



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT

Food and Drink Wales Industry Board: update from the Chair (March 2022)

The latest on how Brexit, Covid, and the crisis in Ukraine have impacted on the Welsh food and drink industry.

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The last two years have, without doubt, been the most challenging for our industry in living memory. Brexit, then Covid, then the crisis in Ukraine have deeply affected all of us and left scars in many ways.

The ongoing impact of these crises has created a perfect storm which cuts deep with all food and drink businesses. We know we're having to deal with labour shortages, steadily rising and fluctuating costs, supply chain threats and the challenge of passing on price rises to our customers who work in highly competitive markets and who supply consumers who are already feeling the pinch of inflation.

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So, despite all the challenges, have I become despondent with the Food & Drink industry? Absolutely not! My enthusiasm for the opportunities that Welsh Food & Drink continues unabated but it's not blind optimism.

We have an amazing industry. Our industry is one of the most innovative in Europe and if anyone doubts it then you should visit one of our many food and drink innovation centres in Wales. Innovation goes hand in hand with entrepreneurship and the SME business base we have in Wales provides both the seedbed and a fantastic springboard to leverage this innovation.

I do believe one of the things that makes our food and drink sector in Wales so special is our ability to collaborate both within Wales and across the UK. We are increasingly respected for our views and are playing a key role influencing the thinking of Westminster Government who hold the reins on a number of policy issues which affect our industry. Of course, many policy issues are devolved and we should recognise our Welsh Government for the support they continue to provide to our industry under difficult and changing circumstances.

I've written before about the excitement I feel about exports which provide a real opportunity for our sector. I believe it's essential that we work in partnership to identify opportunities in export markets where we can add value and retain a competitive position. Free trade agreements are evolving fast and worldwide with Indian and Canadian negotiations commenced and others soon to follow. We have a responsibility to be curious, look for opportunities which may not be initially obvious and be prepared to work with new and existing partners to realise opportunities. It's a journey.

And now to my final point – despite all our challenges, we live in a democracy and can sleep safely at night. We should never forget the plight of our Ukrainian friends at the hands of cruel aggressors and do all we can in our industry to ensure that those in Russia who are responsible pay dearly commercially for behaviour which has no place in a modern world.

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

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