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CASE STUDY, DOCUMENT

Supporting Conwy County Borough Council to Increase Local Food in School Meals: PDF

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Support has been provided to Conwy County Borough Council to explore and pilot opportunities to increase the use of locally grown vegetables in school meals, aligned with Welsh Government's ambitions to strengthen local food supply chains. This work has focused on practical trials, supply chain development, and engagement with growers to transition from imported or frozen produce to fresh, locally sourced alternatives.

While locally sourced meats were already embedded in menus, vegetables presented a greater challenge due to limited local supply and reliance on frozen products. The introduction of Universal Primary Free School Meals has increased demand, creating both an opportunity and a challenge to secure consistent, affordable, local produce. A key issue has been identifying growers and supply arrangements capable of meeting requirements around scale, seasonality, and cost.

A central part of this project has been a pilot to compare fresh and frozen broccoli within school meals. The trial provided practical insights into how a switch to fresh produce could operate in practice. Feedback from catering staff has suggested that fresh broccoli improved the appearance and quality of meals and was well received by pupils, although did require additional preparation time. The findings have demonstrated that both the benefits and practical considerations of introducing fresh, locally sourced produced into school kitchens.

Alongside this project, work has been undertaken to better understand the scale of supply required. This has highlighted the importance of building relationships between growers, wholesalers, and catering services to ensure produce can be grown, aggregated and distributed effectively. The work has also identified that current local growing capacity is limited, with many local producers operating at a smaller scale, reinforcing the need for a longer-term approach to developing supply. However, Coleg Llandrillo signposted the Pen yr Orsaf Community Hub as a potential source of expertise to support young people in establishing or scaling horticultural enterprises, with a view to meeting the demands of supplying local authority school meals services.

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The work has identified challenges in the food system. A limited amount of agricultural land in Wales is dedicated to large-scale growing beyond potatoes. In addition, there are constraints around the variability of affordable labour to harvest crops at scale, alongside the need to invest in infrastructure needed to accommodate the labour required such as recruiting seasonal staff and providing them with living accommodation. Current growing capacity therefore remains limited, with many producers operating at smaller scales, reinforcing the need for a longer-term approach to developing supply.

The support provided by the programme has taken a structured, evidence-based approach to increasing local food in school meals. The project has demonstrated what is operationally achievable, identified key barriers, and informed future planning. It also provides a useful example of how public sector demand can be used to stimulate local food production, when supported by coordinated supply chain development and targeted business support

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