

Connecting and Strengthening Wales' Local Food Ecosystem

Welsh Government & Cynnal Cymru – Foundational Economy Projects

Overview

As part of the Welsh Government's Backing Local Firms Fund, food and drink projects received vital support from Cynnal Cymru through the creation and facilitation of a national Capabilities Network. This network, now a thriving community of practice, has enabled many of these foundational economy projects across Wales to grow, innovate, and collaborate in ways that directly benefit local people, communities, and supply chains.

The Foundational Economy

The Foundational Economy refers to the everyday sectors that are essential to our quality of life such as food, care, housing, energy, tourism, and retail. These sectors are often rooted in local communities, providing fair work and vital services. The Backing Local Firms Fund was created by Welsh Government to strengthen this economy by supporting businesses that could supply more of what the public sector needs, from local food to social care and beyond.

Several food-focused projects were backed by the fund, including Larder Cymru's Welsh Food for Schools programme, Food Sense Wales' 'Welsh Veg in Schools' and Can Cook – Well-Fed.

The Role of Cynnal Cymru

Cynnal Cymru has led the Foundational Economy Capabilities Network on behalf of Welsh Government. The network, consisting of over 75 members, was designed to connect, support, and grow foundational economy projects across the country.

"Our role is to support the projects funded by the Backing Local Firms Fund," explains Phoebe Nicklin, Policy and Engagement Officer for Cynnal Cymru. "We created a space, a community of practice, where project leads could meet regularly, share experiences, and learn from each other. That's where the magic happens."

Objectives and Approach

The Capabilities Network was built on **co-production principles**—a collaborative approach where participants help shape outcomes. The network aimed to:

- Identify and explore common challenges across projects
- Encourage knowledge sharing and problem-solving
- Promote innovation in service delivery and supply chain development
- Build meaningful connections between practitioners, policymakers, and government officials



Benefits of the Network

Project participants reported several key benefits from their involvement in the Capabilities Network:

1. Meaningful Networking

The projects gained access to a wider network of like-minded organisations and businesses across Wales. The monthly meetings brought together grassroots projects and larger, established enterprises, creating opportunities for collaboration across the entire food supply chain.

"Having that space every month to talk through our work, hear what others were doing, and build those relationships—it's been hugely important," one project lead noted.

2. Shared Learning

From innovative procurement models to navigating policy challenges, the network enabled open discussion of both obstacles and solutions. Projects benefitted from seeing how others tackled similar issues, giving them new tools to strengthen their own approach to local food in schools.

3. Connections to Policy and Government

Cynnal Cymru ensured that Welsh Government civil servants were present in many of the sessions, helping bridge the gap between frontline delivery and policy-making. This connection gave projects the opportunity to directly share insights with government stakeholders—and, in turn, better align their work with national priorities.

4. Visibility and Voice

By recording meetings and sharing resources, Cynnal Cymru amplified the work of Food Sense Wales, Larder Cymru, Can Cook / Well Fed and their peers. This visibility helped strengthen the case for supporting local food systems and the foundational economy more broadly.

A Collaborative Model for the Future

The work of Cynnal Cymru has shown how structured, well-facilitated communities of practice can strengthen Wales' foundational economy in practical, measurable ways. Participants have emerged from the programme better connected, more informed, and more empowered to grow local food supply into schools across Wales.

As a result of the Capabilities Network, projects continue to collaborate with other each other and share their own learning—building a more resilient, responsive, and rooted food economy in Wales.

