

Sustainable Food Procurement for Local Prosperity

Sustainability report: June 2023

The purpose of this pilot project is to establish evidence to show that the public sector can procure efficiently from local food producers in ways that benefit the natural environment and local prosperity. The project has supported 2 Food Hubs in Powys and Carmarthenshire to help achieve this.

Global threats from the climate and nature emergency combined with the current cost of living crisis mean it is perhaps more critical than ever to direct public money towards public goods. Producing our own food and supporting local growers is key to this.

Cost and convenience will remain essential criteria to buyer decisions, but the public sector must also demonstrate how their decision-making benefits communities and contributes to a low carbon economy.

In Wales, this is required by law under the Well-Being Future Generations Act, and is supported by policy such as Prosperity for All and the forthcoming Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill.

With the above in mind, an important element of this pilot project is to consider **to what extent public buyers can satisfy their own sustainability objectives by procuring local food through Community-Anchored Food Hubs.**

A sustainability framework: Monitoring and informing best practice

To inform this, a sustainability framework has been developed in consultation with the project team. This identifies what the Hubs can do to continually progress towards environmental, social and economic objectives, how they might do it, and where it aligns with Wales Well-Being Goals.

Our focus here has been on the activities of the Food Hubs themselves and how their plans can contribute to sustainable development, how this aligns with Wales strategic objectives described by the 7 Well-being goals and how this can be communicated to public buyers in a straightforward way.

This sustainability framework was used as a basis for participative planning sessions held with the Hubs where we explored what actions the Hubs can take and what evidence they can gather or measure to demonstrate their progress. A detailed action plan was then drawn up.

The framework and action plan can be found at the back of this report.



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Discussion and findings

A discussion of each of the environmental, social and economic objectives follows. The pilot project has run over a short funding timeframe so this section should be read as objectives that each Hub can progress towards over time, rather than an evaluation of performance to date. Snapshots of actions that the Hubs are doing now are described beneath each objective.

Objective 1: Environmental performance. This is about working towards net zero emissions from each hub's operations. It considers the following areas where they have a measurable carbon impact and can take practical steps towards resource efficiency:

- **Efficient distribution runs.** This is about short supply chains and taking steps to keep fuel, transport and miles travelled to a minimum.
- **Preventing food and packaging waste.** This is about maintaining quality of food supplied to and from the hubs and taking steps to ensure packaging is re-used time and again.
- **Energy efficient storage.** This is about the energy consumed by the hubs when handling food and taking steps to minimise energy use.

What progress are the Hubs making?

Both hubs prioritise growers that are located nearby and this should continue as a core function of the Hubs. A next step is to begin recording the distance travelled, delivery vehicles used and units delivered by each grower.

Food waste is prevented by ensuring the quality of produce supplied by growers. This is currently done through visual inspections and informal feedback. Transit packaging is reused by both hubs, whereby robust delivery crates owned by the hubs are used for collection and delivery. Re-use of grower packaging, such as nets and sacks, also happens. A next step is to begin keeping a record of material type and volume of packaging reused.

Currently produce is held in storage rooms for a short time by the Hubs before delivering to the buyer, this may increase in the future and potentially require temperature controlled storage. Monitoring energy use for storage and equipment (such as fridges) will be a useful next step and energy saving steps can be considered such as insulation, sensors, purchasing energy efficient equipment and so on.

The data gathered here can be used to calculate carbon impact of the Hubs' operations. It can also enable reduction targets to be set and keep running costs down.

Objective 2: Economic return. This is about generating new and guaranteed income streams for local producers. It considers the following areas where they have a measurable impact



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on the local economy and can take practical steps towards increasing this return:

- **Demand for local food by public sector buyers.** This is about the number of, and increase in, procurement contracts with each hub, and taking steps to stimulate this demand.
- **Supply of local food to public sector buyers.** This is about the volume of food supplied from each hub, and taking steps to increase this volume.
- **Variety of local food available.** This is about additional varieties of food supplied by each hub, and taking steps to ensure these are sold in sufficient quantities.

What progress are the Hubs making?

Both Hubs have agreements with public buyers to supply locally grown produce in modest volumes. The Open Food Network platform is being adapted for use by the Hubs for ordering and payments. Volume and type of produce supplied is recorded. Sustainability, nutrition and carbon plans are being developed and should become key to communication with procurement decision makers. A limiting factor is due to procurement threshold of under £5K. Both Hubs are exploring utilising existing supply chains to extend their reach.

Combined these elements can build resilience of the hubs, help stimulate buyer demand and lead to increasing the volume of locally grown produce that is supplied via the Hubs. Including additional varieties of produce is an area that needs more focus, both to build confidence of catering staff to adapt different recipes and for growers to produce in sufficient quantities.

Data can be gathered on the number and value of procurement contracts, the volume of produce originating from local growers, and the variety supplied by each hub. This will be useful to calculate economic return of the hubs. It can also enable change to be monitored and promotional activities to be planned.

Objective 3: Social impact. This is about building the capability of people involved and the resilience of local food supply chains. It considers the following areas where they interact with different stakeholders and can take practical steps to support their well-being:

- **Skills.** This is about people's skills gained through experience of running a Hub, and taking steps to improve this.
- **Confidence.** This is about the level of buyer satisfaction, local producer participation, and taking steps to improve this.
- **Collaboration.** This is about the interactions between local producers and local buyers



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through a Hub, and taking steps to generate positive outcomes.

What progress are the Hubs making?

Public buyers and local growers face different challenges that can create barriers to supply. A focus of the pilot has been about building trusting relationships with public buyers and growers. This has been done via initiating and facilitating a reliable supply chain to give confidence that this works in practice. The Hubs can continue to play a key role in enabling collaboration to achieve consensus to generate positive outcomes.

Some formal and informal training and coaching happens in each Hub and a next step is to co-ordinate this to match current and future skills needs. Demonstrating sustainability is critical to procurement and future training should be geared to enable all staff to advocate how the Hubs are delivering sustainability and why this a core purpose of the Hubs. Becoming accredited as a Living Wage Employer is also planned.

Data can be gathered on training received and evidence of improved 'eco-literacy' across the Hubs' teams, undertaking surveys with buyers and growers will be useful to calculate social impact of the hubs. It can also lead to change in grower production methods and buyer decision making processes.

Closing comments

The sustainability framework has been developed to provide a series of environmental, social and economic objectives that each Hub can progress towards over time. It provides a useful basis for participative planning sessions held with the Hubs to explore what practical actions they can take and what evidence they can gather or measure to inform a baseline to evaluate performance towards Wales Well-Being Goals over time.

The Community Anchored Food Hub model aims to reduce the administrative burden of sourcing produce from many local small-scale suppliers for both public buyers and growers, this framework provides an opportunity to show how the Hub itself can also help contribute to a low carbon economy, benefit local communities and support local growers in addition to facilitating this transaction.

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Sustainability Framework

Wales Well-Being Goals

What	How	A prosperous Wales	A resilient Wales	A healthier Wales	A more equal Wales	A Wales of more cohesive communities	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving	A globally responsible Wales
Objective 1: Environment Working towards net zero emissions from each hub's operations.	Efficient distribution runs.			•				•
	Preventing food and packaging waste.			•				•
	Energy efficient storage.			•				•
Objective 2: Economy Generating new and guaranteed income streams for local producers.	Demand for local food by local buyers.	•	•					
	Supply of local food to local public buyers.	•	•					
	Variety of local food available.	•	•					
Objective 3: Society Building the capability of people involved and the resilience of local food supply chains.	Skills.				•	•		
	Confidence.				•	•		
	Collaboration.				•	•		

Sustainability Action Plan

<p>Objective 1: Environmental performance <i>Working towards net zero emissions from each hub's operations.</i></p>		
What's involved?	What actions can be taken?	What can be measured?
<p>Efficient distribution runs. This is about short supply chains and taking steps to keep fuel, transport and miles travelled to a minimum.</p>	<p>Prioritise growers that are located the closest to each hub.</p>	<p>Record of distance travelled, vehicle used, and units delivered by each supplier and if this is part of multiple drops.</p>
<p>Preventing food and packaging waste. This is about maintaining quality of food supplied to and from the hubs and</p>	<p>Check quality of food supplied to each hub. Share this information with grower.</p>	<p>Record of frequency, volume and reason for returns.</p>



<p>taking steps to ensure packaging is re-used time and again.</p>	<p>Encourage growers to take-back transit packaging. Make part of supplier agreement.</p> <p>Check that packaging is clearly marked and easily separated for recycling.</p> <p>Long term: Hubs buy own reusable transit packaging that is used by growers and for deliveries to customers / closed loop system.</p>	<p>Material type and volume of packaging used.</p>
<p>Energy efficient storage. This is about the energy consumed by the hubs when handling food and taking steps to minimise energy use.</p>	<p>Power off equipment when not in use, install sensors, timers and insulation, and carry out routine checks and regular maintenance.</p> <p>Prioritise energy efficiency when purchasing new equipment / premises.</p>	<p>Record of energy consumption of hub storage (room and equipment used eg fridge).</p>

Objective 2: Economic return

Generating new and guaranteed income streams for local producers.

What's involved?	What sort of actions can be taken?	What can be measured?
<p>Demand for local food by local buyers. This is about the number of, and increase in, procurement contracts with each hub, and taking steps to stimulate this demand</p>	<p>Make outcomes of this sustainability plan (along with nutrition and grower carbon) a key part of communications with procurement decision makers.</p> <p>Develop systems and contracts for customer orders and supplier payments.</p>	<p>Change in number, £value and frequency of procurement contracts with each hub.</p>
<p>Supply of local food to local public buyers. This is about the volume of food supplied from each hub, and taking steps to increase this volume.</p>		<p>Record the volume of produce that originates from local growers at each hub.</p>
<p>Variety of local food available. This is about additional varieties of food supplied by each hub, and taking steps to ensure these are sold in sufficient quantities.</p>		<p>The number and variety / range of produce requested from each hub by public sector customers.</p> <p>The number and variety / range of produce supplied consistently by each hub.</p>

Objective 3: Social impact

Building the capability of people involved and the resilience of local food supply chains

What's involved?	What sort of actions can be taken?	What can be measured?
<p>Skills. This is about people's skills gained through experience of running a Hub, and taking steps to improve this.</p>	<p>Map current and future skills needs. Co-ordinate formal training and informal coaching for hub members.</p>	<p>Record of type of training and coaching received per member. Increase in level of 'eco literacy' across hubs.</p>
<p>Confidence. This is about the level of buyer satisfaction, local producer participation, and taking steps to improve this.</p>	<p>Do buyer satisfaction survey. Assess and share results with growers. Do grower satisfaction survey. Assess and share results with buyers.</p>	<p>Increase in level of awareness of challenges faced and consensus achieved.</p>
<p>Collaboration. This is about the interactions between local producers and local buyers through a Hub, and taking steps to generate positive outcomes.</p>	<p>Co-ordinate buyer / grower meetings / site visits.</p>	<p>Change in grower production methods and/or buyer decision making processes. Hubs become living wage accredited.</p>