



PATHWAYS TO FARMING

RDP056

PILOT ACTIVITY REPORT

Adroddiad ar Gynllun Peilot
Pilot Activity Report

RDP			
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Rhif Peilot Pilot Number	RDP056	Testun Subject	Pathways to Farming

Disgrifiwch y cynllun peilot

Outline the pilot activity

Pathways to Farming was designed to increase the production and the access to local food. The project sought to do this by training more food producers, increasing access to land through the development of micro farm plots, building on the local food networks, shortening supply chains, and promoting local food.

The project was focused in the North Powys area – primarily the communities around Machynlleth and Newtown.



Beth yw bwriad y cynllun peilot?

What are the objectives of the pilot activity?

The project objectives were to:

- increase public awareness of local food
- increase local access to growing land
- train new horticultural food producers

- shorten supply chains
- increase the market for local produce



Sut wnaethoch chi osod lan y cynllun peilot?

How did you go about setting up the pilot activity?

We developed and delivered a new horticultural food production training course which we delivered to 20 trainees over the 2.5-year projects. These trainees took part in training across an entire year which involved classroom sessions, mentoring, and growing support. Our trainees were taken on numerous farm visits to learn from experienced practitioners, with one overnight study tour in Sept 2019 with expert 'no dig' market gardener Charles Dowding. Our trainees were also supported to sell their produce into a number of local outlets.

We worked with 2 key partners – Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) and Cultivate - to develop the micro farm training sites to allow trainees to grow on land if they did not already have access to somewhere suitable to grow. These partnerships, along with the existing knowledge and networks of Mach Maethlon, also helped the project gain access to the target communities and recruit trainee growers.

The Pathways to Farming staff used existing networks and knowledge of the local food system to build relationships with local food businesses to increase the network and availability of local food for customers to purchase. We benefitted 13 businesses over the course of the pilot. We also engaged with 69 participants, increasing their knowledge around buying local produce.

We worked with businesses across the Machynlleth and Newtown areas and set up 2 new selling outlets – a veg box scheme and an online local food hub - in partnership with local growers and businesses. These new outlets did not only result in more sales of local produce, but they also built new local food networks attached to them which will carry on beyond the pilot.

Before the pandemic, we were able to run two local food events which engaged a large base of businesses and consumers in discussions around issues facing local food producers. This resulted in over 22 stakeholders engaging in the pilot project.

We created three new part time jobs during the pilot project: two Project Coordinators and one Trainer. These jobs will continue beyond the pilot due to our securing of further funding.



**Pa adnoddau oedd angen arnoch chi i gynnal y cynllun? Oedd rhaid dibynnu ar eraill?
What resources were required to set up and run the activity? Did you need to rely on others for this?**

The main resource for the project was staff time to deliver training and local food networking. This was funded by RDP and accounted for our largest budget line: £68,404.

Going forward, we have partnered with Machynlleth organisation Ecodyfi on a funding bid to ensure the continuation of this work.

One of the project mico farm sites required quite a lot of infrastructure and maintenance to get to a suitable state to grow and maintain. Resources for this were not completely covered by the project, so outside assistance and funding was required from CAT to carry out the work needed and to cover capital costs for site infrastructure.

The administration of the project was heavily supported by volunteer Directors of Mach Maethlon, as well as contributions to strategy and delivery from our partners at CAT and Cultivate.

Beth oedd amserlen y peilot?

What were the timescales of the pilot?

The project ran into funding issues, so the start date was delayed by 6 months, shortening the 3 year programme to 2.5 years, offering 2 years worth of training programmes plus start up and wrap up time.



Beth oedd yr heriau yn y peilot?

What were the challenges of the pilot?

One of the first challenges we expected was to recruit horticultural trainees. As the project started in July, we only had a few months to recruit. Our training needed to

start in September to offer over-winter 'class room' training before the growing season started. Happily, demand for our training was high and we were able to recruit trainees in the short timeframe.

One major challenge was the lack of capital infrastructure funding available, so a lot of resources were put into developing one of the microfarm plot sites at the beginning of the project. Ideally, the project would be longer to include more development time, or sites prepared in advance.

Another huge challenge we, and everyone, faced in 2020 was the impact of the global covid-19 pandemic. This halted all farm visits and classroom training, and also created challenges with getting produce to market (with hospitality businesses closing and not being able to order produce). However, we saw an increased demand for fresh produce from local people. With the support of the project, producers were able to adapt their business models to sell via different outlets to what was planned and reach household consumers rather than businesses. Adapting to this changing market was challenging, but also brought new innovative selling models which may not have been created had it not been for the pandemic.

Sut weithiodd y peilot yn ymarferol?

How did the pilot activity work in practice?

The project focused on 2 key areas: training people in commercial food production (increasing supply), and developing new and existing markets for the produce (increasing demand).

The pilot employed a horticulture tutor to deliver the training – developing a 1 year training programme including theoretical and practical support, study visits, mentor sessions and practical works days at the microfarm sites.

The pilot also employed a project coordinator role (job-share managed by 2 people) to oversee the pilot and develop markets. This involved trialling new selling models for the trainees, and working with businesses in the local area to develop more demand for local produce.

The pilot also helped the trainees to develop their own horticulture business plan to focus their learning with the view to sustaining a business at the end of the pilot.

From the 20 trainees we supported throughout the project, 4 have progressed to working as professional growers:

- *Kait Leonard* established a food business RealRoots with the support of our project, selling micro salads, fresh vegetables and processed products such as chutneys. Working on this business part time while also running a landscape design business, Kait is still selling produce on the local market and through Siop Blodyn Tatws. She plans to expand further in 2022.



- *Jane Baker* began growing produce for her bakery Rye and Roses in 2019 with support from our project. In 2021 she has moved to growing independently for her bakery without project support and is running weekly pizza nights selling pizza toppings made with her locally grown produce.



- *Sadie Maund* moved on from our training programme in 2020 to set up the market garden Dwylo Da on a local hill farm. She has been selling high quality salads to Camlan Farm Shop and Ty Cemmaes.



- *Maxwell Woodford* was supported by our project to set up a cooperative veg box scheme in Newtown called Veg2Table. Since graduating from our training Maxwell has acquired land with his family and continued to grow produce for sale through this veg box scheme, in partnership with Cultivate.



The feedback on our pilot project has been incredible positive, from both trainees and business partners

Os am ailadrodd y cynllun, beth fuaswch yn newid?

If repeating this pilot activity, what would you do differently?

We would seek to accredit the training element of the project earlier on in the pilot activity. As the project started later than anticipated, we had to start straight away with the training programme, so it was not possible to work on accreditation until year 2. We discovered that it takes much longer to set up and embed a new course with an accredited body so we were unable to do this within the timeframe of the project.

We would also look to source more capital funding so that we could support growers with shared tools & resources.

We would include more time for admin support from the start of the project, to manage funding requirements and claims – we separated out this role half way through the project to employ someone specifically to administer the budget and claim reporting.

Ydy'r cynllun peilot yma yn gynaliadwy? Os na, sut allwch ei wneud yn fwy gynaliadwy y tro nesaf?

Is this pilot activity sustainable? If not, how could you make it more sustainable next time?

Through conducting the pilot project, we identified that there is a need for horticulture training and support for new entrants to food production in Mid Wales. This type of project needs resourcing because the horticultural food production industry is not supported in the same way as other types of agriculture. Without additional support and access to land, we cannot expect to see young new entrants into horticultural food production.

Charging for accredited training could be a way to make the activity more sustainable, but one of the main barriers to new food growers is lack of financial resources.

While our food hub and veg box selling models were operated as trials and did not reach financial self sufficiency during the pilot, we can expect these selling models to become self sufficient in the future. As demand for local produce increases and consumers become more aware of the need to pay fair prices for local produce, we would expect to see local food producers more able to earn a livelihood from selling their produce.

In the long term, the new commercial growers we are training need to be supported by a farming subsidy system which offers financial support to those producing a high volume of food crops from a small area of land. We can hope that changes to farming subsidies will recognise horticultural food producers working full time on less than 5 hectares.

Os yn parhau'r cynllun yma, pa gamau fydddech chi'n ystyried nesaf?

If this activity were to continue, what steps would you look to take next?

We would look to develop the project

by increasing the length of support for horticulture trainees. Initially the project was set up to offer 1 year of training, plus 1 year of mentoring.

We worked with 2 years of trainees, so the second year of participants only received 1 year of support which is not enough. Realistically, new entrants into horticultural food production require 3 years of support.

We would also plan to develop and strengthen the local food supply chain

by setting up more systems and avenues for producers to sell, and customers to buy. We would focus less on sales to businesses and more on direct retail sales which offer a higher price and more stability.

Happily, our project is continuing beyond the pilot phase due to further funding. We will be putting the lessons of the pilot project into practice as we move forward to support more new entrants to horticultural food production.

