



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT, DOCUMENT

Food and Drink Wales Industry Board: update from Alison Lea-Wilson (October 2024)

An update from board deputy chair Alison Lea-Wilson.

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I have lived in Wales since coming to Bangor University in the 1970s to study English. I completed a PGCE and taught for the following 2 years. However, I had always wanted to work for myself, so, together with my husband set up our first business associated with the sea.

This was Mona Seafoods, a wholesale fish, shellfish and game company supplying hotels and restaurants along the North Wales coast, selling our own farmed oysters into Blackpool and bringing back wet fish.

My next venture was the Anglesey Sea Zoo (Sŵ Môr Môn). A public aquarium which included a gift shop, a wet fish shop which also stocked Welsh cheeses, a restaurant, and a lobster and seahorse hatchery.

Tourism is very seasonal, and we needed to employ staff year-round. So Halen Môn was started to firstly run alongside the Sea Zoo. It quickly became apparent, we would need to sell the aquarium to give more time and energy to the sea salt business.

My work in the food industry means that I have a particular understanding of the issues facing start-ups and small businesses. Halen Môn is a family-run company. However, we supply Blue Chip companies such as PepsiCo and Mondelez so have the standards and systems of a much bigger business.

Anglesey Sea Salt Halen Môn is a Protected Designation of Origin food. I have first-hand experience of the importance of branding, delineating our offer from similar products and raising the quality and profile of what is essentially a commodity, which has facilitated growth in both domestic and export markets.

In my work with the Food and Drink Industry Board my aim is to understand what the industry needs to flourish. Also, to encourage producers to play their part in a partnership between the Welsh Government and the industry.

It could be to embrace different ways of working more sustainably, to sign up as

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a Fair Work Employer or to go the whole mile and become a BCorp, as we have done.

My long-term engagement with the clusters has allowed me to see at first hand the positive impact of these groups through their mutual support. I believe a close working relationship between the board and cluster groups will facilitate the delivery of strategic priorities.

The industry is stronger together. I am willing to do anything I can both as a board member and as co-owner of Halen Môn to make the food and drink industry in Wales be as successful as it can be, in Wales, the UK and the rest of the world.

In the last board meeting we discussed the importance of engaging with minority ethnic groups to further diversify the Welsh food offer whilst improving community integration.

In late October I will be attending the first Blas Cymru /Taste Wales conference in Llandudno with other members of the board. We will engage with Welsh food companies and other stakeholders. These will include Welsh Government contractors and consultants.

These stakeholders will be holding 1 to 1 meetings with producers in a variety of business critical subjects.

Together with the other board members, I will be delighted to meet up with anyone with an interest in the food and drink sector. We will discuss the undoubted challenges and barriers. Also the opportunities to further grow a vibrant, agile and prosperous sector.

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