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# Food and Drink Wales Industry Board: update from the Chair (June 2024)

The latest on the Welsh food and drink industry.

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It is a great honour to be elected as Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board (FDWIB) and I am equally delighted to have Alison Lea-Wilson as Vice Chair of the board. Having spent over 40 years in the sector, with all but three of those years being spent in Wales, I am only too aware of the ever-changing demands and challenges that food and drink manufacturing companies face on a daily basis. I have been lucky enough to work in a wide range of product categories, which has afforded me the opportunity to understand the diversity and complexity associated with the vast range of raw materials and processes that are essential to our sector.

Also joining the board for the first time are Alison Harvey, Valerie Creusailor and Graham Black, all of whom have been recently appointed. I'm sure that their knowledge and expertise will be a welcome and valuable addition to the group. Huw Thomas of Puffin Produce has also been reappointed and all of the members of the board are delighted to have access to his experience and expertise spanning both the agricultural and food processing sectors.

One of the first tasks undertaken in our first meeting was to develop a skills and experience matrix to better understand the capabilities of board members and their experience in relation to different product categories and the breadth of food industry issues. This has allowed us to map our expertise against the various subsectors and subjects of relevance within the food chain and I am encouraged that the breadth of our knowledge and experience encompasses the vast majority of sub-sectors in food manufacturing.

Access to the board and a clearer understanding of its function are of paramount importance. Going forward the board will meet in person once per quarter (for one day) and in between these physical meetings will be a shorter virtual meeting. Part of the remit of the board is to engage with other components of the supply chain, and it is our intention to use these online meetings to invite stakeholders from agriculture, hospitality and retail to share the challenges and opportunities in their operational areas.. This will allow members of the board to evaluate any potential interventions which can benefit the sector as a whole.

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We are blessed in Wales to have significant support from the Welsh Government in key disciplines that are essential to a robust and growing food economy. This support network, which includes the clusters network, allows a flow of information between food companies and other stakeholders. I am keen to develop closer links between the strategic priorities identified by the Cabinet Secretary and by board members, with the work of the cluster networks, which now boast over 300 members.

Engagement with the Cabinet Secretary and Welsh Government officials involved in both strategy and delivery will be essential to ensure that we maximise the board's impact through a coordinated approach which should be driven by industry. Access to relevant data and current reports on the issues facing the industry will play an important part in shaping the agenda for discussions at board meetings. Barriers to international trade, access to suitably trained staff, increasing sustainability demands, and above inflation overhead costs are just some of the factors which are feeding through to the board. It will be our role to discuss potential creative and practical interventions to support the food sector in Wales.

In the coming months I am hoping that we can use this portal to introduce the various members of the board who are geographically scattered across Wales. I hope this geographical spread will facilitate conversations and communications between the sector and board members on a local basis. Various board members will also be attending the Royal Welsh Show in July and they would welcome the opportunity to continue those conversations with colleagues in the sector, both from agriculture, food processing, retail and wholesale. We hope that the partnership will benefit integration in the food supply chain and lead to cross-fertilisation of ideas and a stronger food economy in Wales.

**Professor David Lloyd, Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board**

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