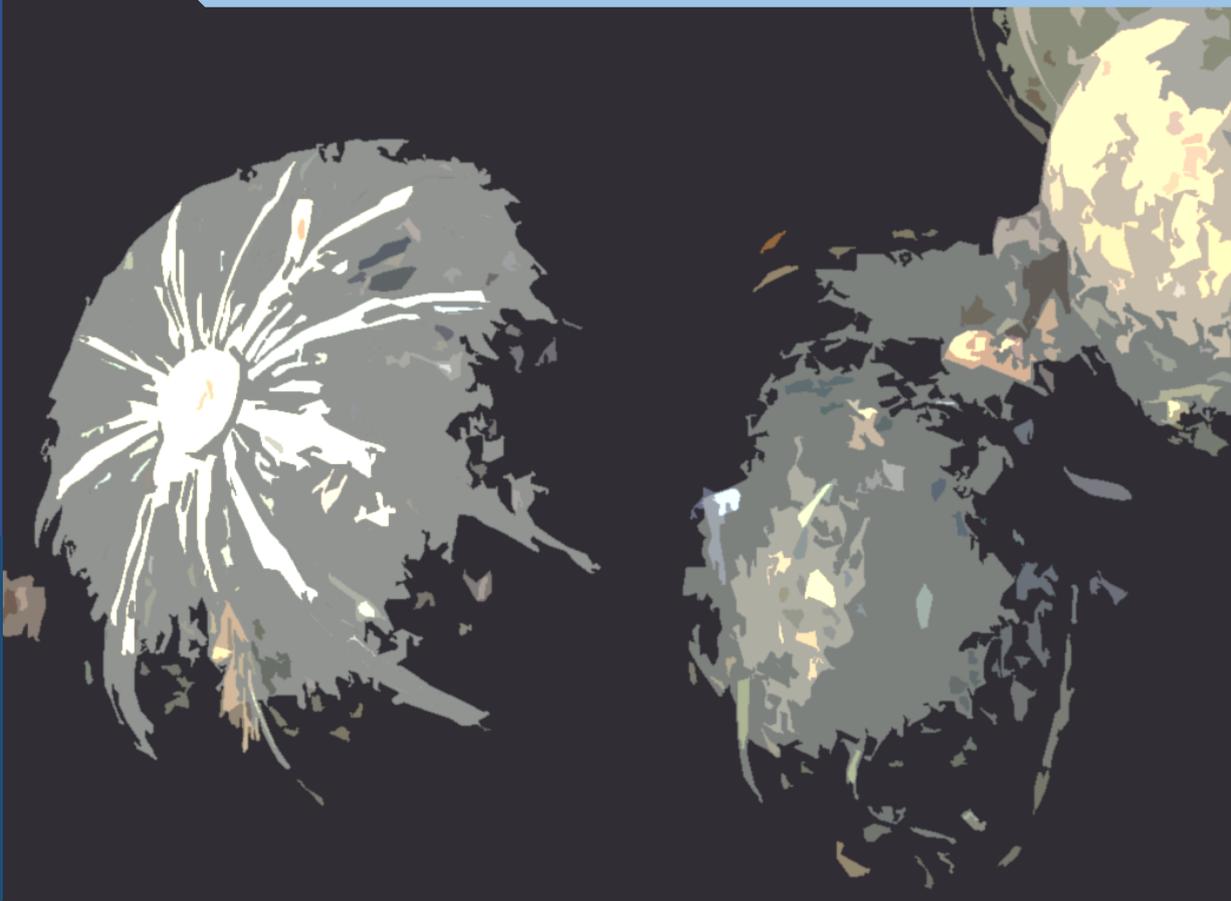


the co-operative party



**Working co-operatively for
sustainable and just
food systems in Wales**



Foreword

This report by the Sustainable Places Research Institute at Cardiff University was jointly commissioned by the Wales Co-operative Party and members of the Co-operative Group in the National Assembly for Wales. Our thanks go to the authors Dr Poppy Nicol and Alice Taherzadeh.

The research explores how co-operative principles could be extended to food production and food systems to deliver a wide range of benefits to people and communities throughout Wales. It scopes the current landscape of co-operation in the food sector in Wales, the barriers to growth, and suggests key recommendations to expand co-operatives and create more sustainable and just food systems.

This report contributes to an urgent conversation about how we create more sustainable and just food systems; where people and communities (and local producers and consumers) have more say in the food that we grow and eat; where we keep more of the benefits – jobs, skills and profits - of food production in our local and regional economies; where community-level co-operation can tackle food poverty and poor nutrition; and – in the face of accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss – where we strengthen the sustainability of our food systems too.

Food justice is a key campaign for the Co-operative Party in 2019. We believe that healthy, sustainable food must be affordable and accessible to everyone in Wales, and that co-operation has a key role to play in achieving that.

We hope you will want to be part of this conversation on how we change the way we think about food and change our relationship with the food system. Co-operative principles can help us do that, so we and future generations can all benefit from more sustainable and just food systems.



Huw Irranca-Davies AM
Chair
Co-operative Assembly Group



Karen Wilkie
Deputy General Secretary
Co-operative Party

WRITTEN BY:

Poppy Nicol

NicolP@cardiff.ac.uk

Alice Taherzadeh

TaherzadehA@cardiff.ac.uk

Contents

A Sustainable and Just Food System in Wales	2
Introduction	3
Food co-operatives in Wales: the current landscape.....	4
Co-operative values and principles	5
What is a sustainable and just food system?.....	6
Embedding Co-operative Values and Principles	7
Legislating for Co-operative Economies.....	9
Welsh Case study: Banc Organics	9
Legislating for change at a city-level: New York City	9
International Case Study: Emilia-Romagna Region.....	10
Cultivating Co-operative Economies	11
Producing co-operatively.....	11
Distributing and Processing Co-operatively	11
Welsh Case study: Open Food Network	12
Trading Co-operatively.....	13
Co-operative Economies and Food Justice	13
International Case Study: The Stop Community Food Centre: Toronto, Canada.....	13
Learning Together for a Co-operative Society	14
Setting up and Managing Co-operatives.....	14
Welsh Case Study: Coed Organics.....	15
Educating <i>within</i> Co-operatives	15
Educating <i>between</i> Co-operatives.....	15
Welsh Case Study: Cae Tan	16
Food Training Landscape in Wales	16
International Case Study: New Entry Sustainable Farming Project	17
Policy Recommendations	18
Three Areas of Policy Recommendations for a Sustainable and Just Food System.....	18
Appendix	20
Methodology	20
Endnotes	21

A Sustainable and Just Food System in Wales

The last few years has seen increasing awareness by organisations, governmental institutions and the broader public of the growing inequities in our food system and the threats it faces. We are currently moving further away from realising the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food for everyone in society. At the same time, we face the dual risks of political uncertainty and instability in the short-term and the unfolding climate emergency in the longer-term. The Welsh Government is a leading nation for sustainability legislation, recognising the importance and interconnection of social, cultural and environmental as well as economic factors. However, when our current economic system prioritises profit for shareholders over sustainability and justice, it is difficult to progress in these critical goals. Scaling out co-operative ways of working based on co-operative principles and values will enable a sustainable and just food system in Wales capable of addressing these challenges. Through legislating for co-operation, Wales could become a pioneering nation for sustainability and justice.

Multiple crises in the food system have made it clear that focusing on access to affordable food is not enough. Whilst a worrying number of people in Wales are struggling to get enough food to avoid hunger, many who do are still unable to afford a healthy diet. The majority of Welsh citizens are not consuming enough fruit and vegetables.¹ Levels of obesity have been steadily increasing, along with micronutrient deficiencies and diet-related diseases.² At the same time, the number of people needing to access food bank emergency supplies has grown at an astonishing rate.³

Global environmental systems are being pushed to breaking point with food production accounting for a large amount of the damage.⁴ This, along with political uncertainty, will likely push up food prices in the coming years and lead to vulnerability in the food supply⁵.

The Welsh Government has recently acknowledged that we are facing a climate crisis.⁶ Moves towards a low carbon economy need to take a holistic approach which includes consideration of the environmental impact of the food system. More co-operation at all levels of society is required to create a sustainable food system capable of ensuring equitable access to healthy food for the people of Wales now and in the future.

This report explores the potential for co-operative ways of working in the food system to support a sustainable and just food system in Wales. Based on primary research, it identifies key challenges and constraining forces facing co-operatives working within the food sector within Wales, as well as the opportunities for future food co-operatives and co-operative policy in Wales.

Introduction

This report highlights a number of **key challenges** currently facing the sustainability of co-operatives and co-operative ways of working within the Welsh food sector. These include:

- The challenges of competing with a food system based upon industrial production of cheap food which has to cover costly distances;
- Limited opportunities for working co-operatively within Wales for processing and distribution;
- Disparate and sparse training opportunities for sustainable agriculture coupled with a lack of appropriate advice and support for co-operative legal structure for co-operatives in the food system.

Amidst these challenges, this study indicates how co-operatives and co-operative ways of working play an important role in the Welsh food economy, albeit fledgling. Overall, stakeholders – particularly those already working within sustainable food production, processing⁷ and distribution – felt there is a wider role for co-operative ways of working and co-operative economies to support sustainable and just food futures in Wales.

When embedded within local communities and guided by co-operative values, co-operative ways of working demonstrate potential for supporting a values-based food systems based upon democracy, solidarity, equality and equity. This needs to be considered at all stages from production to consumption and relies on collectively pooling resources and information to create resilient local food networks. The issues involved in developing a co-operative, sustainable and just food system are explored through the following key themes:

- The importance of values and principles in sustainable and just food systems;
- The need for co-operative approaches to processing and distribution;
- Supporting through education, training and information.

In each section we identify key issues and provide illustrative Welsh case studies. Moving beyond the challenges highlighted, we also present a series of Welsh and international case studies as inspiration for sustainable and just food futures. Along with findings from the interviews, these inform our policy recommendations.

To respond to the challenges highlighted and create such a food system, Wales must develop an integrated food policy which supports:

- 1) Setting up food co-operatives at all levels and scales to increase the number of food co-operatives in Wales.
- 2) Co-operative solutions to food processing and distribution such as food hubs to foster local economies, support small and medium-scale producers, reduce the environmental impact transportation, and enable better use of resources.
- 3) A more connected and comprehensive training landscape in Wales for sustainable food production which links food and farming organisations, urban and rural food production, and educational institutions.
- 4) The scaling out of small-scale horticultural and arable production through access to land and training for new entrants and business advice for producers in the meat and dairy sectors wishing to diversify.

Food co-operatives in Wales: the current landscape

In Wales, we identified a range of organisations and businesses that employed co-operative ways of working within the food system. As well as those operating via the legal structure of Co-operative Society, we also identified organisations oriented to sustainability and food justice that self-defined as co-operatives.

Food co-operatives in Wales generally take one of several forms: **producer or service co-operatives** (between producers), **worker or multistakeholder co-operatives** (within food businesses), or **consumer co-operatives** (between consumers).

There are around 60 food and agricultural co-operatives registered in Wales⁸ ranging from community-run village shops to producer-led quality assurance schemes. Additionally, there are a number of more informal co-operatives. Most notably, around 300 community food co-operatives across Wales had been created since 2004 through the Community Food Co-operative programme funded by the Wales Rural Regeneration Unit.⁹ However, funding ended for this programme in 2015 and a large number have since ceased to exist.

The co-operative food sector in Wales is relatively underdeveloped, particularly at the level of producers. However, there are a few interesting examples, particularly in the meat and dairy sector, of producers grouping together for services or to supply local, national or international markets. There are very few worker food co-operatives in Wales though there exist a number of businesses such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes using a multistakeholder model of co-operative structure. Formal consumer co-operatives tend to take the form community-run shops in rural areas, often responding to closures of village shops and not tending to have a focus on sustainability or justice. Co-operatively run Country Markets¹⁰ across Wales also work to link local producers with consumers.

Co-operative values and principles

Definition of a Co-operative

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.¹¹

Co-operative Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.¹²

Co-operative Principles^{13 14}



1 - Voluntary and Open Membership



2 - Democratic Member Control



3 - Member Economic Participation



4 - Autonomy and Independence



5 - Education, Training, and Information



6 - Co-operation among Co-operatives



7 - Concern for Community

What is a sustainable and just food system?

Drawing upon the sustainable food and social justice literatures as well as stakeholder perspectives, this report understands a food system to include production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food.

As in the Eat Lancet report¹⁵, **sustainable food production** is understood as that which "stays within safe planetary boundaries" while providing a **sustainable healthy diet**¹⁶ which "largely consists of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and unsaturated oils, includes a low to moderate amount of seafood and poultry, and includes no or a low quantity of red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains, and starchy vegetables."

We build upon this understanding with the concept of **just food**¹⁷, defined as "communities exercising their right to grow, sell and eat healthy food" whereby healthy food is understood as "fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers and animals."

A **sustainable and just food system** is one that intentionally integrates both social justice and sustainability as encompassed in Agyeman et al.'s concept of **just sustainabilities**¹⁸:

"The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems."

We found that stakeholders had a clear understanding of a sustainable food system which sometimes encompassed justice concerns as defined above. They tended to define a sustainable food system as one which would safeguard future generations by considering social, environmental and economic issues, emphasising:

- Local food networks and moving towards self-sufficiency in Wales as key to sustainable food systems, both in terms of reconnecting people with food as well as minimising the economic and environmental impact of imported food;
- The importance of soil health, animal health and welfare, minimising external inputs, and avoidance of environmental damage with several stakeholders mentioning organic, biodynamic and permaculture as sustainable approaches;
- A system which recognises food as a basic right rather than simply a commodity and ensures a fair price for producers.

There was also a clear sense of aspects of the current food system which were unsustainable including: market pressure to bring down food prices, price-based competition, the dominance of supermarkets and just-in-time ordering. All of these factors were identified as leading to the squeezing out of small producers and local retailers.

Embedding Co-operative Values and Principles

Co-operative ways of working are both a mind-set and a culture, relying on co-operation over competition and collaboration rather than conflict. However, the co-operative legal structure alone is not enough to ensure co-operative values and principles are embedded within practices. Co-operative success requires broader societal values. When guided by co-operative values and principles, co-operatives and co-operative economies have the potential to support the development of sustainable and just food futures in Wales.

Many stakeholders involved in sustainable food production demonstrated how **co-operative values** of democracy, solidarity, equality, equity, self-help and self-responsibility and **co-operative principles** are embedded within their organisation and how they complement the pursuit of sustainable and just food futures.

Stakeholders involved in small-scale ecological food production and local food networks tended to share the notion that they are part of a worldwide movement working towards alternative ways of trading based upon co-operation and collaboration. Within these organisations, co-operative ways of working included co-operation with ecological systems as well as social systems. These stakeholders felt they were working in solidarity with other sustainable food organisations to build more sustainable and just food economies.

Collective decision-making – whether informally or formally



Stakeholders particularly those within workers' co-operatives, valued collective **democratic decision-making processes** and **non-hierarchical organisational structures**. These processes and structures can support sustainable and just food systems through cultivating equity, equality, solidarity and empowerment within organisations.

Collective ownership - sharing responsibility and rewards



Co-operatively-run organisations depend upon equitable distribution of **responsibility** and **rewards** amongst members. Equitable distribution of ownership and wealth so that responsibility and rewards are not concentrated in the hands of few but distributed amongst the many reduces inequalities, promoting more just food systems.

Collective responsibility – working together towards a shared goal



Co-operative structures enable members to **work together** towards a shared goal that would be otherwise difficult to achieve individually. This hinges upon application of the co-operative values of **self-help** and **self-responsibility**, whereby each member takes on responsibility to help both themselves and others. In a co-operative society, everyone has a part to play in creating sustainable and just food futures.

Cooperating amongst co-operatives



Collaboration underpins co-operative ways of working – including the **pooling of resources** and the **solidarity** principle of working together as a collective rather than competing against each other. Local, regional and national co-operative **networks** can support the scaling-out of co-operative ways of working and co-operative economies.

Education, training and information



Education and training for members and information for the public is a core co-operative principle. Strengthening co-operative learning through **education, training and information** is critical in the building of inclusive co-operative values within society and economy - the foundations of sustainable and just food futures.

Cooperating for community



Several stakeholders felt co-operative ways of working have the potential to support **ecological, community-based food systems** and **local economies**. This was a sentiment raised particularly amongst stakeholders working directly with local communities via CSAs, veg box schemes and food hubs.

At the heart of each stakeholder's vision for a sustainable and just food system we identified many of the co-operative principles and values. Many of those working towards creating sustainable and just food futures, however, highlighted the challenges of operating within a food system currently dominated by multiple retailers and non-co-operative ways of working.

Legislating for Co-operative Economies

Currently, the Welsh economy is dominated by non-co-operative ways of working. As demonstrated in the Banc Organics¹⁹ case, there is a need for a critical mass within the Welsh economy in order to achieve significant shifts towards co-operative ways of working. This hinges upon building co-operative values within society.

Welsh Case study: Banc Organics

Banc Organics are part of a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee which operates according to co-operative principles. As a community supported agriculture (CSA) project, they grow and distribute organic veg weekly to members living in the Gwendraeth valleys, Carmarthenshire. As part of the scheme, members are encouraged to get involved in growing their food, as well as getting to know each other. They hold monthly Farm Days and an annual Harvest Supper.

As the head grower explains, co-operative principles underpin operations: *"owning our means of production and the workers having a stake in things, having democratic control over things and basing them on things other than the market"*

Market conditions are one of the key challenges facing small-scale sustainable horticultural initiatives operating in Wales: *"the price of food, the international competition, the fact that people can produce food by cutting costs and cutting corners by externalising costs to the damage of the environment."*

The scaling out of co-operative ways of working within the Welsh food system requires a 'critical mass' of co-operatives: *"with co-operative ways of working there's a thing of getting a critical mass of coops and hopefully, the co-operative ethos would allow them to support each other."*



As exemplified in the case of Emilia Romagna, Italy and New York City, governments can play a key role in fostering co-operative values through implementing policies that promote and encourage co-operative ways of working at regional and city scales.

Legislating for change at a city-level: New York City

In New York, the city government is adopting regulations to assist co-operatives. Governmental bodies have the potential to support co-operatives through prioritising co-operatives when they enter a contract for goods or services.

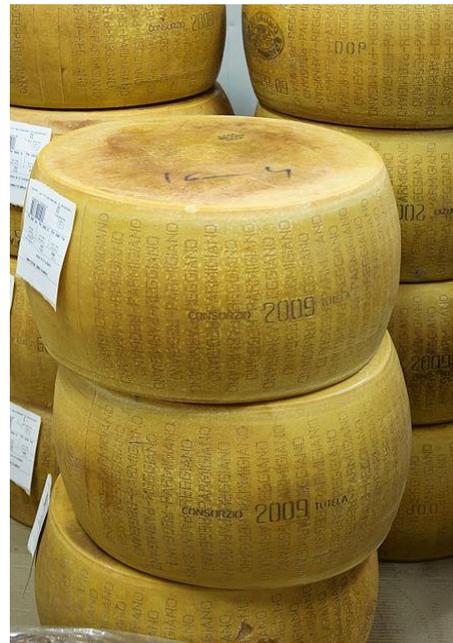
Source: ²⁰

International Case Study: Emilia-Romagna Region

In Emilia-Romagna, a north Italian region, co-operatives produce around 30 percent of the region's GDP and two out of every three inhabitants are members of a co-operative. Part of the strength of this regional co-operative economy has been the range of horizontal, vertical and complementary networks. However, there are also a number of legislative frameworks that support co-operatives and co-operative ways of working.

One law exempts co-operative profits saved as reserves from corporate taxation (these profits are indivisible to members). Another law also requires 3% of profits to be sent to co-operative development funds and federations, strengthening the co-operative movement through creating new coops and supporting existing ones.

Co-operative success in the region of Emilia-Romagna reflects broader societal co-operative values. Social and financial capital built up by co-operatives is considered to belong not only to the current members but to future generations.



Parmigiano Reggiano¹ is one of 44 PDO and PGI products of the Emilia Romagna region.

Source: 21; 22; 23; 24; 25;26

In order to scale-out co-operative ways of working within Wales and build a thriving sustainable and just food system within Wales, support for sectors beyond the food system is key. Food co-operatives need to be located within a wider co-operative landscape within society where co-operative ways of working are becoming mainstream – whether in the form of social housing co-operatives, co-operative energy schemes and co-operative finances – as well as policy-making at a range of scales.

Working towards placing co-operative ways of working at the heart of Welsh policy will make Wales a pioneering nation of cooperators.

Co-operative Principles



Cultivating Co-operative Economies

Co-operative ways of working foster collaborative rather than competitive economies; efficient, ecological use of resources, and; more equitable, democratic ways of trading. Within the food system co-operative economies connect producers and consumers and build solidarity; share resources, tools and infrastructure; and scale-out more equitable and just co-operative economies.

Stakeholders identified a number of key challenges currently facing co-operatives and co-operative ways of working within Wales. This includes access to land, distribution costs, lack of processing units and the dominance of food economies that do not accurately reflect ecological or social costs of food. There is further identified current lack of hubs for the processing and distribution of locally produced food within Wales. Co-operatively-run processing units, food hubs and community-food centres were identified as effective means of supporting sustainable and just food economies within Wales.

Producing co-operatively

Currently, 0.1% of land in Wales is used for growing fruit and vegetables - 1,599 ha out of 1,842,878 ha of agricultural land.²⁷ This is enough to supply an estimated 5 % of requirement for the population of Wales (based on 5 a day).²⁸ Those involved in small-scale horticulture, however, felt there were significant opportunities for scaling-out horticultural production and developing local food economies within Wales. Food hubs for collective distribution were considered a means of scaling-out sustainable local food economies and enabling more communities to access local, ecological and affordable food.

Many producers felt the need for pricing that reflects the real costs of producing, processing and distributing sustainably and ethically produced food. Here, they saw opportunity in operating within local food markets where there are pricing structures that reflect the 'real' ecological and social costs of food whilst also supporting communities in accessing affordable, healthy food.

In order for sustainable food production to scale-out, there is a need for: increase in fruit and vegetable production in Wales; greater support regarding access to land (particularly for new entrant growers), training in sustainable food production, infrastructural support for food hubs.

Distributing and Processing Co-operatively

Transporting produce across regions of Wales and beyond was identified as a challenge facing co-operatives, particularly amongst larger distributing and processing producer-led co-operatives. Although co-operatives enable producers to work collectively, transport

costs constitute one of the most significant sustainability challenges mentioned amongst stakeholders from the meat and dairy sector - particularly when it comes to transporting raw produce with a short lifespan, such as milk. The lack of co-operatively run processing units within Wales, particularly within the organic dairy, meat and cereal sectors was identified as a key challenge facing co-operatives.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges of navigating the geography of Wales, several stakeholders recognised potential advantages of producing, distributing and trading within Wales via local food economies. Some producers suggested working co-operatively enables navigation of the potentially challenging terrain of the Welsh countryside - particularly for small producers located in remote areas of Wales, that otherwise would not be able to reach markets. This could also include sharing large machinery, otherwise inaccessible to small producers.

Co-operatively managed processing and distributing food hubs were identified as essential for enabling more communities in Wales to access locally produced, affordable food. This gap was identified by stakeholders as potential opportunities for sustainable food futures in Wales. However, it was noted that they would require significant start-up costs and infrastructural support, particularly if they were to be co-operatively run.

Welsh Case study: Open Food Network

The Open Food Network is a **platform co-operative** supporting the development of hubs for local food distribution. Members include food producers and food hubs and shops. Via the online platform, producers can sell to other shops and hubs as well as direct to consumers; wholesalers can manage buying groups and supply food hubs; communities can set up food hubs enabling trade and distribution within the local community.



Currently, over 1,000 producers and around 50 community enterprises running local food hubs are registered on the Open Food Network UK. Open source software supports the distribution of local food via food hubs. As a model of co-operatively managed software, all members collectively own the software and data.

According to Nick Weir (Open Food Network):

"OFN shortens food supply chains...giving as much of the value to the producer whilst making food as affordable as possible to the eaters." (OFN)

Trading Co-operatively

Online software and digital tools offer means of overcoming certain challenges facing the food sector - enabling technical assistance (for example, software that supports producers attain specific quality standards); distribution (for example, via online platforms), and; network building (for example, via online social media platforms). The Open Food Network²⁹ (OFN) is identified as an innovative case of a co-operative using technology to support local food economies.

Co-operative Economies and Food Justice

Food hubs have the potential to support sustainable and just food futures. We understand food hubs as “networks and intersections of grassroots, community-based organisations and individuals that work together to build increasingly socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound food systems that connect farmers with consumers as directly as possible.”³⁰ Using this definition of food hubs we would include but are not limited to food distribution centres, online platforms, farmers’ markets, community kitchens and certification programmes.

The Stop Community Food Centre³¹ presents an innovative example of a community-based hub addressing food justice through cultivating local food economies.

International Case Study: The Stop Community Food Centre: Toronto, Canada

The Stop is a community hub supporting access to local, ecological produce and food skills in a low income neighbourhood in Toronto. Their work **addresses healthy food access**

through community meals, affordable fresh produce markets and healthy food distribution programs; **builds food skills, knowledge and confidence** through community kitchens, gardens and training programs, and; **supports education and engagement** through peer advocacy and support, community action training, social justice clubs and volunteer programs.



Other communities took notice of The Stop’s powerful model, and in 2012 Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) was launched to drive the development of community food centres based on The Stop across the country. Today, these two distinct, autonomous organizations support each other’s work to advocate for healthier communities and more equitable social policy.

Co-operative Principles



Learning Together for a Co-operative Society

The commitment to education is a core co-operative principle. Education, training and information were discussed with all stakeholders in this study, including both support for setting-up and managing co-operatives as well as the broader training landscape for sustainable food systems. Funding was identified as the main obstacle by stakeholders in terms of accessing consistent and high-quality training and relevant advice.

There is huge potential for improving the quality and availability of advice and training on co-operatives in the food sector in Wales as well as raising public awareness on co-operatives. Investing in these provisioning services would support the scaling-out of co-operative food economies within Wales. There is also a key role for education within and between co-operatives both in terms of educating members on co-operative principles and co-operatives supporting each other through mentoring and advice on co-operative structure, and sectoral expertise. This internal and external form of solidarity both works to expand the co-operative economy and movement within Wales as well as increasing the availability of agricultural and business management training.

Setting up and Managing Co-operatives

As the co-operative structure is still relatively marginal in the Welsh food system there is a need to both raise awareness around co-operative ways of working and support new and emergent sustainable food co-operatives.

There were mixed experiences around support for food co-operatives within Wales. Some stakeholders had found the Wales Co-operative Centre (WCC) and Co-operatives UK were able to provide useful advice on legal structure whereas others felt there was limited support or advice available within Wales for new and fledgling co-operatives starting-up. These findings are reflective of the current focus of WCC's funding - WCC has not had funding relating to the food sector since 2004. This issue was highlighted in a report commissioned by Social Business Wales³² which recommends that WCC move to providing specialist advice to existing and start-up co-operatives in food.

It is important that such support reaches all forms of co-operatives at all scales and in all sectors – there is for example an identified gap in specialist training and support for small-scale horticultural co-operatives, co-operative processing units, community-based food hubs and other community-led food initiatives. For small-scale horticultural co-operatives, Social Farms and Gardens were seen as a key organisation for supporting co-operative ways of working via programmes like the Community Supported Agriculture Wales network. Additionally, Farming Connect provides a key mentoring scheme which could be expanded to ensure it is capable of offering appropriate support for sustainable farming.

It was also noted by several stakeholders that the co-operative model is still fairly marginal within Wales and new food businesses setting up are often ill-informed about co-operative ways of working when seeking advice. We identify wider work to be done in terms of informing Welsh business advisory services of the potential opportunities regarding co-operative ways of working, as well as the wider public. The case of Coed Organics³³ provides an example of the gap in support for agricultural co-operatives.

Educating *within* Co-operatives

It was noted by key stakeholders that education *within* co-operatives around co-operative principles is crucial to the continuation and sustainability of that co-operative. Although having a co-operative legal structure did not ensure that the business was run by co-operative principles, it was seen as useful for safeguarding co-operative ways of working which might be lost in a more informal co-operative structure over time.

Educating *between* Co-operatives

Several stakeholders emphasised the importance of co-operation between co-operatives to educate around co-operative ways of working and scaling out of the co-operative model. Additionally, stakeholders who strongly identified with the co-operative values had often first encountered co-operative ways of working through interaction with other co-operatives through training and work experience.



Welsh Case Study: Coed Organics

Coed Organics is a worker's co-operative operating a veg box scheme in the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff. They recently became a Co-operative Society as this better reflected their existing values and ways of working. They found current provision within Wales for setting up cooperatives to be lacking and instead received support from Co-operatives UK which they saw as a useful service for signposting to further sources of information. However, they noted that it still "felt like a bit of a struggle" to get consistent and clear advice and that they still feel that most businesses are not informed about or encouraged to explore Co-operative Societies as an option.

Currently, this opportunity for scaling out is hampered by the relatively small number of co-operatives existing in the food sector in Wales and therefore require institutional support. Once co-operatives in Wales reach a critical mass they will be more self-sustaining in terms of providing co-operative-to-co-operative training.

As well as informal networks and advice, many stakeholders also mentioned the importance of mentoring schemes such as those offered through Development Trust Wales, Business Wales, Social Farms and Gardens, Pathways to Farming and Farming Connect.



Welsh Case Study: Cae Tan

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is an approach to farming where the responsibilities, risks and rewards are shared between growers and members. Cae Tan is a grower-led CSA meaning decisions are guided by the growers, supported by the members of the CSA who pay for a share of the crop in the form of a weekly box of veg. There are currently 120 members of the Cae Tan CSA who pick up their weekly veg box from a local hub.

Cae Tan aims to help establish new growers and build local produce availability. Currently, the head grower and assistant grower manage farm operations, supported by an apprentice and a number of volunteers. Through the CSA model, Cae Tan are creating a range of opportunities for new entrant growers including training and employment. Over the last four years, two apprentices have moved on to secure employment in horticulture - one has become assistant grower at Cae Tan, one has set up a salad growing social enterprise. Another is working towards setting up a sister CSA in the Swansea area.

Alongside their apprenticeship scheme, Cae Tan run a Sustainable Schools Programme where primary school pupils from 5 schools in the Swansea area are learning about sustainable farming.

Food Training Landscape in Wales

There was a broad agreement that the food education and training landscape is "pretty sparse" and needed to be more connected, particularly in horticulture. Small-scale stakeholders, such as Cae Tan³⁴, saw themselves as key actors in expanding training opportunities through mentoring and apprenticeships. **Work-based apprenticeships and traineeships, formal training programmes, qualifications for trainers and training centres** to support new entrants were identified as initiatives that could support the scaling-out of sustainable food futures in Wales. Some stakeholders further emphasised the importance of **accreditation of training** at recognised educational levels. There is scope for collaboration between organisations and educational institutions to provide accreditation, such as in the case of biodynamic apprenticeship scheme.

Short-term funding has resulted in **gaps in the food-sector training landscape** within Wales at certain points in time. Whilst many of the smaller-scale stakeholders connected lack of funding with sparse training opportunities, large-scale stakeholders were critical of the quality of government-funded training and preferred private consultancy or formal high-level qualifications. Training delivered by a broad range of actors on the basis of winning government grants was considered as potentially **damaging to consistency and quality** in comparison with base funding provided to experienced and trusted organisations.

The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project³⁵ demonstrates how learning can be a vehicle for bringing different actors together to build sustainable and just food systems.



International Case Study: New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

New Entry was launched in 1998 by Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy to develop a strategy to integrate recent immigrants and refugees with farming backgrounds into Massachusetts agriculture.

Through the scheme they offer farmer training, land access and support for market entry. Their mission is "to improve local and regional food systems by training the next generation of farmers to produce food that is sustainable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate and making this food accessible to individuals regardless of age, mobility, ethnicity, or socio-economic status."

The project addresses food justice via the New Entry CSA and Food Access Programme. The CSA scheme provides a reliable market for 20 new entrant farmers. The Food Access program provides fresh produce to over 2,000 food insecure individuals subsidised through a scheme whereby financial support closes the gap between what consumers can afford and what farmers need to cover costs of production and earn a living wage. Donations, grants and CSA membership subsidises the CSA share enabling low income individuals to access fresh produce and New entrant producers to benefit from income generated via the Food Access program sales.



Policy Recommendations

When co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, solidarity, equality and equity are embedded within local communities, co-operative ways of working demonstrate potential for contributing to a sustainable and just food system. Achieve this in Wales requires further support for co-operative modes of training, access to land, processing and distribution and marketing.

Three Areas of Policy Recommendations for a Sustainable and Just Food System

1) Cultivating Sustainable, Just and Co-operative Food Production

A Welsh agricultural policy that works to support **sustainable** and **just food production** in Wales needs to address the current gap in horticultural and arable production in order to provide for a healthy, sustainable and just diet. It recognises the potential role of co-operative ways of working and values in achieving this.

- a. Support the **scaling-out of horticultural production**, for example via apprenticeships, training and mentoring, and provides optional support for existing meat and dairy farmers interested in diversification to horticultural production.
- b. Support with **access to land** for new-entrants seeking to work on the land co-operatively and sustainably and further addressing current limitations of the planning process – for example planning permission for co-operative distribution centres, food hubs and dwellings.

2) Co-producing Local Food Economies and Cultures through Food Hubs

An integrated policy environment within Wales needs to recognise the vital link between sustainable and just food, vibrant culture, and the health and well-being of future generations. This requires a Wales-wide action plan that catalyses local food economies through development of **co-operative food hubs** and **community food centres**.

Co-operative food hubs can support producers through co-operative processing and distribution enabling resources and access to local markets. **Community food centres** can further be spaces for diverse communities in Wales to come together to access healthy, local and affordable fresh produce, foster vibrant food cultures, educate about co-operative values and principles and catalyse local food innovation and enterprises.

Together co-operative food hubs and community food centres can cultivate co-operative Welsh food economies and empower communities to achieve sustainable and just food futures.

- a. Set-up support (including funding and subsidised rates) for **co-operative processing** (particularly in meat, dairy, cereals and plant-based products).
- b. Infrastructural and set-up support for diverse communities within Wales to come together to create **co-operative food hubs** and **community food centres**.

3) Supporting Co-operative Welsh Economies: Information, Training and Advice

A sustainable and just food system is aligned with co-operative values and principles. In order for the two to support one another, there needs to be **education** both around co-operative principles and values and sustainable and just food systems. Embedding education around co-operative values and principles within Welsh policy will support and enable communities to play an active role in creating sustainable and just food futures.

This will **enable the scaling-out of co-operative ways of working within Wales and ensure consistency and quality of provision.**

- a. Support for setting up **regional training centres for sustainable food production** that draw upon and bring together the wealth of knowledge of farmers and business owners through collaboration. These centres could support new co-operatives and co-operative ways of working as well as enabling accreditation and/or financial support for farmers wanting to deliver traineeships and training programmes.
- b. Long-term core funding from government for **training and support** for new and existing **sustainable food co-operatives, community food hubs** and **community food centres**. Advice and further education on both co-operative ways of working and co-operative legal structure tailored to the food sector available to businesses regardless of size or turnover.
- c. Embedding **co-operative education** within Welsh educational policy and business provision services.

Now is time for different branches of government and different political parties to work co-operatively to create a coherent, cross-sectoral Welsh Food Policy which will ensure a sustainable and just food future in Wales.

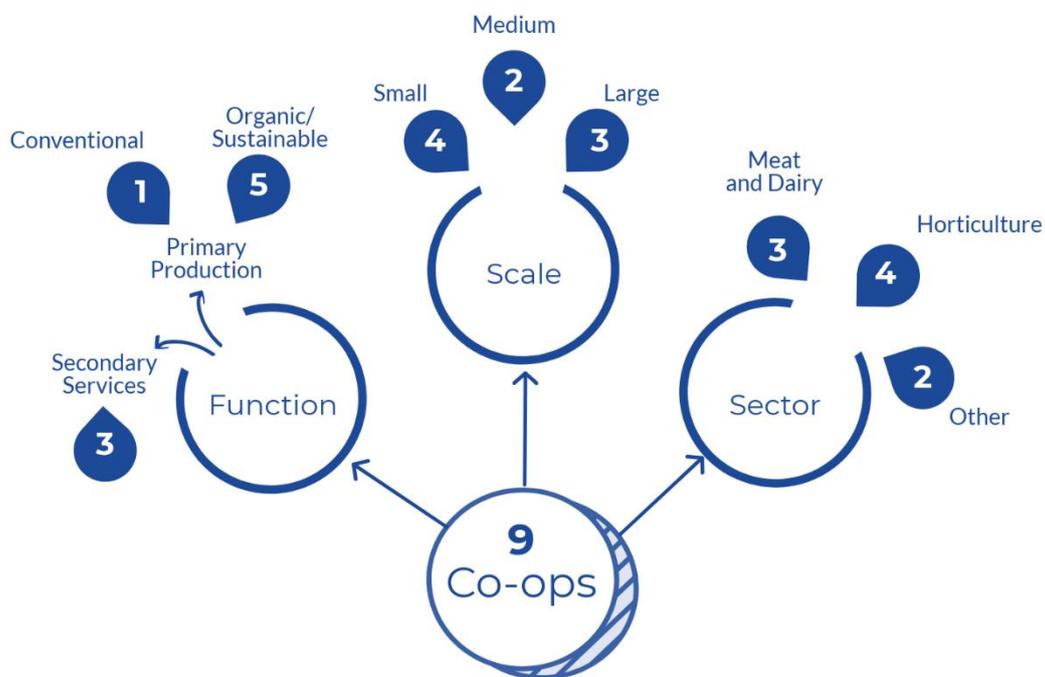
Appendix

Methodology

For this report, we sought to speak with a broad range of co-operatives in terms of function, scale and sector operating within the food system in Wales. A number of key organisations operating in the horticulture, dairy, meat, processing and food sector were identified, along with a number of key supporting organisations in the sector. It was found that co-operatives in the meat and dairy sectors tended to be large and medium consortium co-operatives, whereas those in horticulture were more likely to be small-scale organic or sustainable production.

We interviewed twelve stakeholders representing nine co-operative businesses, two organisations working with co-operative principles informally, and a representative from the Wales Co-operative Centre were interviewed (see fig. 1). An interview question guide was followed during interviews. The research was underpinned by the BSA³⁶ and Cardiff University guidelines on research ethics.

Figure 1 Sample of co-operatives by function, scale and sector.



Endnotes

- ¹Only 24% of people in Wales eating 5+ a day. Welsh Government. (2017) National Survey for Wales. Available at: http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/nationalsurvey/?slideld=2&topic=population_health&tab=el_home&lang=en.
- ² The case for action on obesity in Wales <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/97832> [accessed July 2019]
- ³ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/> [accessed July 2019]
- ⁴ Willett, W., Rockström, J., Loken, B., Springmann, M., Lang, T., Vermeulen, S., Garnett, T. et al. 2019. "Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems." *The Lancet*. 393 (10170): 447-492.
- ⁵ Lang, Tim, T. Lewis, T. Marsden, and E. Millstone. "Feeding Britain: food security after Brexit." (2018). See also Steffen, W. et al. (2015). "Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet." *Science* 347, no. 6223: 1259855
- ⁶ <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-makes-climate-emergency-declaration>
- ⁷ Food processing is any method used to turn fresh foods into food products. This can involve one or a combination of the following: washing, chopping, pasteurising, freezing, fermenting, packaging and many more. <https://www.eufic.org/en/food-production/category/food-processing>
- ⁸ Figure calculated using data set for all registered co-operatives in the UK and then identifying 'live' co-operative businesses in Wales within Agriculture, Wholesale or Retail with a focus on food. Date set from the Co-operatives UK open data set (<https://www.uk.coop/open-data>) [accessed June 2019]
- ⁹ The Community Food Co-operative programme began in 2004 and at its peak involved around 300 community food co-operatives hosted in venues such as schools and churches and bringing affordable fruit and vegetables to communities through collective purchasing and linking them directly with producers. The funding for this programme ended in 2015 and it is difficult to gauge how many of these co-operatives still exist and none were found during the scoping for this research. <https://www.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/shared-practice-directory/community-food-co-operative-programme/>
- ¹⁰ See <https://www.country-markets.co.uk/>
- ¹¹ International Co-operative Alliance. 2018. Co-operative identity, values & principles. ICA: Brussels. <https://www.ica.coop/en/co-operatives/co-operative-identity>
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Icon designs attributed to various creators - <https://thenounproject.com/>
- ¹⁵ (Willet et al., 2019).
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Just Food. 2010. What is Food Justice? New York: Just Food.
- ¹⁸ Agyeman, J., R. Bullard, and B. Evans. 2003. *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.bancorganics.co.uk/>
- ²⁰ DePasquale, Dan, Surbhi Sarang, and Natalie Bump Vena. 2017. "Forging Food Justice Through Co-operatives in New York City." *Fordham Urban Land Journal* 45: 909-950.
- ²¹ Duda, John. 2016. The Italian Region Where Co-ops Produce a Third of its GDP. YES! Magazine July 5 2016. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/the-italian-place-where-co-ops-drive-the-economy-and-most-people-are-members-20160705>

-
- ²² Menzani, Tito, and Vera Zamagni. 2010. "Co-operative networks in the Italian economy." *Enterprise & Society* 11 (1): 98-127.
- ²³ Cracogna, Dante, Antonio Fici, and Hagen Henry. 2016. *International handbook of co-operative law*. supra note 198 496-497.
- ²⁴ Crowell, Erbin. 2009. Cooperating Like We Mean It: The Co-operative Movement In Northern Italy. *GEO 2* (II) <http://www.geo.coop/node/357>
- ²⁵ Agriculture and Food: Emilia Romagna Region. <https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/en/agriculture-and-food>
- ²⁶ European Commission. 2019. Quality Schemes Explained. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/quality-schemes-explained>
- ²⁷ Welsh Government. 2015. Welsh Agricultural Statistics 2014. Statistical Publications Unit. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- ²⁸ Wheeler, A. 2016. Beyond 5 a day. Available at: <https://foodmanifesto.wales/2015/09/25/beyond-5-a-day/>.
- ²⁹ <https://openfoodnetwork.org.uk/>
- ³⁰ Social justice dimensions include accessible, inclusive, culturally appropriate, participatory as well as health-based considerations. Economically robust means the food system keeps as much money as possible in local economies, provides a living to farmers and food that is economically accessible. Ecologically resilient implies regeneration and transformation. Alison Blay-Palmer , Karen Landman , Irena Knezevic & Ryan Hayhurst. 2013. Constructing resilient, transformative communities through sustainable "food hubs", *Local Environment*, 18:5, pp524.
- ³¹ <https://www.thestop.org/>
- ³² Parker, J., Griffiths, E. Teifi, I. 2018. *Co-operative development in the Welsh food sector*. Social Business Wales: Aber.
- ³³ <https://www.coedorganic.co.uk/>
- ³⁴ <http://caetanrsa.org/en/>
- ³⁵ <https://nesfp.org/>
- ³⁶ BSA. 201). *Statement on Ethics*. BSA: Durham. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf