

Increasing agroecological farming in the Cardiff region: an initial exploration

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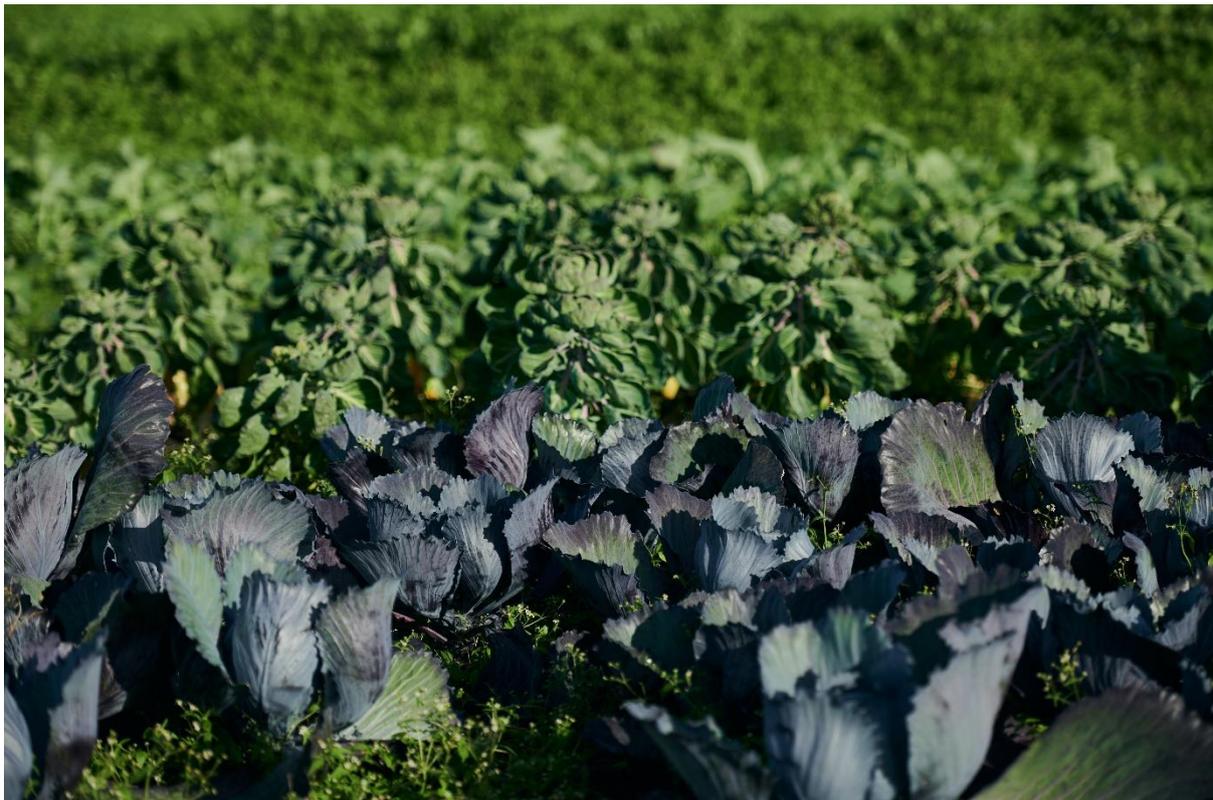
Summary

In November 2022 Food Cardiff hosted an event as part of the [Fringe Farming project](#), to bring together stakeholders in the region to look at how to increase agroecological food production in and around Cardiff.

This report summarises the barriers, opportunities and potential actions which the 22 stakeholders identified during the workshop.

As a result, in 2023 Food Cardiff and partners will convene a Fringe Farming working group, which will look at how to take forward this work across the Cardiff Capital Region.

If you are interested in finding out more about the project or being part of future discussions please contact foodsensewales@wales.nhs.uk





Background

What is the Fringe Farming project?

The [Fringe Farming programme](#), led by [Sustain](#), is a collaboration with partners across the UK to understand barriers, identify opportunities and local actions, and develop national policy to enable agroecological farming at the edge of cities as part of a green economic recovery.

In 2021, the Fringe Farming collaboration produced a series of action-planning events, place-based research, and policy briefings in [Bristol](#), [Glasgow](#), [London](#), and [Sheffield](#). From this, a report outlining national and local policy recommendations to support opening up peri-urban land for agroecological food production was published. [Read it here](#).

In 2022, Cardiff joined the programme to undertake action planning to highlight opportunities, barriers, and the resources that might be required for next steps. This work was led by the local sustainable food partnership [Food Cardiff](#).

Project Objective

To identify and implement actions to increase the amount of agroecological food produced in the urban and peri-urban areas of Cardiff.

What is agroecology?

For the purpose of this project, Food Cardiff worked from the definition used by the Landworkers' Alliance:

“Agroecology is the use of principles in farming practices that ensure a balance between plants, animals, people and their environment. Agroecological farming practices aim to work with wildlife, mitigate climate change and give power to local growers and communities to create systems best suited to their needs”

The project scope included all forms of commercial agroecological food production, including meat, dairy, eggs, arable and horticulture.

[WWF's Land of Our Future case studies](#), produced by the Landworkers' Alliance and Food Sense Wales, highlight agroecological practices in action on Welsh farms.

It is worth noting that some participants felt a need for a more specific definition of what agroecology is, to include detail on farming methods.



What is Food Cardiff?

Food Cardiff believes that the food we eat has a huge impact on life in Cardiff – not just on people’s health, but on communities and businesses, farmers and food producers, and the environment too. Good food creates strong, healthy, resilient communities.

Food Cardiff is a city-wide partnership of individuals and organisations. It acts as a hub for connecting the people and projects working to promote healthy, environmentally sustainable and ethical food across the city; it acts as a voice for wider change.

Food Cardiff is part of [Food Sense Wales](#), which aims to influence how food is produced and consumed in Wales, ensuring that sustainable food, farming and fisheries are at the heart of a just, connected and prosperous food system.

Where is the Cardiff peri-urban region?

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Sourcebook](#) (2022) states:

“Peri-urban agriculture takes place in the urban periphery. Peri-urban spaces act as a transitional zone between the inner city and the countryside; they tend to undergo dramatic change over time: land prices rise, there is an influx of people both from rural and intra-urban areas, density increases, multiple land-uses emerge and construction spreads.”

Initially, the scope of this project was limited to the Cardiff Council local authority area. However, to achieve the objective of increasing peri-urban agroecological farming, Food Cardiff quickly identified the need to take a regional approach, for example looking at the Cardiff Capital Region.

The Cardiff Capital Region is a partnership between the ten local authority areas in South East Wales - Blaenau Gwent; Bridgend; Caerphilly; Cardiff; Merthyr Tydfil; Monmouthshire; Newport; Rhondda Cynon Taf; Torfaen; and Vale of Glamorgan.

The region has a [population of 1.5 million](#) (of which just over [360,000 reside in Cardiff](#)) and includes the two cities of Cardiff and Newport, market towns, the South Wales Valleys, rural communities and coastal areas.

Stakeholder Workshop



Attendees and pre-event questionnaire

In addition to Food Cardiff and Sustain, 22 stakeholders attended the event (of 25 registered). The sectors of those who attended are listed in the table below.

The largest group represented were farmers or growers at 28%, followed by industry representatives at 14%.

Sector	Number of participants (many participants selected more than one option)
Farmer / Grower	8
Industry Representative	4
Land Owner	3
NGO / Food Partnership	3
Other	3
Food Retailer / Markets	2
Policy Maker	2
Land Seeker	1
Hospitality	1
Consultancy	1
Researcher	1

When registering, participants were asked some questions to inform this report. Answers were open-ended but then grouped into key themes. 19 people responded and their responses could cover more than one theme.

1. What do you think are the greatest **barriers to increasing agroecological (climate and nature friendly) farming in and around Cardiff?**

Key Response Themes	Number of mentions
Access to land	9
Attitudes & knowledge (respondents mentioned attitudes towards farmers, culture, lack of information, lack of education)	7
Market for agroecological food (respondents mentioned cost of food and balance of farmers being paid for quality food, accessible distribution models)	4
Availability of land (specifically the lack of available land or geographical limitations)	4
Skills	4
Start-up investment	2

2. What do you think are the greatest **opportunities to increase agroecological (climate and nature friendly) farming in and around Cardiff?**

Key Response Themes	Number of mentions
Current demand from citizens	6
Opportunity to increase demand and markets (responses included both physical infrastructure and driving up demand through marketing and education)	5
That Fringe Farming could be solution to tackle challenges (respondents mentioned climate emergency, health & wellbeing, local economy, supply chain resilience)	5
Taking a collaborative regional approach	4
Agriculture Bill	1



Workshop Overview

Cardiff's Fringe Farming Stakeholder Workshop was held in November 2022 with the following aims:

1. Support the development of a cross-sector action plan for commercial agroecological food production in the Cardiff region;
2. Facilitate practical connections between people and projects (e.g. land owners and producers) around Cardiff;
3. Showcase an example of an urban horticulture enterprise

The event started with a tour of [Cardiff Salad Garden](#), which is a not-for-profit social enterprise with a commercial element. Cardiff Salad Garden supplies salad by bike to over 40 regular household customers and 11 restaurants, as well as providing volunteering opportunities to improve mental health and reduce loneliness and isolation.

This was followed by a roundtable discussion for participants to share their experiences and perspectives about the barriers and opportunities to increase peri-urban farming.

For the final session, participants split into three groups for an action planning workshop, with the following themes and discussion points:

Themed Groups	Discussion Points
1. Land Access	a) Actions participants or their organisations can take
2. Skills & Training (farmers and new entrants)	b) Actions participants or their organisations can influence
3. Education & Marketing (citizens)	



Summary of Barriers and Opportunities

Below is a summary of the barriers and opportunities identified by participants during the roundtable, with some additions from stakeholders unable to attend.

Agriculture (Wales) Bill 2022 and Sustainable Farming Scheme

One of the largest barriers *and* opportunities which was discussed was the Agriculture (Wales) Bill 2022, which provides the framework on which all future agricultural support can be delivered. The Agriculture (Wales) Bill 2022 establishes Sustainable Land Management as the framework for future farm support and the Sustainable Farming Scheme (the Scheme) is being developed as the source of future Government support for farmers in Wales.

Participants felt they could influence the Scheme, but many are holding off planning new activity until the Scheme is published. Participants also raised challenges within the proposals, such as targets for tree cover and lack of financial support for small horticultural enterprises. Some opportunities were raised, such as the [new horticulture schemes](#).

Land Availability, Access and Start Up Costs

Land availability was identified as an issue within the Cardiff local authority area itself, however policy KP18 in the [adopted Local Development Plan](#) does protect grades 1, 2 and 3a land from development and this policy will be taken forward in the Replacement LDP.

The peri-urban region outside of the Cardiff local authority boundary, including more rural areas such as Monmouthshire, could have more potential to increase agroecological food production.

Some participants felt that there was plenty of land available in the peri-urban region, but that other barriers such as skilled workers and demand were more of an issue.

The group identified some existing opportunities and best practice case studies including:

- [Farming Connect Venture](#) is designed to match farmers and landowners who are looking to step back from the industry with new entrants looking for a way into farming;
- Fonmon Estate in the Vale of Glamorgan has offered an opportunity for a horticultural enterprise;



- [Our Food 1200](#) are aiming to secure 1200 acres of land for regenerative horticulture in Monmouthshire & the Brecon Beacons;
- Tir Pontypridd is a land bank, looking to purchase land for community use, which could include agroecological farming.
- The community of Treherbert (represented through Welcome to Our Woods and the Rhondda Skyline Project) have recently signed a first-in-Wales Community Management Agreement with NRW following the production of a co-designed [Future Forest Vision](#) through 2021-22, including plans for innovative use of Welsh Government Woodland Estate for agroforestry and community food resilience.

Participants also felt that there is considerable competition in the current market for land, particularly for non-food production (e.g. housing, tree production, solar farms). The cost and availability of housing for farmers and growers was also raised as an issue. Participants felt that this is resulting in young people and new entrants being priced out of the market. The Landworkers' Alliance have [modelled the start-up costs](#) required to set up new horticultural enterprises, with a 3 acre market garden being in the region of £150,000. One opportunity raised, was about the potential to better understand the impact on health and wellbeing, once land is secured and utilised.

Skills and Jobs

Participants discussed the fact that farming requires skilled workers and identified an opportunity to upskill both new entrants and existing farmers to adopt agroecological practices. Some stakeholders felt that agroecological farming should be better defined to enable farmers to change production methods.

Participants felt it is short sighted to rely on volunteer labour and that there is an opportunity to better develop career pathways to dignified land-based livelihoods which offer security and pay a living wage. Particularly within the commercial horticulture sector, some participants felt there were more grower jobs advertised than staff available and that this is a key barrier to increasing production.

One opportunity for existing enterprises, are programmes such as [Tyfu Cymru](#) which offer free training and support.



Supply Chains and Marketing

Participants discussed the opportunity for the market to drive an increase in agroecological food production.

For example, as part of a small pilot in 2022, the Cardiff Council education catering team worked with a local horticulture enterprise and a wholesaler to purchase locally grown vegetables for 'Food and Fun', a summer holiday provision scheme operating in 29 schools for over 1500 pupils. Although it was a small pilot, this could be expanded to support an increase in agroecological food production in future, particularly in the context of the roll out of [Universal Free School Meals](#) for primary pupils in Wales. The [Resilient Green Spaces](#) programme is also helping establish five new enterprising and sustainable food hubs in communities across Wales.

Participants also identified a need for marketing and education to increase households directly purchasing agroecological food. In the context of horticulture, one grower commented *“any effort to increase agroecological horticulture production without first working to increase demand, could have a very real, immediate, and harmful effect on existing local commercial producers”*.

Participants also raised the issue of both wholesale and individual customers expressing an interest in purchasing locally grown food but being unable or unwilling to pay the additional cost and/or being unable to adapt to seasonal changes.

Summary of Action Planning Workshop

Theme	Actions participants or their organisations can take	Actions participants or their organisations can influence
Land Access	<p>Gather case studies of best practice, which could include how to split larger farms into smaller plots or multiple enterprises</p> <p>Develop guidance for landowners on land-sharing / land-sparing, for example including methods of making tenancy secure</p> <p>Develop guidance for land seekers on how to approach landowners and undertake negotiations</p> <p>Host a dedicated land access event</p> <p>Offer available land for growing</p> <p>Investigate options for community growing to increase scale and provide produce commercially e.g. allotments, Incredible Edible</p>	<p>Influence One Planet Development requirements to increase their accessibility and their application to planning policy</p> <p>Build relationships and trust between landowners and land seekers, for example through food partnerships</p> <p>Influence the Sustainable Farming Scheme and Agriculture Bill</p>
Skills & Training (farmers and new entrants)	<p>Share positive case studies of new entrants and/or trainees</p> <p>Formalise existing training programmes to be more long-term, for example 3 years+</p> <p>Work with colleges to deliver courses in the Cardiff peri-urban region</p>	<p>Raise the profile of peri-urban farming as a career option, for example through careers fairs or services</p> <p>Influence the new Curriculum for Wales to embed agriculture and horticulture skills development</p>
Education & Marketing (citizens)	<p>Work with farms to increase information sharing and bring people onto the farm. It was noted there is willingness among farmers to engage in this</p> <p>Take farming into schools and including creative arts in food and farming education to share traditional skills</p> <p>Deliver campaigns to demystify local food sourcing</p>	<p>Influence education packages in schools which are provided by third sector or independent businesses</p> <p>Increase the number of peri-urban producers who can engage with schools</p> <p>Work to improve transport routes and options to move food in the peri-urban region, for example a shared delivery bank or procurement hub</p>

Next Steps for 2023

The stakeholder workshop has provided a strong start to realising the ambition to increase agroecological food production in the Cardiff peri-urban region.

Subsequent actions reported by participants include:

- Making connections around [The Sustainable Production & Supply of Food Challenge](#)
- Setting up meetings and discussions with others from the event to engage in collaborative projects (*reported by multiple participants*)
- Being part of a working group around Community Rights to Land legislation (*another participant shared a [paper on Community Assets](#) from Welsh Parliament Local Government and Housing Committee*)
- Further embedding actions to increase peri-urban agroecological food production into existing work such as the Resilient Green Spaces programme
- Attending the Wales Real Food and Farming Conference to network and progress conversations on peri-urban farming
- Offering to investigate Research and Development opportunities to support best practice

The overwhelming agreement for the next stage was to hold further workshops with a regional scope, to enable more actors to come together to discuss focal points of work, next steps and what we can do collaboratively to turn the aims into action points.

In 2023, Food Cardiff will convene a working group to progress this.

If you are interested in finding out more about the project or being part of future discussions please contact foodsensewales@wales.nhs.uk

Appendix 1. Workshop attendees and report contributors

With thanks to the following organisations who attended the Fringe Farming Stakeholder Workshop and/or contributed to the report:

Anonymous x 3
BIC Innovation
Blas Gwent
Cardiff Council
Cardiff Salad Garden
Coed Organic (<i>unable to attend workshop but contributed to report</i>)
DTA Wales
Farmers' Union of Wales
Food Vale
Landworkers' Alliance Cymru
Lantra
Our Food 1200
Pontypridd Land Society
Shared Assets (<i>unable to attend workshop but contributed to report</i>)
South Riverside Community Development Centre
Sustain
Urban-Vertical CIC
Welcome to Our Woods
WWF Cymru