

## Chair's Update

As 2019 draws to a close we can reflect on a vibrant and busy year for the food and drink industry in Wales.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Brexit, Wales' food and drink sector continues to thrive with exports at a record high. In the last year alone, the industry exported £539 million worth of products – an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year, in comparison to a UK wide increase of just nine per cent.

As a Board, we are keen to build on our recent success through our next action plan which will take us to the next level in our growth story for Welsh food and drink. This plan will be co created between industry and Welsh Government. Over recent months, we have asked producers, manufacturers, retailers and wider interests from across the industry to share their valuable insight and views on the future success of the sector to make sure this plan is the best we can make it for Wales.

Industry feedback on potential skills shortages, professional experiences, as well as discussion surrounding training, accreditation and partnership programmes have all contributed to the plan, which will be published in the new year.

In November, we jointly held the Preparing for Sustainable Scale-Up conference with Welsh Government in Cardiff Bay and announced the outcome of the Investor Ready Programme. Food and drink businesses across Wales have received more than £5.5 million of commercial investment as a result of the scheme, set up to help the food and drink sector grow in a sustainable way.

It was really interesting to hear live results from a survey of delegates at the event, asking for their views about growth. 97 per cent said they plan to grow in the coming years and 94 percent of fund providers and investors want to work with the food and drink sector. However most (64 percent) of businesses at the event said they didn't have a clear plan for investment and more than half (52 percent) didn't have a scale up plan.

We were pleased to hear 96 per cent of food and drink businesses attending the conference said they had a better understanding of how to plan their scale-up journey, after hearing from other businesses and attending sessions and workshops at the event.

We've also discussed the benefits of Welsh exports and seen more Welsh foods given PDO (protected designation of origin status) by the European Union this year. The Denbigh plum became the 16th item of food produce in Wales to be added to the protected name status lists.

Of course, there are still more questions than there are answers at present surrounding Brexit and how an exit from the EU will impact protected foods, tariffs and more. As a Board we've been working hard to encourage businesses to prepare for Brexit as much as possible and signposting to resources regularly. Please do follow us on Twitter @FoodDrinkWIB for updates.

We've also held some really useful cluster networking events; in Llanerch Vineyard in Hensol in October and at Dylan's Menai Bridge in December, where we facilitated speed networking for more than 50 very diverse food and drink businesses and members of the Board. It was great to see so many people, from such a variety of backgrounds, talking and learning from their peers in the industry.

As always, please get in touch with myself and the rest of the Board, to share your sector thoughts and ideas.

With best wishes for a prosperous Christmas and New Year to all busy food and drink businesses across Wales.

See you in 2020 for more collaboration and partnerships as we launch the next phase of our action plan.

**Andy Richardson,**

**Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board**