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Welsh Government

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# Food and Drink Wales Industry Board: update from the Chair (June 2021)

The latest on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, leaving the EU and the impact on the Welsh food and drink industry.

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Dear all,

As we reach the halfway point of the year, we can take time to reflect on a challenging first part of 2021, but also to think about the opportunities ahead of us.

As Wales continues to move cautiously and carefully towards easing Covid restrictions, the impacts of the pandemic on food and drink businesses are becoming more and more apparent. Many businesses are still suffering the impact of such a tumultuous 18 months and financial stress remains a challenge to many businesses. However, it is vital that we do not allow the pandemic to slow our growth momentum and this includes maintaining our focus on

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innovation and skills. We must work together with government to ensure we continue to invest in these key areas.

In a similar way, our vital industry is beginning to grasp the reality of leaving the European Union, but with many uncertainties still ahead, including the issue of Northern Ireland. As difficult as it may be to lift our eyes above the new challenges of doing business with the EU, we should not forget the potential opportunity provided by the various new trade deals which are currently being negotiated. As one door closes, another opens and we should be ready and prepared for those opportunities. Let's play a constructive and insightful role as these worldwide trade deals emerge.

As a Board, we recognise the world is changing and the next phase of our strategy will tackle these issues and work for solutions for the industry. In 2020 we appointed five new members to the Board to bring a wealth of new varied skills and experience, and these new appointees have been working alongside existing members to devise a strategy that supports recovery and future growth.

We know we currently export less than 10% of the food and drink we produce in Wales, and if we are to continue our growth we need to look towards expanding our sales in export markets particularly where we have competitive advantage as a nation. Supporting this expansion with training, innovation and skills will be key.

Finally, I would like to extend congratulations to Lesley Griffiths MS for her reappointment as Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd with food and drink in her portfolio. Lesley has always been a fantastic advocate for our industry and offered incredible support. We look forward to continuing to work together for the best interests of the industry.

As ever, collaboration is key and I would encourage food and drink businesses of all sizes and in all parts of Wales to engage with the Board and share your experiences. We should continue to share experiences, look for solutions and

navigate these uncertain times together.

**Andy Richardson, Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board**

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