

Welsh Food Alliance

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Health Improvement: Let's Keep it Simple

In proposing free school meals for all school aged pupils it is suggested that the Assembly requires a 20 year vision against how it will be judged. This is the key conclusion arising from Alliance responses to recent consultations. *One bold initiative, rather than many small schemes!*

A profit driven food and catering industry has a near strangle hold on providing food which pupils instinctively prefer, yet current dietary patterns undermine attempts to improve health. Do schools need a bonus of £100 a week income from school yard chip vans for the purpose of boosting school funds?

Breaking the cycle of deprivation

Getting the nutritional provision for pupils, especially girls, is pivotal in breaking the cycle of deprivation, which is inbuilt into the inequality of health. This is because nutrition is a major factor that materially affects children born to them.

The conclusion from the recent Survey of children 4-18 is that many more children need school meals than those eligible for free lunches. In recent research the Wynn's concluded that school meals had failed children in households with low or modest incomes.

Health of future generations

Government has announced substantial increases in health and education expenditure. Priority is being given to reducing child poverty and health inequality. Are not free school meals an efficient integrated targeted solution?

It is much cheaper and more cost

Free school meals for all present a unique opportunity to:

- *provide nutritious food*
- *influence eating habits*
- *teach the importance of good food for good health*
- *impact on the health of future generations*
- *support Welsh food and farming*

effective to feed pupils at school than to increase family incomes to levels at which nutritional adequacy results. Has anyone considered investing in our existing school meals service as a positive way of improving the health of future generations?

Children's taste buds develop in infancy, some would say before. Since the introduction of food groups' to guide the school meals service, caterers have faced an uphill struggle to challenge the high salt, sugar and fat culture, especially when pupils refuse traditional food. *Do we all need educating in opportunities and choices?*

Strategic framework & policy

A National Assembly strategic framework and policy direction will be required, which can be implemented by local authorities, preferably in the form of high quality school meals for all pupils.

This provides a great opportunity to improve the health of the people of Wales, to enable the Assembly to use its existing powers and resources to tackle a major inter-generational

barrier to health equality.

Future Action

It is now time for the Assembly to consider how we:

- support an *integrated policy* across sectors of health, nutrition, education, across agriculture and fisheries, manufacture and marketing.
- prepare to utilise future additional central government funding to *address child poverty* and health inequalities to provide a free school meal service in Wales from 2003/2004.
- *manage effectively* the delivery of acceptable good quality nutritious school meals, rather than catering contractor profits, which are influenced by pupil choice which is often nutritionally poor;
- put in place a *wholesale system* to support the delivery of food commodities to unitary authorities that are consistent with recommended dietary allowances and the key health messages,

Using new and existing resources so that we reallocate public money into local school meal budgets that could support appropriate local food production. *With free school meals healthy children would have greater opportunity to leave school to become healthy adults.*

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Food, Education, Health, Social Services & Sustainable Agriculture Strategy

We have had the opportunity to contribute to seventeen National Assembly for Wales (NAFW) and other consultations (see box on page 3). We have done this in the spirit of joined up government, which everyone is asked to espouse. Following our cover article on free school meals for all, we summarise our wide-ranging responses below.

Education and Lifelong Learning to 2010 *A new key feature*

As was discovered many decades ago *'to take advantage of a good education a good diet is essential'*. Environmental factors, nutrition, school meals, parental involvement, and action on commercial pressure is required. All should address the food and health as a key new feature to 'The Learning Country.'

To generate bottom up motivation and initiative pupils need to know why food education is central to good health. Provision should be strengthened to ensure that food technology be given the same consideration as other materials within the national curriculum design and technology.

Vocational education and equal opportunities

The new EU food hygiene legislation will disproportionately impact upon small to medium sized food and tourism enterprises, with opportunities for careers in food and related industries. The most cost-effective method of ensuring effective compliance with new EU food hygiene regulations will be to target food managers. This will need to be mandatory.

We estimate that 10,500 Welsh catering premises do not operate and document a Hazard Analysis system. This is equivalent to a large adult education programme, with significant potential in contributing to the NAFW's commitment to equal opportunities, in a sector where women predominate. We need to increase further education funding for quality practical catering skills training.

School Meals, food production and Local Health Alliances

School meals are central to the public health and this is well understood by

local councillors. It is central to the work of local authority led Local Health Alliances. Our agriculture and public procurement system needs to be better organised to provide quality food in schools. School kitchens and meals needs to be adequately funded as an essential part of the forthcoming NAFW /Food Standards Agency Nutrition Strategy, which should be linked to the Future of Farming in Wales.

Research into food groups', or analysing menu's will not uncover the fact that as a result of driving down meal prices during the Compulsory Competitive Tendering years, pre-formed and mechanically recovered meat products with the lowest possible cost go into school meals in the form of battered and bread crumbed meat shapes and sausages, etc. We need to substitute with good protein.

Future of Primary Care

Food security concerns the affordability, availability, and accessibility of food throughout the year. Following WHO Europe advice, food retailers and caterers are crucial partners in any primary care service that aims to ensure that the human body receives essential micro-nutrients at critical stages of the life cycle. (Key research questions are proposed to support future primary care strategy). Pressure on large food retailers can best be affected at the UK level, but needs co-ordinating across the UK. *Can the Health and Social Services Minister take action with other UK Health Ministers?*

Nutrition is not, but should be on the Assembly agenda, within the community and hospital settings. Malnourished patients not only stay longer in hospital, they cost more per day because they have more set backs. They pick up infections more readily and need more nursing if special feeding is required. Community nutrition services could improve the nutrition of people who become hospital patients, make effective use of hospital services, and give best value for patients and the NHS. *Have the different NHS Task and Finish Groups liased with each other?*

Acceptable free school meals, measuring nutrition standards (not food groups), and national curriculum changes are all part of a community nutrition service. Whilst valuing local community food initiatives, they are unlikely to address the food security needs of the whole population. Projects funded under the Health Inequalities Fund must include a literature search, and arrangements to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness.

National Diet & Nutrition Survey (NDNS)

Traditionally this has been an English survey with insufficient sample size to encapsulate population needs in Wales. NAFW should encourage the Food Standards Agency to consult on this issue, so that we may influence the development of the proposed NDNS specification of low-income rural and small urban area consumers.

Delayed Care Transfers

This requires a paradigm shift, beyond the medical model, in viewing food and health as an essential part of primary care strategy. This requires community nutrition services supporting choice and independent living. Emergency pressures Task Force measures should focus scarce resources upon barriers to food security, rather than soft information / education measures that do not offer best value. *Do we have clear evaluation criteria for such projects?*

In **Care Homes** we need to regulate food nutritional standards, with a national minimum standard such as that provided in the CORA software by the Caroline Walker Trust for older people in residential homes. Given growing demand for the supply of pre prepared, frozen and cooked food, we propose a Kite Mark system for public and private sector food operators supplying such 'Meals on Wheels' services in the home. As previously suggested NHS catering requires a national framework and standards to which all Trusts should work.

Inspection systems require more attention in residential and nursing homes, and the NHS, so that we include the essential criteria for a healthy nutritious diet. Urgent attention is

required to ensure effective food management safety systems (HACCPs). This should be supported by new European regulation to drive effective food hygiene manager training, to implement new systems.

Older Persons Strategy

We need to properly invest in preventive care policies that will involve the whole community, and provide the resources and structures to make this possible. In Wales, we need a single assessment tool, incorporating the same criteria where ever a need has been identified. This should help address the current inconsistency in service provision between local authorities. *Nutrition should be a key aspect of this tool kit.* Malnutrition is a particular cause for concern, and may affect up to one third of those over 75 years in Wales.

A contributory cause of malnutrition is inadequate income for those without occupational pensions especially women over 75 years. This means people lack access to resources to address these problems. This with increasing frailty and inability to carry kitchen equipment, or food from shops, is part of this downward spiral leading to lost independence. Malnutrition can deteriorate further in a downward spiral leading to hospitalisation. As family support decreases, older people are left in a vulnerable position.

We should recognise the importance of wide-ranging user knowledge and experience in participative policy formulation by stimulating meaningful participation that is properly resourced.

Plan for Wales 2001/ Future of Food and Farming

The UK Government has already indicated support for a *new food and health policy framework* mapped out both by the World Health Organisation (September 2000) and the European Union (December 2000). This new policy is very simple and appropriate: a three-way focus upon nutrition, safety and sustainable food supply.

The *First Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy* was finally published in November 2000. Civic society, retail food and caterers are key elements in any strategy, as are our education and

agricultural systems. See <http://www.hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk/nyfaweb/>

A stronger case could be made for agriculture and aquaculture by relating subsidies to socially useful production, particularly human health and reproduction. *In particular this supports our proposal for free school meals for all.* This means redirecting Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other funds.

For any age group to be poorly nourished, apart from being heartless, is not even economical. Our nutrition strategy can borrow a thought from Shakespeare's seven ages of man (and woman).

Listening to Children & Young People

We strongly support this aspect of NAFW's work, but this should take account of the supra-nationalisation of decision making that will be crucial to public health and consumer concerns, about fair trade, food safety and labelling.

Codex Committee on Veterinary Residues in Foods

Given the risks to human health from global food trade, in representations on the use of antimicrobials (or antibiotics) in animals, we proposed a TOTAL BAN world wide on the use of all antimicrobials as growth promoters. Intensive animal rearing systems, and animal feeds contribute to the increased use of antibiotics, and is of growing medical and consumer concern. With global trade this must be carefully regulated. We see little if any evidence that international Codex procedures can meet this challenge. Are Health Departments, the BMA, and the medical Royal Colleges being consulted on this vital health issue?

Draft EC Regulation - official controls on products of animal origins for human consumption

In detailed evidence to the European Commission and MEP's we proposed a new definition of "suitable, wholesome and healthy meat" to improve consumer protection, and to protect animal health and welfare. Attention is also required to strengthen EU official controls through a common standard for

professional training and development.

Draft Food Hygiene regulations

Europe are proposing radical changes as part of the free trade agenda. We have asked the Commission and MEP's several questions. Is the concept of 'food operator' a legally secure paradigm? Under subsidiarisation and HACCP codes, at food establishment level, who bears ultimate legal liability? Is the EU regulatory concept of a 'food operator' adequate? Who is legally responsible in the last resort? *Therefore we proposed action to establish a European standard for food hygiene manger training, testing, certification, and retraining, to support the consistent implementation of food safety management systems.*

Conclusion

Arising from all these consultations what is clearly demonstrated is the complexity and diversity of issues concerning food. Integrated holistic solutions are required at all tiers and functions of government. Public participation is an essential part of this process. Resources and structures are required across public and private sector organisations to achieve this as part of a long-term public health strategy. *That is why we propose a National Food and Health Policy Council in Wales.*

The Alliance has responded to seventeen Consultations:

The Learning Country, NHS Structures, Public Health Task and Finish Group, Targeting Poor Health/ NHS Allocations Report, Plan for Wales 2001, Moving Forward - Listening to Children and Young People, Development of a Strategy for Older People, Delayed Care Transfers, The Future of Farming, ELWa draft Corporate Strategy, Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales 2002, Codex Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food (FSA/ DEFRA), Codex Risk Analysis - CRVDF, Regulation for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origins for human consumption, European new draft Food Hygiene Regulations, European Public Health Programme: Parliament's 2nd reading, and the Research Framework Programme.

Arthur Wynn 1910-2001

We have many friends with expertise and knowledge who assist us in our work. Arthur who died recently was a statistician and scientist, who along with Margaret his wife, wished to improve the health of children in Wales. Both have helped develop our policies, especially on free school meals. His expertise was invaluable. We shall miss him greatly.

Health Objectives for CAP

The Alliance have written to the NAFW asking if they are able to affirm that:

1. A "multifunctional" agriculture should incorporate health objectives.
2. The European Commission should publish its Action plan on Nutrition Policy by the spring of 2002.
3. There should be an inter-service working group on the Common Agricultural Policy.
4. The Common Agricultural Policy should promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables.

About Welsh Food Alliance

The Welsh Food Alliance is a non-profit making knowledge based policy development and promotion network comprising members in Wales, the UK and Europe. It brings together multi-disciplinary expertise to link all aspects of food policy in a holistic and integrated way which is disseminated in its quarterly newsletter. The Alliance aims to provide a new perspective on food policy founded on the principle of informed public participation in the policy development process. It uses an extensive network of local, national and international contacts to help stimulate positive action at all levels of government.

Join us today and help us in this crucial enterprise.

Acknowledgements

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National Food & Health Policy Council

Why is this necessary? Within Wales we have the opportunity to devise a fundamentally sound food policy. We benefit from and draw from aspects of education, nutrition, agriculture and fisheries, manufacture and marketing; and should seek to build on this foundation. How can this be best implemented? An arms length organisation is required. A Food and Health Policy Council, supported by public participation, could assist with the development of integrated policies, in conjunction with other tiers and functions of government. These issues are being considered within voluntary sector meetings with relevant Assembly Ministers.

National Youth Food Assembly - July 2002

We are currently planning the second National Youth Food Assembly and the National Food Teachers Symposium in July 2002. Interested parents, teachers and pupils please contact (01633) 663114 or e-mail: JeanandJohnS@AOL.com

Retailer bans suspect pesticides

The UK retailer and farming enterprise, the Co-op, has banned the use of 24 pesticides world wide in crops it purchases because of rising consumer concerns about health and environmental aspects. As Britain's biggest farmer, the Co-op believes governments must start applying the 'precautionary principle' to existing and new pesticides and increase support for safer alternatives. A new report from the Co-op addresses the

problems of agrochemical use in intensive agriculture and provides some sustainable solutions. 'Green and Pleasant Land'. From the Co-operative Group Ltd, Freepost MR9 473, Manchester M4 8BA. 0800 068 6727

Organic farming, food quality & human health: a review of the evidence

Over 400 scientific papers on organic and non-organic food have been reviewed by the Soil Association and published in this groundbreaking report, revealing important differences between organic and non-organic foods and supporting the consumer intuition that organic food is better for you. £12 (£9.60 for Soil Association members). From the Soil Association, Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6BY. T: 0117 9290661. Email sass@soilassociation.org

Food Technology

The national curriculum subject is design and technology, within which food technology is a major component. Within food technology is included the nutritional element, food legislation, food science, the development of good practical skills, sound hygiene practices, and industrial application, such as product design and development. In contrast Personal and Social Education (PSE) is a non-national curriculum experience taught by the vast majority of teachers. It is ill advised, therefore, to single out food technology from other aspects of design technology and discuss it in the PSE context.

Welsh Food Alliance



Cynghrair Bwyd Cymru

Membership Application

Name: _____
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Please let us know if you wish to contribute in specific ways:

Send to WFA, 216 Stow Hill, Newport, NP20 4HA
with £5 p.a. for individual membership or £40 for corporate membership.