

Resilient  
Green Spaces  
Mannau  
Gwyrdd Gwydn



# Exploring Community Access to Farms & Land

Carmarthenshire Case Study  
Resilient Green Spaces

Social Farms  
& Gardens  
Ffermydd a Gerddi  
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## Localising public procurement and revitalising a council farm in Carmarthenshire

The Landworkers' Alliance and Shared Assets have teamed up to find ways to realise the challenges and opportunities of access to land for new entrants and local communities interested in agroecological farming as part of the [Resilient Green Spaces](#) project. This series of case studies are meant to showcase existing good practice amongst a variety of groups in Wales, as well explain how they have tried to tackle some of the barriers they've faced along the way, to inspire others who might be on a similar journey.

The negative impact of the Covid pandemic on people's access to fresh food was felt keenly across many parts of the UK, and in Carmarthenshire, it proved to be the catalyst for bringing together a group of partners interested in working together to build a more resilient local food system. Working with a broad range of stakeholders from across the county's grassroots food system through the [Carmarthenshire Food Network](#), [Bwyd Sir Gâr Food](#) has developed a Food Strategy with the local Public Services Board that sets out a bold vision for increasing sustainable local procurement for the area. This case study outlines the progress the group has made to date, their plans for the future, and the advice they would offer to other areas interested in doing something similar.

### Who was involved?

In February 2021, staff at the Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services successfully attained a piece of funding from the Wales Poverty Alleviation Fund to develop the Carmarthenshire Food Network, get more fresh produce into emergency food services, and apply to become a member of [Sustainable Food Places](#). They brought together a range of different groups working across the public, private and voluntary sectors to support the

local community to access food in various ways.

Over 100 organisations are now members of this network and are grouped in clusters including community growers, commercial sustainable food producers, chefs championing short-supply chains, community food initiatives and wider food poverty alleviation services. [Bwyd Sir Gâr Food](#) is the strategic local food partnership that was developed to take forward the county's ambition to become a member of Sustainable Food Places. Carmarthenshire Food Network is a stakeholder in this group, along with others including Carmarthenshire County Council, Natural Resources Wales, [Hywel Dda Unitary Health Board](#), University of Wales Trinity St Davids, Social Farms & Gardens, Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services, and [Castell Howell Foods.](#), and the partnership as a whole is supported by the Public Services Board.

### What were their aims?

[Bwyd Sir Gâr Food](#) has several key aims under the broad umbrella of building a more sustainable and resilient local food system. One is to support increasing the production of fruit and vegetables locally to shorten supply chains – currently only 6% of the fruit and veg purchased for the Welsh public sector is grown in Wales, compared to much higher proportions of other food types (e.g. 94% of dairy products and 76% of meat and poultry) – through training more agroecological farmers and community growers. Another is to work towards equality of access to nutrient dense, fresh, unprocessed, local foods through tackling food poverty and boosting the amount of this food coming into community food providers such as food banks, as it was felt that much of the food available through these services at present doesn't support people's long-term health.

Tackling climate change and the negative environmental impact of current mainstream food production systems, as well as working towards nature recovery and net zero ambitions, is another set of priorities, so supporting local agroecological growers to thrive through expanding their potential markets was also seen as key. This in turn could contribute to re-circulating the 'Carmarthenshire pound' and supporting the wider local economy, and contribute to Carmarthenshire County Council's commitment, during this 5-year cabinet term (lasting 4 more years), to move from 53% to 70% local procurement.

### What did they manage to do?

Building on the work members undertook together on emergency food provision during the Covid pandemic, through a process of co-production with its members, Carmarthenshire Food Network developed a collective vision for the network which has five main components: alleviating food poverty, enabling communities to grow, cook and share nutritious food, preserving and enhancing ecosystems, protecting the climate, and increasing prosperity. Bwyd Sir Gâr Food also successfully became the county's sustainable food partnership, the seventh Sustainable Food Place member in Wales, in April 2022.

The Carmarthenshire Food Network ran a food survey with local residents and organisations to see what they thought was needed for a more resilient food system – people who responded were passionate about the need to increase the availability of fresh and local food and being able to access spaces for growing. With this information from the community, as well as the vision of Carmarthenshire Food Network and Bwyd Sir



*Picking locally grown veg in Carmarthenshire (Image credit: Bwyd Sir Gâr Food)*

Gâr Food, more practical initiatives have since been put into place to meet the area's shared goals.

Through the Resilient Green Spaces project, Bwyd Sir Gâr Food was able to pilot a new 'sustainable food procurement hub' in Llanelli, linking local small-scale producers using environmentally friendly practices for growing fruit and vegetables to public sector customers. This involved aggregating produce from 10 small-scale agroecological growers (or those on the journey towards being agroecological through training) to supply a variety of local authority settings. These have included a residential care home for the elderly in Llandeilo-Awel Tywi, a primary and secondary school in Llanelli, and Pembrey County Park café, as well as a newsagent at a Llanelli hospital. The idea is that if this fresh, local food tastes better than the food which was previously procured, people will eat more of it, not only improving their health, but supporting the local economy and environment as well. Public sector procurement also offers opportunities to achieve more equitable access to nutrient-dense food through universal service users such as schoolchildren. In fact, a 'Future Generations Menu' is now being developed to try and align school meal menus and procurement with the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

One of the most exciting ideas to come out of the Carmarthenshire Food Network and Bwyd Sir Gâr Food so far, which would build on these previous pilots, is a proposal to repurpose a council farm to provide local, fresh and sustainably produced food for the public plate. The plan would be to put in place infrastructure, equipment and skilled staff to develop a model market to field-scale sustainable fruit and vegetable production site, which would not only reinvigorate and secure the long-term commercial viability of a local authority asset that has recently become available, but also to contribute to several council policy objectives, and potentially act as an example for other areas to follow. Once established, the site would have a 1.5-acre intensive no-dig agroecological market garden, and wider field-scale cultivated areas of 3-5 acres initially. In time, the market garden could produce 7 tonnes of food annually, enough to provide for the school meals of around 500 children. As well as providing new employment opportunities and markets for local growers, training and volunteering sessions would be held for a wide range of local groups, including schoolchildren and people benefitting from social prescribing schemes. There are also plans to set up a machinery ring for small-scale producers, in addition to the agricultural 'Library of Things' already established locally for essential equipment such as wheel hoes, a two-wheel tractor, tilters, planters and seeders. Further funding has been applied for to expand the range of items in the library so more are suitable for field-scale agriculture.

Finally, a food strategy and action plan for Carmarthenshire is now being drafted for the Public Services Board to continue to ensure the cross-sectoral work being done around food in the area can be coordinated and measured in a holistic way, in order to deliver:

“sustainably produced and healthy food for everyone; better livelihoods and economic security of local producers; and support a transition to environmentally regenerative food production.” Bwyd Sir Gâr Food have also been successful in ensuring sustainable and equitable access to healthy food were included as objectives in the new council Wellbeing Plan.

Through this work, the Carmarthenshire Food Network and Bwyd Sir Gâr Food are beginning to reconnect more people in Carmarthenshire with the land and environment around them, either directly through their plans to improve community growing opportunities, or indirectly through increasing the provision of local, fresh food that tastes great.



*Images from the pilot initiatives in Carmarthenshire (credit: Bwyd Sir Gâr Food)*

### **What barriers did they face?**

The current system of public procurement is complex, and often impenetrable for small-scale producers. Therefore, it has been necessary to work with producers to match

supply and demand and think in new and innovative ways, and to work with the procurement team at the local authority to explore ways to integrate small-scale producers' supply into existing contracts, or through alternative approaches such as dynamic procurement or 'sub-lotting' tenders, so they are not as large and thus more accessible to smaller cooperatives of producers. There is more work to be done to make sure the lessons and skills emerging from this work can be shared widely to help others who would like to get more local food onto the public plate, especially from small-scale local growers.

Most plans proposed by Bwyd Sir Gâr Food require significant amounts of funding, and the partnership is still waiting to hear if a recent Shared Prosperity Fund bid will be successful to take the council farm pilot forward. However, the partners are committed to making their ideas a reality one way or another through different funding opportunities even if the current bid doesn't come through. This will likely happen by continuing to build on ongoing community level work to support more people to grow food on small parcels of land to support their mental health and wellbeing, and begin to supply some of their produce into communal cooking and eating sessions, and poverty alleviation services, ensuring more fresh and unprocessed produce in emergency food provision (i.e. food banks) and community hot meals. Additionally, they will continue to support local small-scale commercial growers through skills building and equipment sharing.

## What if any lessons could be learned for other community groups and/or public bodies?

Three key lessons were highlighted by representatives from the Carmarthenshire Food Network and Bwyd Sir Gâr for other local food partnerships wanting to follow in their footsteps:

- Be bold in your ambitions – having the courage to aim for a major goal or inspiring vision, like repurposing a council farm, from the start, will help build energy and momentum and enable you to bring more people on board for the journey.
- Set your ego aside – when working in partnership with many stakeholders, it is important to recognise the knowledge and experience that exists in different parts of the 'ecosystem' – working together will be more productive if everyone's expertise and lessons learned are welcomed and incorporated.
- Think using a systems framework – food is a topic that branches out into many areas, from health, to the environment, to people's livelihoods and much more – trying to see the bigger picture, make connections, and avoid working in silos is crucial to make progress. The Sustainable Food Places framework can be a useful tool to help do this.

## Find out more:

- Wales Food Poverty Alleviation Fund [Final Report](#) on the early work of the Carmarthenshire Food Network
- Sustainable Food Procurement Hubs Pilot [Information](#)
- Innovative Food Hubs Pilot [Information](#)
- Carmarthenshire County Council [Wellbeing Objectives](#)

## About Resilient Green Spaces:

Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project being led by Social Farms & Gardens to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales until June 2023.

This project has received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

