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

The latest on how the Welsh food and drink industry as the Royal Welsh Show returns.

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Let's start on a positive note – wasn't it amazing to see everyone at the Royal Welsh Show in July after a 3-year break?

I was so encouraged to see so many of you at the event and hear your stories of resilience, innovation and agility which have helped the industry to adapt and even capitalise on the Covid pandemic. The ingenuity of this industry never ceases to amaze me and in many cases you've taken the opportunity to reinvigorate your businesses.

When we left the show on the final day back in 2019, who could possibly have predicted a Covid-19 pandemic and the huge impact it was to have on the global, UK and Welsh economy, the way businesses operate, and of course our personal lives.

As we aim to move on from Covid, we cannot shy away from the labour shortage we are currently facing across the UK. Brexit, the loss of migrant workers, the pandemic have all played a part and, for the first time, vacancies outweigh the number of people looking for work. This is having a detrimental impact on Welsh food and drink manufacturing, and we must find solutions to address the shortages.

I was particularly pleased to see the Food and Drink Careers Hub at the Royal Welsh Show raising the profile of careers. This initiative builds on the work of the Food Workforce Wales campaign which aims to encourage more people to work in the sector and which has had a reach of over 7 million via various social media platforms. The Food Workforce Wales campaign, launched in January this year, has been helping the sector with recruitment issues, showcasing the fantastic career opportunities and advertising real life jobs that are available right now through the Jobs Notice Board.

We often talk about the journey from field to fork, but quite often this jumps from agriculture straight to retail and hospitality, and vital messages about processing and manufacturing are not told. At the show, the Food and Drink Careers Hub,

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told the story of how the humble potato can be seen in the field, and it's journey through manufacturing, from harvesting, logistical tasks such as moving pallets of potatoes on forklift trucks, the many production operatives involved, hygiene management, the role of food scientists in new product development, and the importance of marketing and finance; each job role playing an important part on getting that humble potato onto the consumers plate.

Looking forward, I passionately believe Welsh food and drink is perfectly placed to thrive when markets recover, and things improve. This is not blind optimism but instead a sense of well-founded enthusiasm that the ingredients of our future success are already in place.

In my last newsletter I talked about the role the innovation will play in our future success. Now, I would like to consider sustainability. There is no doubt that the importance of sustainability has been temporarily put on the back burner by many businesses as they focus on survival following Covid and the effects of the war in Ukraine, particularly soaring energy prices. I fully understand the impact the current energy situation is having on our industry and the board have been working tirelessly to ensure policy makers are aware of the impact rising energy prices are, and will have, on our sector. I also recognise that the combination of rising and volatile costs is making planning for the future a real challenge.

Despite the current challenges, I am confident that the focus on sustainability will soon return because there is no doubt our future UK and International customers will want to see progress being made on sustainable food production which will become a "licence to do business" in the next few years.

I am therefore really pleased to hear that membership of the Wales Food and Drink Sustainability Cluster has increased to over 100 business members in addition to government bodies and academic organisations which demonstrates the interest Welsh Food and Drink businesses have in sustainability. If you're interested in knowing how sustainability could help create a more resilient business for the future and support to make your business model more

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sustainable, consider joining the sustainability Cluster where you'll find real peer-to-peer learning, support with your projects, and enrichment with inspiring case stories which inspire us all to "raise the sustainability bar".

And finally, many of you will be aware that the BBC Food and Farming Awards will be visiting Wales for the very first time in November. This is a huge feather in our cap for our industry in Wales and a real opportunity to present our credentials to the world in recognition of the growing role and influence that Welsh Food & Drink is playing on the UK, and indeed Global, food map.

Thank you for what you all continue to do for our vital industry.

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

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