Social Farms &amp; Gardens staff and expertise</li> <li>➢ Partnership Steering Group</li> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our Food 1200</li> <li>- Powys CC</li> <li>- LWA</li> <li>- Shared Assets</li> <li>- Powys Sustainable Food Places Partnership / Cultivate</li> <li>- Nature Friendly Farming Network</li> <li>- Gwlad Consortium</li> <li>- Lantra</li> <li>- Ecological Land Co-operative</li> <li>- Pathways to Farming / ecodyfi</li> <li>- BMC</li> <li>➢ Finance from SPF</li> </ul> </ul>	<b>WP 1: Grower Journey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Recruit three growers for plots.</li> <li>➢ Design training programme</li> <li>➢ Deliver training.</li> <li>➢ Carbon foot printing training</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Sustainable Farm diversification into horticulture is increased within Powys County and further across Wales</li> <li>➢ Increased food resilience within Wales</li> <li>➢ Enhanced rural economy in Wales</li> <li>➢ Reduced food miles and</li> </ul>	
	<b>WP 2: Site Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Identify works to be completed</li> <li>➢ Secure quotes for works</li> <li>➢ Manage budget for works</li> <li>➢ Work within terms of planning approval.</li> </ul>				
	<b>WP 3: Messaging and Replication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Birmingham Marketing Study</li> <li>➢ Communication with local community</li> <li>➢ Wider messaging (press, conversations, WG, PCC)</li> <li>➢ Conversations with potential</li> </ul>				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Additional funds through ACP3W and LPFN</li> <li>➢ Planning Guidance</li> <li>➢ Offas Farm Feasibility study</li> <li>➢ Evaluation of Phase 1 and 2</li> </ul>	investors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ carbon reduction</li> <li>➢ Environmental benefits through reduced run-off, improved biodiversity and habitat for pollinators</li> </ul>	
	<b>WP 4: Network Building</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Identify networks and opportunities for events</li> <li>➢ Supporting groups to run knowledge sharing events</li> <li>➢ £1500 per group to run an event and track the progress of participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 4 events</li> <li>➢ 4 business receiving financial support</li> <li>➢ 4 businesses engaged in new markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 50 increased visitor numbers</li> <li>➢ 28 organisation involved in knowledge transfer</li> <li>➢ 1 business with increased productivity</li> <li>➢ 4 business supported</li> </ul>		
	<b>Other Activities</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Partnership Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 2 partnership meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Well-co-ordinated partnership working well together</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Working together to identify alternative sources of funding</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Applications for funding submitted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Opportunities to develop the project further and scale out utilising learning</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Evaluation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ End of project report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Learning shared with identified audiences</li> </ul>		
<i>External Factors:</i>		<i>Cross Cutting Themes:</i>		<i>Assumptions:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢</li> <li>➢ Market prices</li> <li>➢ Growing season and weather</li> <li>➢ Increased transport costs</li> <li>➢ Increased building costs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Welsh Language</li> <li>➢ Environmental sustainability</li> <li>➢ Equality of access to land</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Planning permission granted within timeframe</li> <li>➢ Enough suitable growers come forward</li> </ul>	

## ANNEX 2: MEETING THE FUND'S TARGETS

### Monitoring Information

#### A: Growers Journey

Revenue Allocation	Spend	Notes
Training - £9,600		
Carbon Footprinting - £6,000		
Activity	Status	Explanation
Develop grower recruitment pack	Complete	
Distribute grower recruitment pack	Ongoing	
Identify assessment panel and agree process		
Respond to enquiries		
Open day at Sarn		
Assess applications		
Conversations with potential growers		
Leases to be awarded		
Growers to meet site development WG and wider partnership		
Training needs assessment		
Identify and source training		
Deliver training for 4 growers		
Investigate Farm Carbon Toolkit options		
Output	Evidence	Required
4 x people attend training session		Yes
4 x potential entrepreneurs provided assistance to be business ready		Yes
Formal agroecological horticulture accreditation (Pathways to Farming request)		No
Outcome	Evidence	Required
3 x businesses created and supported	Record of spend (Alison)	Yes
3 x businesses introducing new products to the firm		Yes
3 x businesses created		Yes

## B: Site Development

Capital Allocation	Notes	Spend
Preparation for temp dwelling & services: <b>£70,000</b>		
Horticulture Infrastructure: <b>£37,200</b>		
Activity	Notes	Status
Energy Audit	Complete	
Allocate Budget according to project outputs and planning.		
Identify contractors		
Carbon footprint of build		
Output	Evidence	Status
6 commercial buildings developed (NOTE: Alison to speak to funder and bring down to 1 (Shed)		
4 low carbon energy infrastructure installed		
Outcome	Evidence	Status
Increased amount of investment	Record of spend (Alison)	
3 x premises with improved connectivity		

## C: Messaging and Replication

Revenue Allocation	Notes	Spend
Marketing - £9,000		
Activity	Notes	Status
Produce "How to..." guide	Complete	
Press release (County Times) to promote grower opportunity locally		
Website	Ready for Review	
Training with PCC planners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Site visit</li> <li>- Other site visit</li> <li>- Virtual</li> </ul>		
Training for other planners		
Royal Welsh Show <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talk (Wed 10am)</li> <li>- Leaflet</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
Marches RFFC (5-6 Oct)		
Welsh RFFC (20-22 Nov)		
Other talks		
Project evaluation	Ongoing	
Output	Evidence	Status
Website live		
Leaflet produced and distributed		
PCC planners virtual training		
PCC planners site visit		
Talks given		
Events organised		
Events attended		
Documents produced		

## D: Network Building

Revenue Allocation	Notes	Spend
Marketing £8,400		
Activity	Notes	Status
4 businesses to receive support (be invited to a network event/signposted to other support such as Start to Farm)		
Meet the buyer event? To help businesses engage in new markets		
“Knowledge transfer” event - 28 participants		
Business advice to one participant leading to increased productivity		
NFFN local meet up in Sarn once new growers in post?		
NPTC visit to site and meet growers		
BMC visit to site and meet growers		
Output	Evidence	Status
4 x local events or activities supported	1 x Sarn Consultation 5 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2024 1 x How to Focus groups (16/17 July) - Holly T and Kim G from Landworkers Alliance and Shared Assets organised	
4 x businesses receiving financial support other than grants		
4 x businesses engaged in new markets		
Outcome	Evidence	Status
Increased visitor numbers (50)		
Organisations engaged in new knowledge transfer activity (28)	Future Farms Partnership has 13 organisational members	
1 x business with improved productivity		
4 x businesses supported		

## ANNEX 3: LIST OF ORGANISATION AND INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

### Internal Stakeholders

Organisation	Name
Architect	Damon Webb
Our Food 1200	Duncan Fisher
	Sue Holbrook
Social Farms & Gardens	Alison Sheffield
	Gary Mitchell
Cultivate	Chloe Mansfield
Sustainable Farming/Gwlad	Tony Little

### External Stakeholders

Organisation	Name
Menter A / Farming Connect	Einir Davies
Pathways to Farming / ecodyfi	Claire Rhydwen
Welsh Veg in Schools	Amber Wheeler

## ANNEX 4: FUTURE FARMS IN BUSINESS SITE VISIT

### Sarn Village Hall and the proposed Growing site

8<sup>th</sup> October 2024 v3

#### Present

Alison, Gary: SF&G

Tony: Gwlad Consortium

Duncan, Sue: Our Food 1200

Richard: Cultivate & Bwyd Powys Food

Hugo: Powys CC Farm Estates

Rob, Calum: BRO

Damon: Architect

Tom: Farmer, currently grazing the Sarn site

Einir: Menter A (Farming Connect - Start to Farm)

Ricklin & Jim, Tilly, Sid: potential growers

The purpose of the gathering was for the Future Farms in Business partners to meet with three potential growers at the proposed Sarn site, discussing the aims of the programme in more detail. The potential growers were to be interviewed on the Friday following this gathering, so it was made clear that the site visit did not form any part of the interview and selection process. In some respect, it was as much for the benefit of the partnership as the new growers.

#### Background

This is a pilot project to test out how using Powys CC farm holdings could play a role in increasing the amount of horticulture in the County. The experiences of this pilot could possibly be replicated elsewhere in Powys, and with potentially much wider application in Wales. Some other Welsh Counties with significant farm estates are already interested in what Powys CC are doing, notably Monmouth and Carmarthenshire.

The partnership has been brought together, with a mixture of Welsh Government funding and UKSPF, through Powys CC. The Council has already issued Planning Guidance (for Rural Enterprise Dwellings on Smaller Scale Horticultural Enterprises), and this could be further developed following public consultation into Supplementary Planning Guidance, which would give it added weight.

In the meantime, a planning application for three horticultural units with an associated packing shed and temporary accommodation for three growers was submitted in April 2024 for a site In Sarn about 6 miles from Newtown.

This is a significant issue for Powys in that they have a large number of farm units which are leased out, around 130 or so. Therefore, if part of the Sarn holding could

be used for, this would be significant. Gary is also a Powys County Councillor and sits on the advisory group who support Hugo's Farm Estates team.

Since the amount of fruit and veg produced and consumed in Wales is very low, no more than 6%-8%, there is a significant market to tap into, but there are many strands to pull together.

There has been a significant increase in Wales' community growers - there are about 120 now, about the same as the number of commercial growers. But with increasing demand there is a lot of scope to do more.

There are several parallel studies and initiatives taking place, such as:

- The Welsh Veg in Schools Project, which is looking at linking local food suppliers, now in its second year of three year funding.
- Pathways to Farming, which is being run by Eco Dyfi.
- A potential Green Careers project, which Cultivate are developing with Black Mountain College.
- Cultivate will also have an EV minibus which can be used to transport veg for some of the week.
- The March Meadows project has connections.
- CAT and BMC are developing horticultural training, though Newtown College, adjacent to Cultivate, is concentrating more on traditional farming, at least for the time being.
- There's other support from Menter A (formerly Menter a Busnes), particularly in term of developing business plans and legal advice; and further help from LANTRA, Cwmpas and others. LWA's network of members is expanding in Wales.

The Welsh Government are very interested in all this, and are putting in funding. There is also an understanding that the Community Food Strategy will be issued by the end of 2024. At the same time, Future Farms partnership organisations are having at least some influence on the SFS, though there is more advocacy needed here to ensure that meaningful revenue funding becomes available for growers. The Welsh Government is also looking at a revised TAN 6, and providing advice on intensive agriculture (e.g., pointing out that there are alternatives to poultry, pigs and dairy through diversification into horticulture).

### **Planning Permission**

The biggest challenge, as of October 8<sup>th</sup> 2024 when the site meeting took place, is that planning permission had still not been granted. However, the partnership did expect a decision very soon; and a hope that it would be positive.

Bearing in mind that the Planning Guidance has been issued, it is not clear why it has taken so long for the planning application to be determined. It may simply be that this is a novel proposal, and the first test of the new guidance. There is no

precedent, at least in Powys CC, and so the planning officers would give this application more scrutiny.

Assuming that planning permission is granted, the Partnership would then have the challenge of spending the money they have under the current grants, which are for the farm infrastructure; and for the 3 temporary housing units. Both grants streams have tight deadlines for works and expenditure to be completed.

Planning Permission has been requested for 5 years and at that point each of the holdings is expected to be economically viable. There was some debate as to what this means in practice, but the basic rule of thumb appears to be that viability is simply defined by the fact that the growers are sustaining themselves from the land.

There was a public consultation as part of the planning process and one objection received, which was from the Sarn and Kerry Community Council. The main concern was that the units would not be viable businesses, and that the temporary accommodation would eventually become new houses in the countryside. The ‘Nissen huts’ themselves are fully demountable, and could be removed from site after 5 years.

On the face of it, the above may not be a valid objection in terms of planning law. But the objection is indicative that there is some anxiety in the local community, and therefore the Partnership, the growers, and Powys CC need to continue engaging locally.

Whilst there are doubts regarding the model and size of the farms, there is support for local young people having opportunities to develop new rural enterprises, and the current tenant was able to provide valuable insights to prospective growers during the site visit on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

No formal individual objections were received from any Sarn and Kerry residents.



## Legal forms of tenure and site organisation

The arrangement will be that Our Food 1200 will set up a mechanism (possibly a Community Land Trust) to lease the land off Powys CC and then rent it to the three growers on a 5 year tenancy initially (in line with the planning permission granted) but with the ambition to offer 99+ year leases to successful businesses. Much of the detail of this is yet to be worked out in practice.

The legal structure, and the collective aspects of the three new enterprises sharing services, could evolve in time. Our Food 1200 have submitted an EoI request for a Community Asset Transfer to Powys CC..

At the end of the 5 years, the growers could apply for the temporary planning to be extended; or if they wanted to, they could put in a fresh application for a more permanent structure.

## Routes to Market

Our Food 1200 have are commissioning a study looking at the potential of selling wholesale to Birmingham City Council. This would include all the farms in Powys, but the horticultural elements would be particularly important. In terms of potential markets therefore, there are three layers:

- Selling locally, either individually or through collaboration. A food loop is being explored to support this around Newtown. Our Food 1200 and Cultivate also help growers to network, sharing tools, expertise and even social gatherings.
- Working with a wholesaler, like Castell Howell, in order to get produce into schools, this is already in place. There is also a potential link with Slice and Dice, who are based in South Powys and produce prepared veg. Powys CC are looking at all of the procurement for their schools - for instance the beef that they currently source is from Brazil, which makes no sense at all, except in terms of short-term pricing margins. The County Council is a firm and consistent supporter of using local produce whenever it can.
- Bigger markets, like Birmingham, which will take longer to open up but offer the biggest prize. The Land 1200 feasibility study will be completed in December 2024. Current estimate is that it would take 2 years to establish a secure link on a small scale, and 5 years for it to become a larger market

Transport is an issue, but there are some innovative things being looked at, such as Castell Howell backhauling some produce on their existing routes, or even using trains to move produce around again: the Cambrian line already carries some freight, and the Heart of Wales line is a possibility.

## Site Selection

In terms of the site at Sarn, this was the only option available as a preferred location fell through, for various reasons. Nonetheless, this site is very attractive in a number of ways, both for production and the wellbeing of growers:

- It is very close to a main road (A489), only 7 miles from Newtown, and on a bus route. In terms of local outreach, Sarn village is within easy walking distance of the site, has a village hall and a pub. Kerry is 4 miles away towards Newtown, offers more facilities (2 pubs, another primary school and a corner shop). Those services are very important for the everyday living, and overall wellbeing of the growers
- Newtown is a key East/Mid Powys market town (with a railway station), and is already developing a local food culture, with Cultivate as a food hub.
- The soil is suitable for growing and already has some access to water through a brook which runs through the site. Some water could be extracted without a license. Additional water capture infrastructure will also be included.
- The open-valley setting is truly beautiful, and the land already supports considerable biodiversity. Indeed, one of the three units has a larger acreage not just to deal with collective site infrastructure like a delivery area and packing shed, but also sustain more biodiversity, create new habitats, and offer public access, linking into an existing ROW.



*Proposed split of site between three enterprises - growers to agree final split which could be adjusted over time.*

One side is next to a busy road, but the main access is via a smaller country lane. The brook will require a lorry trailer to be placed in it to act as a bridge. It does flood from time to time, though the soils drains well.

A decision is yet to be made as to whether the site will be entirely off grid, with its own water, electricity and waste treatment, or whether a hybrid approach will be adopted.



Packing shed and delivery area. In association with the packing shed, there will be a row of ground solar panels. The hard surfacing will allow for a lorry to turn and a track will be needed to access the three units.



The residential area involves three 'Nissen huts', insulated and fitted out to modern standards, each providing 2 bedrooms

Sewage facilities will be installed, but also some compost toilet options are possible. And the same with energy generation - debate continues as to how far the growers will wish to go in terms of off-grid living.

### The Growers' Journey and Partnership support

Establishing a new horticultural enterprise can be said to face three absolutely critical challenges:

- Access to suitable growing land - Powys CC have already provided the site
- Routes to market - a considerable amount of work is going into helping to develop these routes, as mentioned earlier
- A suitable labour force - all three growers at the site visit have considerable experience in small scale horticulture businesses. The fact they have persisted through the selection process to interview stage is testimony to their commitment

Thereafter, the growers would need, or at least benefit from, a variety of support, if available. It was noted that the growers would benefit from a level of support (from the Future Farmers in Business Partnership) which is usually not available to simply anyone who fancies trying their hand at commercial small-scale horticulture such as Pathways 2 Farming, but also open support via Lantra's Farming Connect Horticulture offering.

Increasing the quantity of Welsh horticulture is a strategic aim for the Welsh Government, and an increasing concern at local government level as well. Issues of food security, improved nutrition, and carbon footprint reduction have become increasingly important against the background of climate crisis. Powys CC is fully engaged with this agenda, as evidenced by their very helpful, enabling actions to date on this pilot project.

The Partnership also includes a range of very appropriate organisations, all of whom want the pilot to succeed, and provide a model more widely applicable in Powys and across Wales. Their collective expertise and commitment will ensure the growers are properly supported on their journey to create sustainable enterprises.

**Some issues to be considered, which will form part of the evaluation questions:**

- 1) If planning permission is turned down, what happens next?
- (2) Quite detailed plans have been/are being drawn up, but the growers have not been involved as yet. They may have submitted headline business plans for the interview. But the partnership will also need to get a timetabled plan in place quickly for developing 'devolution' to the growers, getting down to details of what will be grown in the first year, and so forth.
- (3) Part of this will be assisting the Growers group to establish their own decision-making, which will be needed at minimum to ensure any collective working needed for the site to be maintained properly. In effect, the growers could be said currently to comprise a simple 'community of interest'. They will need to move towards becoming an 'intentional community', one that develops towards a version of consensus decision-making where collective effort requires it.
- (4) This also raises the issue of how best the three units (separately or collectively) can link with the local community, e.g., through a monthly market, school visits, volunteering opportunities, site open days, or other activities which may engage the local community. The Partnership has already secured funding through Local Places for Nature to improve biodiversity which could be delivered with the local Wildlife Trust.
- (5) How will the legal relationship work between:
  - Powys CC,
  - the consortium that Our Food 12 establish
  - and the growers be established? What are the current options?
- (6) If the partnership doesn't recruit the current three grower applicants, or only one or two, do the partnership proceed with the infrastructure works,

and try recruiting again? If recruiting growers does appear to be a persistent problem, at what point might a different model be explored?

## ANNEX 5: FUTURE FARMS IN BUSINESS – SUGGESTED COMPLEMENTARY MODELS

### A: Replicating the model

In terms of “replicability”, the next site selected in Powys could be one with basic infrastructure and some accommodation potential already on site (which was the case with the farm first selected for this pilot). Powys County Council has amended its Planning procedures and tested them with the Sarn application. And the Future Farms in Business partnership now has considerable experience of the practicalities of this approach. Future projects will be much easier, and would not incur the development costs encountered in this first-ever pilot, so this could be a model to be replicated.

Powys itself presents the obvious opportunity where the model could continue to be developed because, of the 21,000 hectares of Council farms/smallholdings across Wales, 50% are in Powys ownership. Target local authorities for further expansion also readily suggest themselves because the next 40% of ownership is shared by only 5 other local authorities: Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Mon.

The remaining 10% are shared by the other 16 Councils, with some no longer having any at all. However, it's possible that one of those who do might be particularly interested in efforts to grow more food & veg locally, perhaps in the context of the Welsh Veg in Schools scheme.

### B: Considering other options

It should be stressed again that the Future Farms in Business model does seek to help solve the affordable rural accommodation issues which often accompany recruiting more people for increased horticultural production - particularly younger people. Possibly, there could be other solutions combining land with on site (or very close nearby) accommodation, beyond the one adopted.

But that is a very complex topic. To make progress with that, Future Farms would need to scope what else has been tried, and this could best be done with a sympathetic housing association and local authorities who still manage housing property.

However, it also became apparent during interviews and other exchanges that other, complementary models could be considered. The Sarn pilot tests a model which has an essential link to affordable, on-site accommodation. If the aim was simply to increase the amount of fruit & veg grown, marketed and consumed in Wales, using agro-ecological techniques and a general “nature-friendly farming” approach, then a number of other models spring to mind.

These models would increase the amount of land and employment opportunities potentially becoming available, presented for convenience in three categories:

#### **B1: Government estate:**

Local Council (or Welsh Government) farm estates but also other open, unused land or other assets in public ownership (possibly aligning with Community Asset Transfer policies). That would include not just Local Authorities and the Welsh Government, but also government agencies such as Natural Resources Wales (NRW) or the NHS.

#### **B2: The voluntary sector:**

There are various voluntary sector organisations in Wales who also own or manage large tracts of land. The National Trust estate, particularly their farms, already has a “Nature Friendly” strategy. Wildlife Trusts and RSPB between them also control substantial landholdings.

#### **B3: Private farmers/landowners:**

Finally, there is the extent to which existing farmers in Wales would be willing to grow more fruit & veg; or at least enter into long-term leasing/sale arrangements for part of their landholding to diversify into horticulture.

Models which do not rely on site housing accommodation would vary considerably, depending on the constraints and opportunities of the above three different kinds of potentially available growing space.

### **C: Some Examples**

It was not a key output of this consultancy to enquire in any depth about other possible models. A full scoping would be a considerable task, and it would be for the Partnership (or some of the partners) to decide whether, or how to progress.

So what follows is a brief, illustrative tour of examples models known to be underway in Wales. The Welsh Veg in Schools initiative appears to have galvanised smallholders by providing a more direct route to market, so many examples below are taken from a 2024 FoodSense Wales newsletter about that scheme. It also considers a collaborative example, where smallholders already co-operate to increase the total viability of supply and enterprise.

#### **C1: Publicly owned land, including farm estates**

Some other Wales local authorities with large farm estates have also been taking the initiative in finding ways their farm estate can be more productive in terms of horticulture. For example:

**Bremenda Isaf farm, Carmarthenshire**, [Bremenda Isaf](#), belonging to Carmarthenshire County Council, is a 100-acre lowland farm in the village of Llanarthne.



The farm is now being used as a trial location to grow fresh, high-quality and affordable fruit and vegetables aimed for the public plate - Welsh Veg in Schools, care homes and cafés. The crops range through cucumbers, carrots and brussels sprouts to pumpkins.

### **C2: Voluntary sector land holdings**

The National Trust would be the obvious starting point. They have a well-developed and regularly updated Nature-Friendly management approach to all their estate. Apart from influencing their own farm tenants, have also taken action on two other fronts:

- They are directly involved in local supply in the sense they produce crops on-site for some of their cafes, and their gift shops. And have supported publicly more general aims of food security, and local food supply chains. They have also allocated land for community gardens at major properties, e.g. Tredegar House in Newport and Erddwig in Wrexham.
- The National Trust also began pioneering allotments for local people on some of their sites over 15 years ago. Craflwyn Hall in Eryri, near Beddgelert transformed their derelict kitchen gardens into six new allotments for the local community.

All this suggests substantial progress could be possible using several models on the National Trust estate. In some cases, accommodation options could be possible.

### **C3: Farmers diversifying, or leasing/selling land to others for horticulture**

Although the focus here is on existing farms and farmers, it's worth mentioning briefly that some people are establishing new markets, from scratch.

They are in a similar situation to the new starters at Sarn, save that their accommodation is a matter for them to arrange; and they would not be benefitting from the kind of intensive technical or marketing support provided by Future Farms.

## Diversification

### **Alfie Dans Market Garden** [Alfie Dan's Market Garden - Brecon Food Delivered To Your Door | Alfie Dan's Market Garden](https://alfie-dans-market-garden.com/)

Started by a couple in 2021 on one acre of land in the eastern Brecon Beacons. They now have three acres where they grow veg and fruit, selling to the local community in veg boxes and through an honesty stall. They also visit local farmers' markets to promote their fresh and local, organic produce. The enterprise currently also now employs two part-time growers.



### **Coedmor Home Farm/Garッド Enfys: Ceredigion**



Coedmor Home Farm in Llangoedmoris runs a horticultural business in conjunction with a community garden on their land (Garッド Enfys). Coedmor is a well-established mixed farm, including livestock and pasturage. They have been increasing their production of vegetables, herbs, and the variety of cereal crops.

### **Holden Dairy Farm, Ceredigion**

Bwlchwernen Fawr is the home of Holden Farm Dairy, the makers of Hafod cheese. This year, they're also growing carrots specifically for the Welsh Veg in Schools project.

**Langtons Farm: Powys & Ceredigion** is run by the Langton family, supplying organic veg boxes to the east side of the Bannau Brycheiniog from their market garden in Crickhowell. They have recently expanded their organic vegetable production to also include their farm near Cardigan, aiming to increase production

of fruits and vegetables for their veg boxes, wholesale, and to supply into Welsh schools.

### Leasing/renting or selling land

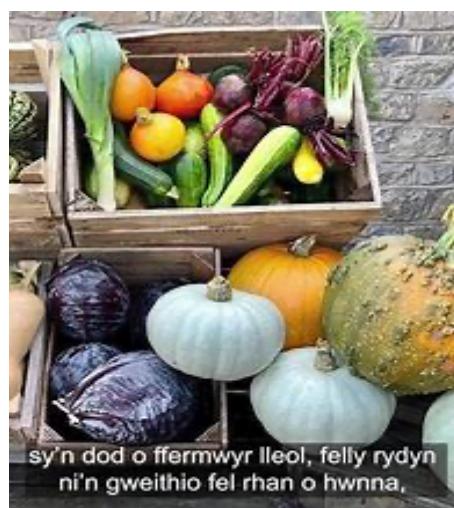
Leasing/renting has a number of models, some of which are described as a “farm share”.

**Coed Organics** in the Vale of Glamorgan (near Cowbridge) is an example of land being leased/rented from an existing farm. Coed Hills Rural Arts Space was established as a sustainable community over 25 years ago, by a member of a family operating some 180 acres of mixed farming on the site.



In 2007, one field was leased to Riverside Market Garden (working in alliance with the emerging Riverside Farmers’ Market and Riverside Community Garden). This enabled expansion into CSA-supported veg boxes as well, and led in 2018 to the formation of Coed Organics (a workers’ co-op), and an agreement for 6.5 acres to produce increasing quantities of a wide range of fruit and veg.

**Bonvilston Edge, Vale of Glamorgan** is an example of an existing farmer selling land to a new starter enterprise. Initially, the growers were looking for an allotment but couldn’t find one nearby.



A local landowner offered a 9 acre plot for sale, so they bought the field and left their jobs to start to growing fruit and vegetables. The business has since evolved with a new orchard of 70 apple and pear trees, 80 cherry trees, and 4 bee hives. They also grow a wide range of vegetables and are starting to specialise in onions, courgettes, butternut squash and cauliflower.

**Ash & Elm in Llanidloes, Powys** is another example of this. Ash & Elm started around 12 years ago when an organic farm decided to sell them 5 acres.



The holding nestles within the wider, nature-friendly mixed farm. The site has been transformed into a hive of activity, with appropriate infrastructure and caravan temporary accommodation for farm volunteers. This has enabled a CSA operation with an increasing number of veg boxes, plus various local retail outlets, and a fresh flower business

### **Collaborative models**

There also smallholders beginning to collaborate to produce a larger, increasingly varied, and more resilient fruit and veg offer.

#### **Bannau Acres [Discover the taste of local - Bannau Acres](#)**

Is a collaborative example connecting customers with a growing network of small-scale independent farmers (some 18 farms and smallholders currently), working across Bannau Brycheiniog, and neighbouring districts (particularly those elsewhere in Powys and Monmouthshire). Their main offers are veg box schemes (often on a CSA model), farm shops and market stalls.

Between them, the range of crops and related products is extensive, and coupled with their collaborative approach, means they are potentially also useful suppliers in terms of public sector procurement, e.g. the Welsh Veg in Schools scheme. All are committed to agro-ecological approaches, regenerative farming, and local food sustainability.

Notable about some of the enterprises summarised below (and above) is they have started in the last 5 years, and some growers had little practical experience of

market gardening. The 15 holdings involved are of various sizes, and currently include: Bryn Celog, a family run market garden near Llangorse Lake, Powys; Rhos Market Garden, a 3-acre holding in Knighton, Powys.