

Good morning.

It is good to see so many of you here today.

I hope you are looking forward to the day ahead. Our conference today will provide an opportunity to learn about the new and exciting innovations taking place in the food industry, and a chance to meet with a wide variety of people with an interest and expertise in quality food, diet and health.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was a landmark piece of legislation. It puts in place seven goals which public bodies have a legal duty to work towards in order to create a healthier, more prosperous, resilient, and more equal Wales - a Wales where we have strong communities with a vibrant culture and a thriving Welsh language, and where we are mindful of and responsive to global challenges.

So, for the first time, every public body must demonstrate how it is working toward those goals – including a healthier Wales – and this will give our work a new impetus and focus.

Our strategy “Food for Wales, Food from Wales” offers a high level statement of intent for the industry. In the Action Plan “Towards Sustainable Growth”, we outline our ambition to sustainably grow the sectors in Wales by 30% to £7 billion turnover by 2020.

The latest priority sector statistics for farming and food reported a £5.8bn turnover, which means that we have already achieved 11.5% growth since 2013.

The Plan is broad in its ambition, and includes a number of actions to improve food-related health outcomes. Instilling important messages on diet and health in school children will improve the health of the next generation. Healthy choices must

be readily accessible and affordable to everyone, no matter where they live, or what their household income is.

There has been a huge amount of activity in the last eighteen months to deliver the Plan.

The Food and Drink Wales Industry Board is fully established with Andy Richardson recently announced as its Chair. The Board has already begun the work of assessing four key work streams to support the development of the industry in Wales. Their experience and expertise in the sector will be invaluable and will provide the strategic direction to build on the work already underway.

We have also established an internal Food Policy Group to ensure that the cross cutting nature of food is considered in a joined-up way across Welsh Government departments.

We are responsible for the delivery of business support and investment to companies. A comprehensive programme of business support links directly into current gateway programmes such as Business Wales.

We continue to support Food Innovation Wales, which brings together three food centres of excellence dedicated to encouraging the development of the food sector and providing technical and operational support on all aspects of food manufacturing.

The centres provide a strategic backbone to technical and new product development within Welsh businesses. They provide a unique service within the UK, on a range of technical issues, including accreditation to standards such as BRC or SALSA and support for labelling advice, shelf life and packaging.

To achieve a joined-up approach to skills development our focus is to support the Skills Implementation Plan and its Skills

Gateway to provide a simple, single, access point for employers and for the workforce to identify training needs and to source the appropriate support.

Through our Rural Development Programme, we support companies to access European Funding through the Food Business Investment Scheme (FBIS). It is designed to help primary producers of agricultural products and businesses that do first and/or second stage processing activities in Wales. The Scheme can provide capital investment and other support to development projects. I am hugely encouraged by the interest that there has been in this scheme, which I believe reflects the positivity and ambition that we have in our food sector in Wales.

Also through our Rural Development Programme, we are providing support via the Co-operation and Supply Chain Development Scheme (C&SCDS), which is designed to support productivity and efficiency improvements throughout the food

chain. Co-operation can address a much broader range of problems and bring the sector together to a stronger place.

We have been developing a programme of Cluster Projects where the aim is to bring together food businesses, educational and research institutions, and policy makers in Wales in a targeted and structured way, to improve the knowledge base and exploit business opportunities for the sectors. We currently have four clusters set up - Impact, Fine Foods, Seafood and NutriWales. NutriWales is here today, I would encourage you all to seek them out during a break and explore how you can get involved in this interesting new approach towards developing healthier food and drink products. This topic is a key interest for many food businesses and the NutriWales' order book is already oversubscribed.

We have a comprehensive range of programmes to support Welsh food and drink producers to increase their exports. This support ranges from bespoke one-to-one advice on areas such

as developing export strategies and market selection, through to identifying in-market opportunities and supporting companies to visit and exhibit in key overseas markets.

Last year, we took 12 food companies to Food Matters Live, an event dedicated to food, health and nutrition. The event brought together the industry as a whole to tackle one of the most important challenges of our time – the relationship between food, health and nutrition.

Last year's Great Taste Awards were a great success, with 174 awards going to products from Wales, and 10 products being deemed worthy of the 3-star accolade. The competition witnessed a 25% upsurge in Welsh entries. Many of these entries were from exciting and innovative food products, showcasing a vibrant food and drinks sector for Wales.

We are already delivering a wide range of activities which deliver a healthier, more prosperous, resilient Wales; with a vibrant culture and a thriving Welsh language.

But there is more that can be done.

To this end, Food and Public Health teams have partnered up to develop direction, and to better understand how to best support Welsh food companies that deliver for the consumer.

Wales is home to a dynamic food and drink industry, with a diverse mix of businesses.

These businesses produce a wide range of products from speciality items for niche markets to high volume items for major distribution networks. As such their objectives, needs and barriers to growth vary from business to business.

We interact with food companies across Wales, providing support to develop the sector, creating jobs and growth. This cannot be undertaken in isolation, and without thought and appreciation for the effect that food has on people's health. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that the support we provide takes this into consideration.

Innovative products that deliver for market and consumer demands will strengthen the Welsh food and drink industry. We want to support and encourage the development of new products that meet these demands whilst giving due consideration to wider influences and the effect that food has on all our lives.

And today is the start of that conversation.

- Where are the market opportunities for companies?
- What do consumers want from a Welsh food industry?
- What should the Welsh Government be doing to support the industry to nourish and feed the people of Wales?

These are questions that have complex answers but I hope that today will begin the work of unpicking these answers.

It is not constructive to demonise the food industry or blame consumers; all of society has a role to play. Ultimately though, it is about individual choice, and government, educators and the industry have a responsibility to help individuals make an informed choice.

Significant successes have already been made on salt. Over 70% of the retail market and around half of major high street restaurants have committed to reduce salt levels in food. These commitments from the food industry have led to population intakes falling from 9.5g to 8.1g per day, moving in the right direction to the target of 6g/day.

Today is a chance for everyone to highlight the progress already made in this important area as well as discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead.

I invite you, our food and drink industry, to both face the challenge and embrace the opportunity posed by this need for continued innovation to improve the healthy nutritional offer for the consumer.

Towards Sustainable Growth commits us to consider whether a Welsh food and nutrition strategy is necessary. Today delivers on this commitment and we welcome your thoughts on this throughout the day.

I want Welsh food and drink companies to produce tasty and healthy products that consumers want to eat. Alongside our work to promote the Welsh food sector, we will also work with the industry to encourage the provision of healthier choices through reformulation, more appropriate portion sizes, healthier options, wider availability and better labelling.

Food and drink should be emblematic of Welsh culture and have an international reputation for quality and authenticity, reflecting and enhancing the positive values of Welsh provenance.

I am convinced that we are on the right path to deliver on our priorities of economy, health and education through a prosperous, resilient and sustainable food economy.

I hope you all have an enjoyable, productive and interesting day.

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