

Food for thought

Increasing access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food

March 2026

The Equality and Social Justice Committee looked at how access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food can be secured for everyone in Wales. The Committee previously explored food poverty as part of its [inquiry into debt and the rising cost of living](#) in 2023.

This inquiry focused on the adequacy of the Welsh Government's approach in light of concerns about the scarcity of nourishing food in many communities.

We looked at good practice to overcome the barriers to being able to make nourishing meals from what is being provided by food banks and how this could be scaled up to improve food literacy. The full [Terms of Reference](#) can be found on our inquiry page.

Our oral evidence was supplemented by targeted consultation with key stakeholders. We heard from individuals with lived experiences of emergency support and a range of voluntary and not for profit organisations which are endeavouring to provide sustainable solutions to an enduring cost of living crisis. We visited projects in the Vale of Glamorgan, Blaenau Gwent and Flintshire. Full details are available in the Annexes.

Our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to our work.



Chair's foreword

Whilst Wales is famous for the quality of its meat, seafood and dairy products, our food culture is dominated by an industrialised food industry where profitability trumps nutritional value.

It is shameful that far too many people struggle to afford and access healthy food in one of the richest countries in the world. The consequences for the health of our nation is calamitous. Government must act to face down powerful vested interests.

Wales has made important strides in starting to tackle this, from Universal Primary Free School Meals to the Community Food Strategy. However too much of what is served in public settings remains ultra processed and disconnected from Welsh producers.

Our inquiry set out to understand how we move beyond what started as a crisis response to a preventative, system-wide approach that puts dignity, health and resilience at its core.

We heard consistent messages: invest in horticulture and local food distribution networks, put schools and communities at the heart of change, embed “cash first” principles around good food, and ensure long term support for local food partnerships. This report sets out our conclusions and recommendations. to ensure every part of Wales has access to healthy, affordable food.



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

1. Food insecurity

1. Food insecurity remains a significant issue in Wales. The Food Standards Agency's latest report revealed that 21% of Welsh respondents were food insecure. In the most deprived areas that rises to 37% of respondents compared to 13% in the least deprived areas.¹

2. Being food insecure means a respondent has low or very low food security:

Low food security: reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.

Very low food security: multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.²

3. The Food Foundation's Broken Plate 2025 reported that "In 2024, more healthy foods cost more than twice as much as less healthy options, averaging £8.80 per 1,000 kcal compared to £4.30 for less healthy foods".³

4. The Food Foundation calculated that the poorest households would need to spend 45% of their disposable income on food to be able to afford the UK Government-recommended healthy diet. The poorest households with children needed to spend 70% of their disposable income on food to eat well.⁴

2. Supporting communities

Striking a balance between emergency food aid and preventative, long-term approaches

5. Food Sense Wales highlighted, there needs to be a balance between meeting emergency need and supporting preventative, longer-term approaches that increase access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food.⁵ Simon Wright, from Cegin y Bobl, emphasised the importance of "giving people the resilience

¹ [Food Standards Agency, Food and You 2: Wave 10 survey September 2025](#)

² [Food Standards Agency, Food and You 2: Wave 10 survey September 2025](#)

³ [The Food Foundation, Broken Plate report 2025](#)

⁴ [The Food Foundation, Broken Plate report 2025](#)

⁵ [Written evidence FP02 Food Sense Wales](#)

and helping them to find their own solutions in terms of the ability to cook, choose and source their food and, indeed, to grow it.”⁶

6. We heard that the Welsh Government and food providers have made some progress towards developing a more preventative, longer-term approach to tackling food insecurity. The work of the Local Food Partnerships was highlighted by Food Sense Wales as “really looking at those root causes and looking at trying to create that balance”.⁷

7. We heard similar views from community food providers. FareShare Cymru told us they have “been working with our members really, really hard over the last couple of years to increase the amount of fruit and veg that they can take, and what they can do with that”.⁸ During 2024/25 Fareshare redistributed over 1223 tonnes of food of which 47% was fruit and vegetables.⁹

Case study: Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership

A Food and Veg voucher project in Blaenau Gwent, funded by the Welsh Government, provides fruit and vegetable vouchers to families with young children who identify as experiencing food insecurity. This is delivered through a partnership with Flying Start and a local independent greengrocer. This cash first approach gives families more choice, supports local high streets, and has achieved high redemption rates, helping parents afford fresh produce and easing financial pressure.

The Food Partnership has extended the project to targeted primary schools to reach children under seven (in line with the Marmot Principles Best Start in Life criteria)¹⁰. Their data shows evidence of an increase in 5 a day consumption of fruit and vegetable from 3.52 to 4.21 portions per day (+19.7%).

The feedback from participants has been positive:

“We have eaten more fruit n veg since being on this programme. We have also tried new fruit that we wouldn't have before.”

⁶ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 179](#).

⁷ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 41](#).

⁸ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 168](#).

⁹ [Written evidence, FareShare Cymru](#)

¹⁰ [Marmot Council, Blaenau Gwent Council](#)

Overall, it increases access to healthy food while strengthening the local foundational economy.

8. Food Sense Wales said that “more needs to be done to create a sustainable system”:

It would be worth reviewing how much money for emergency food aid is spent by Welsh Government to the benefit of large retail. Could schemes that promote spend in local food economies provide the dual benefit of supporting those on low incomes whilst building local resilient economies?¹¹

9. Size of Wales told us that the approach in Wales “does not yet fully support long-term, equitable access to healthy and nutritious food and the goal of being a globally responsible nation”. They believe further measures are required, such as using a social value approach to deliver preventative, long-term investment, anchoring prevention within provision of universal school food provision, and integrating food education into school life.¹²

10. The value of providing support alongside food provision as a ‘one stop shop’ was evident. We heard of excellent examples where community pantries, shops, cafés and food banks support people through social connections, benefits or housing advice, signposting and linking people to appropriate services.¹³ Maximising people’s incomes can have a significant impact and reduces the need for further emergency food aid.¹⁴ The importance of the Welsh Government Discretionary Assistance Fund was also highlighted for those who get into difficulties.¹⁵

11. The importance of dignity and respect was a central theme. Participants in our engagement work recognised the stigma about accessing food banks and food provision. Participants set out approaches they take to address this, for example redesigning services, not requiring disclosure of personal

¹¹ [Written evidence FP02 Food Sense Wales](#)

¹² [Written evidence FP03 Size of Wales](#)

¹³ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

¹⁴ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 77-79, 145; Engagement Summary February 2026](#)

¹⁵ [Focus Group note February 2026](#); Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 233](#)

circumstances, and using a pay-what-you-can-afford approach so people feel they are making a contribution towards the costs of their food.¹⁶

Meeting the needs of individual communities and places

12. We heard evidence on the importance of supporting community-based approaches to support people to eat healthy, nutritious and affordable food. Janet Hayward, from Big Bocs Bwyd, told the Committee that “the answers are in the communities”.¹⁷

13. Baobab Bach, a not-for-profit Community Interest Company, supports local communities to reduce food waste, tackle food poverty, and support healthy wellbeing. They operate 18 pantries and other collaborative services across Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and the Vale of Glamorgan. Their Kenffig Hill Hub is the only community space in the village which enables people to come together, which is important for people’s health and well-being.¹⁸

14. FareShare Cymru highlighted that:

*“...we work with community organisations that are based in their communities, and the solutions that they build are the solutions that their community want, and so I think that's a really strong bit of work, working with those communities and allowing them to find the solutions. There are so many different solutions within that”.*¹⁹

15. The positive impact of Local Food Partnerships in every local authority was emphasised.²⁰ We heard about creative collaborations with Flying Start, local schools, youth services and local food pantries to increase food literacy and access to healthy food, responding to the needs of the local community.

16. Fishguard Bay Sustainable Food Initiative call for “... longer term, sustainable models which put control of land, food and resources in the hands of the community as a fundamental necessity”. They value the support of

¹⁶ [Engagement Summary February 2026: Focus Group note February 2026](#)

¹⁷ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 303](#)

¹⁸ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

¹⁹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 189](#)

²⁰ [Written evidence, FP01 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

Pembrokeshire Local Food Partnership and others in establishing a community kitchen in Fishguard.²¹

17. The Powys food partnership, Bwyd Powys, works closely with the local health board, Flying Start and local growers to improve access to food for families with young children, providing subsidised fruit and vegetables and developing food literacy.²² Chloe Masefield, from Bwyd Powys, noted the importance of taking place-based approaches to meet local needs, as areas such as Powys are different to Cardiff.²³

18. A single social enterprise is delivering food to communities across north east Wales, distributed via housing associations and voluntary groups. Well-Fed's partnerships with community centres, churches and others services such as a warm space or community café, provide an opportunity to purchase freshly cooked healthy meals. The industrial scale of Well-Fed's operation will increase in July 2026, from preparing 10,000 fresh meals, free of ultra-processed ingredients, to be able to prepare 60,000 meals per week.²⁴



Figure 1: St Bartholomew's Church community café offers a welcoming breakfast and weekly collection of affordable meals



Figure 2: Volunteers at St. Paul's Church community shop where people order and collect meals from Well-Fed

19. At a weekly volunteer-run community shop at St. Paul's Church, Rhosesmor and a community café in St. Bartholomew's church in Sealand, people valued a

²¹ [Written evidence, Fishguard Bay Sustainable Food](#)

²² Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 61-62](#)

²³ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 42](#)

²⁴ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 160-161](#)

warm, welcoming space for social interaction, food or drinks whilst picking up good-quality, home-cooked meals for £2.25 made by the Well-Fed social enterprise. Others collected Well-Fed fresh meal kits and recipe cards. For many unpaid carers and older people, this support was described as a lifeline, particularly for those unable to cook or for whom it eased the burden of preparing a nutritious meal. Both churches secured significant funding from the Welsh Government Community Facilities Programme²⁵, enabling them to transform the churches into accessible, functional and thriving hubs in their communities.

Funding challenges

20. We heard about the challenges that some well-established projects are facing. A number of contributors in our stakeholder sessions highlighted the need for funding to cover core costs of organisations rather than funding ‘shiny new projects’. FareShare Cymru highlighted:

*“Grassroots organisations rooted in communities are vital to creating a good food movement and supporting people who need it most. However, too many organisations are struggling with cost pressures, scarce funding and increasing demand”.*²⁶

21. Conwy Food Partnership suggested it would be helpful to have a Wales-wide approach to reserving a proportion of emergency food aid funding for “sustainable projects” such as community kitchens and social supermarkets, noting that:

*“This could be done at a local level, but would work better and face less resistance if it was backed nationally”.*²⁷

22. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice said that the Welsh Government provides funding to local authorities, who then decide how that money is spent. She noted that:

²⁵ Welsh Government, [Community Facilities Programme](#)

²⁶ [Written evidence, FareShare Cymru](#)

²⁷ [Written evidence, Conwy Food Partnership](#)

*“we try and give them [local authorities] as much leeway as possible to respond to local needs rather than ring-fencing money in terms of eligibility”.*²⁸

23. Emergency Food Aid, Local Food Partnerships and Welcome Spaces are monitored quarterly against set objectives, detailed in further correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary. This is also considered as “an opportunity to look for ways in which we can build on what they are already doing and share practice.”²⁹ One Food Partnership is piloting a Fresh Produce Voucher scheme to improve access to affordable healthy food, support low-income households, and strengthen local food resilience by promoting local producers and community engagement.

24. The funding for the Local Food Partnerships has a “medium to longer term focus” and they must provide evidence that they are:

- *Establishing and leading a broad and dynamic local food partnership network, which is representative of the communities they are supporting*
- *Providing leadership and coordination for local food activity towards embedding a new resilience in the local food system*
- *Tackling food poverty and supporting household food security across all citizens within the local community, including for those with protected characteristics*
- *Raising the capacity and diversity of local food supply to satisfy local food demand.*³⁰

Our view

While there will always be a place for emergency food aid in a moment of crisis, there needs to be a better balance between responding to immediate needs and preventative approaches that address the root causes of food poverty,

²⁸ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 2 March 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 78](#)

²⁹ Paper to note 2.3 [Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Chief Whip and Trefnydd](#) 18 March 2026

³⁰ Paper to note 2.3 [Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Chief Whip and Trefnydd](#) 18 March 2026

provide dignity to those using them, and increase access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food. There has been some progress in this area over recent years, but there is still much more to do.

A place-based approach, which focuses on local needs and is community-led, is key to developing and scaling the longer-term, preventative solutions we want to see. We heard about the excellent work being undertaken by many community food providers within their local area and were privileged to visit some examples of best practice. We recognise the substantial contribution by volunteers who organise and deliver services which support people's health and well-being.

However, providers also highlighted the considerable financial challenges faced by many organisations. The next Welsh Government must prioritise working with local partners to support community food providers to develop solutions to these barriers, enabling them to carry on increasing access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food, and scaling up approaches that work.

Recommendation 1. The next Welsh Government should work with local partners to help address the considerable financial challenges many community food providers face. It should ensure multi-year funding is available, to support successful organisations to carry on operating, including meeting core running costs, and to scale up where approaches are proven to work.

3. Driving change through education

Case study: Big Bocs Bwyd



Figure 3: Chair of the Committee, Jenny Rathbone MS, met pupils from Cadoxton Primary who help run Cadog's corner with the Community Manager and volunteers

Big Bocs Bwyd is a not-for-profit education project founded by Janet Hayward, headteacher at Cadoxton Primary School. The school started distributing surplus food from a corner of the community centre adjacent to Cadoxton Primary School on a pay-as-you-feel basis in 2020.

The partnership with FareShare was so successful that the pay-as-you-feel shop moved its operations into a shipping container. Big Bocs Bwyd was born. A Good Food café in the community centre now serves the wider Cadoxton Community.

The Chair also visited the Big Bocs Bwyd at Willowtown Primary School in Ebbw Vale, one of many schools where the Big Bocs Bwyd initiative now operates. It aims to ensure no child goes hungry, and that every child is able to learn about how to make good food choices. Big Bocs Bwyd hubs include a pay-as-you-feel shop, additional secure storage, raised beds, and a small meeting space. Some hubs have additional features, such as more extensive growing spaces, woodlands, poly tunnels and bee hives.

Examples of the work undertaken at Cadoxton Primary School include the Ready, Steady, Cook family healthy cooking programme and the Soup and Song

intergenerational healthy eating programme. These programmes have engaged with hundreds of families over the course of their operation. They have supported healthier eating habits; helped to increase parental confidence and skills; helped strengthen family relationships; and supported the development of intergenerational connections.

Since the first Big Bocs Bwyd opened, the Waterloo Foundation, Welsh Government, and the National Lottery have provided funding to enable the programme to expand considerably. Once the latest expansion is completed by Bwyd Bob Amser, there will be 100 Big Bocs Bwyd projects located across all 22 local authorities.

The latest summary evaluation of Big Bocs Bwyd, completed in 2023, described it as a “visionary project”, adding that that the programme is “making a difference in many communities”. It found that “Wales should embrace and emulate this progressive and impactful project, ensuring that even more children and their families can access quality food”.³¹

School meals

25. The Welsh Government will invest £93.5 million on Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) in 2026-27³², and has recently increased the rate paid per meal from £3.20 to £3.40.³³

26. In their evidence NHS dieticians regard the provision of UPFSM as “a vital step towards prioritising children’s health.”³⁴ The provision of UPFSM was widely welcomed as a means of addressing hunger and easing pressures on household budgets.

27. While we were taking evidence for this inquiry, the Welsh Government published its interim evaluation of UPFSM. Key messages from the interim evaluation include:

- In July 2024, average uptake of UPFSM was 69%, with rates ranging 57% to 82% across local authorities.

³¹ [Learning Partnership Wales. Evaluation of Big Bocs Bwyd. July 2023](#)

³² Welsh Government, [Children, Young People and Education Committee Evidence paper on Draft Budget 2026-27 – Education Main Expenditure Group \(MEG\)](#)

³³ Welsh Government, [Free school meals easing financial pressures for families](#)

³⁴ [Written evidence NHS Dieticians](#)

- “Many stakeholders felt that the UPFSM policy has eased financial pressures on families, particularly those with multiple children”.
- Improved data would increase understanding of which groups of learners aren’t fully benefitting from UPFSM, and enable targeted support for groups where uptake is lowest.
- While there is strong support for sourcing Welsh and local produce, barriers remain. These could be addressed by developing and promoting a clear definition of local produce, piloting initiatives to increase local supply, and developing a long-term sustainable procurement strategy.
- Practical measures such as improving dining room layouts or staggering lunch sittings could address barriers created by busier lunchtime experiences.³⁵

28. Stakeholders highlighted that the success of free school meals hinges on the quality of the ingredients and how meals are delivered. Concerns were expressed about the quality and nutritional value of school meals. Simon Wright stated that “the way that vegetables are served is enough to put you off vegetables for life.”³⁶ Robbie Davison, from Well-Fed, emphasised that the significant use of ultra-processed food within school meals is unacceptable.³⁷

29. We heard how operational inefficiencies, workforce challenges and low uptake have limited the impact of UPFSM. Simon Wright said:

*“If we don't address those central issues—and this probably is the single most central issue because of the level of Government spending that goes towards this—then we're hiding from the reality of it”.*³⁸

30. Janet Hayward observed:

“...what's going on in our school kitchens isn't entirely fit for purpose. So, a review into what's going on in school kitchens, I think, would be

³⁵ Welsh Government, [Evaluation of universal primary free schools meals \(UPFSM\): interim report, February 2026](#)

³⁶ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 227](#)

³⁷ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 221](#)

³⁸ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 212](#)

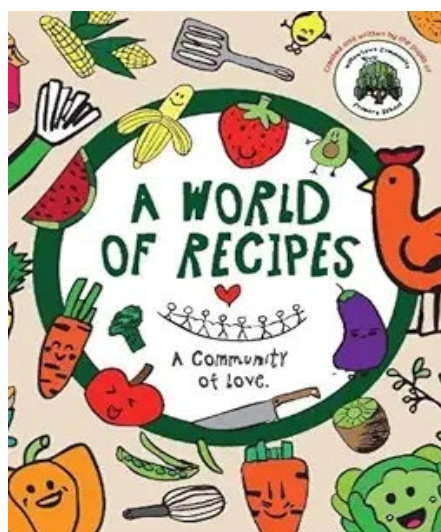
very timely. I think it would be important to look at the conditions for staff, to look at the food that's being provided, but also the whole culture around food".³⁹

31. Leadership in schools is essential to embed a whole-school approach to food, integrating learning about food with the curriculum, influencing the food culture and engaging with the wider community.⁴⁰ Janet Hayward acknowledged that "Quite a lot" of headteachers don't recognise that the food served in the dining room is part of their responsibility.⁴¹

32. The revised Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations (due to come into force on 31 October 2026) were welcomed, but dieticians emphasised the need for long-term funding and training so regulations translate into daily practice.⁴²

Food literacy

33. Low levels of food literacy and cookery skills among the general population are a barrier to eating healthy and affordable food. In our stakeholder session we heard that "one of the biggest issues... is a lack of knowledge and skills" around cooking and storing fresh food.⁴³ According to Robbie Davison, as many as two thirds of people in Wales cannot cook a meal from scratch.⁴⁴ Many families rely heavily on ready meals and take aways - a pattern participants linked to time pressures, low confidence and a lack of food literacy.⁴⁵



34. We heard about good practice in delivering food literacy in schools. During a visit to Willowtown school in Ebbw Vale Year 6 pupils shared their cookbook – A World of Recipes. This project, supported by Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership

³⁹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of proceedings, paragraph 218](#)

⁴⁰ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 281](#)

⁴¹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 292](#)

⁴² [Written evidence, NHS Dieticians](#)

⁴³ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

⁴⁴ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 257](#)

⁴⁵ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

creatively engaged pupils and their families to explore food together, discuss meals and recipes, learning how to cook them and sharing food and feedback.

35. Community cooking sessions, school-based programmes and hands-on workshops were described as highly effective interventions.⁴⁶ The transformative impact of providing practical cooking classes, meal kits and recipe cards in Willowtown school empowered people who thought ‘I can’t cook’ and helped families rediscover shared mealtimes.⁴⁷

36. Food and Fun (the School Holiday Enrichment Programme) delivers “free nutritious breakfasts, lunches and fun activities for learners to enjoy during the summer holidays”. It ran in 230 schools across Wales in summer 2025, with over 14,000 places available every day.⁴⁸

37. Food and Fun was praised as “amazing... what our communities need”, it blends meals, nutrition education, physical activity and family engagement.⁴⁹ Many urged an expansion of Food and Fun to all primary schools, though only schools with at least 16% eFSM are able to apply to the scheme which is managed by the Welsh Local Government Association.

38. The interim review of Food and Fun led by Julie Morgan MS, published in March 2025, found that the programme delivers “a high-quality service”, with enthusiastic staff, good links with parents, stimulating activities, and effective planning. It noted that “positive engagement appeared to have beneficial effects in terms of the wider relationship between children, their families and school, and subsequently, term time attendance”. The interim review recommended continued expansion of the programme, and more work to raise awareness and maximise participation.⁵⁰ An extra £1m was allocated to expand the scheme in 2025-26.⁵¹

39. Bwyd Powys work closely with Flying Start settings to distribute a subsidised vegetable box, or free if using their Healthy Start card whilst offering “cooking sessions and opportunities to share meals”.⁵² There were calls to embed

⁴⁶ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

⁴⁷ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

⁴⁸ [Welsh Government, Ten-year milestone for ‘Food and Fun’ summer holiday scheme](#)

⁴⁹ [Focus Group note February 2026](#)

⁵⁰ Julie Morgan MS for Welsh Government, [School Holiday Enrichment Programme \(SHEP\): interim report](#)

⁵¹ [Welsh Government, Ten-year milestone for ‘Food and Fun’ summer holiday scheme](#)

⁵² [Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 61](#)

dietetics into Flying Start and early years provision to reduce health inequalities and increase support for babies and children.⁵³

40. Healthy Start cards are available to low-income households where someone is more than 10 weeks pregnant, or there is at least one child under 4. Over recent years there has been a considerable increase in Healthy Start take-up rates, following the introduction of mandatory training for health professionals working within pregnant women and new Mums.⁵⁴

41. The Future Generations Commissioner and dietitians called for the expansion of the Nutrition Skills for Life across all schools to ensure “every child leaves school food literate, with the skills and knowledge to maintain a healthy and sustainable diet”.⁵⁵

Ultra-processed foods and healthy food environments

42. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (UK) highlights that there is too much reliance on foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar in diets.⁵⁶ A study published in the British Medical Journal found the UK has one of the highest consumption rates of ultra-processed foods in the world, higher than other European countries and below only the United States.

43. Despite efforts to increase choice and access to fresh fruit, vegetables and healthy meals, the marketing and availability of ultra-processed food and takeaways are significant barriers. As the Food Standards Agency highlights⁵⁷, there is no single accepted definition of ultra-processed foods, although the NOVA definition, created by researchers at the University of São Paulo, is most commonly used and describes them as:

*“...formulations of ingredients, mostly of exclusive industrial use, typically created by a series of industrial techniques and processes”.*⁵⁸

⁵³ [Written evidence NHS Dieticians](#)

⁵⁴ Health and Social Care Committee, 17 January 2024, [Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 185-191](#)

⁵⁵ [Written evidence FP01 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

⁵⁶ [The National Diet and Nutrition Survey \(UK\), 2025](#)

⁵⁷ Food Standards Agency, [Ultra-processed foods](#)

⁵⁸ Monteiro, C.A. et al for Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, [Ultra-processed foods, diet quality, and health using the NOVA classification system](#), published 2019

44. Well-Fed claimed that 75% of “everything eaten in schools in Wales is ultra-processed” and called for legislation to take ultra-processed foods out of the supply chain, saying that a phased approach could be a potential option.⁵⁹

45. The Future Generations Commissioner recommends that “all public bodies should reduce or eliminate the junk foods and ultra-processed foods (UPFs) sold on their premises and from the meals they provide, such as in schools, hospitals and care homes.”⁶⁰ Simon Wright highlighted international examples where this is being done.⁶¹

International examples of action in relation to ultra-processed foods

Brazil

A [2023 presidential decree](#) outlines a framework for promoting healthy eating habits in school environments across Brazil. Restricting ultra-processed products is one of the three core pillars of the decree, which allows local and state governments to make laws and regulations based on its principles. A number of cities and states in Brazil have banned ultra-processed foods in schools over recent years. These include [Niterói](#), [Rio de Janeiro](#) and [the state of Ceará](#).

Brazil’s National School Feeding Programme aims to [lower the percentage of ultra-processed foods in free school meals to 10%](#) by 2026. The programme prioritises purchases from family farms, with an emphasis on supporting female farmers. [From January 2026](#), at least 45% of resources spent through the programme must be made from family farms or and family-run rural enterprises.

California

In October 2025, “AB 1264, a first-in-the-nation law phasing out the most concerning ultra-processed foods from California schools”, [was signed into law](#). The California State Department of Public Health [will be required](#) to adopt regulations before 1 June 2028 to define “ultra-processed foods of concern” and “restricted school foods”. By 1 July 2029, schools will be required to begin to phase out these foods, and from 1 July 2035 they will be prohibited from offering school breakfasts or lunches that offer them.

⁵⁹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 277](#)

⁶⁰ [Written evidence, FP01 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

⁶¹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 254](#)

Colombia

In late 2023, Colombia ~~passed a law imposing a tax on ultra-processed foods~~. The tax rate was 10% in 2023, 15% in 2024, and 20% from 2025. The law applies to a range of products:

“...milk products added with sugar, sausages and cold cut meats, chocolates and confectionary candies, snacks, bakery products, breakfast cereals, canned fruits and vegetables added with fat, sugar or salt, jams, jellies and marmalades, sauces, condiments, and seasonings”.

46. The number of unhealthy takeaways, and their concentration in more deprived areas, where access to healthier options were often limited is an additional challenge. Chris Nottingham, from Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership, disclosed that in “Ebbw Vale and Brynmawr, we have a hot food takeaway density well in excess of the national average and, in turn, we fall well below the national average for what classifies as a healthy weight.”⁶² In 2023, Blaenau Gwent had 142 fast food outlets per 100,000 people, a 13.6% increase from 2018.⁶³

47. The Committee was told that the planning system needs to support healthier food environments. A number of local authorities in Wales have used their planning powers to restrict the location or number of hot food takeaways. For example, Wrexham County Borough Council has implemented a policy that routinely prohibits such takeaways being opened within 400 metres of school premises.⁶⁴ However, there have been cases where Planning and Environment Decisions Wales have reversed decisions to refuse hot food takeaways on appeal, including in Wrexham.⁶⁵

48. A number of public bodies elsewhere in the UK and internationally have taken action to limit hot-food takeaways around schools. In England, planning guidance has changed the Use Class Order for hot food takeaways, so that planning permission is required for new takeaways and changes of use. The policy intention is to “allow local authorities to have greater control, through using the planning application process, to prevent the proliferation of hot food takeaways”.⁶⁶ A borough in Montreal, Canada has limited where new fast food

⁶² Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 133](#)

⁶³ Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, [Planning Applications Report: 21 August 2025](#)

⁶⁴ Wrexham County Borough Council, [Local Planning Guidance Note No. 9: Hot Food Take-aways](#)

⁶⁵ The Leader, [Plans for takeaway near Wrexham school allowed on appeal](#)

⁶⁶ Public Health England, [Guidance: Addendum: Hot food takeaways use in the new Use Class Order](#)

restaurants are able to open since 2016, restricting them to three commercial streets.⁶⁷ Similarly, a number of Irish local authorities have introduced ‘no-fry zones’ near to schools.⁶⁸

49. The Welsh Government’s Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales delivery plan for 2025-27 commits to consulting on proposals to support a healthier balance of food outlets across Wales, for example by using planning rules and guidance.⁶⁹ The Cabinet Secretary highlighted this in her evidence to the Committee.

50. Under the Food (Promotion and Presentation) (Wales) Regulations 2025, which came into force on 26 March 2026⁷⁰, medium or large businesses that employ 50 or more people must not offer specified high fat, sugar and salt products as part of a ‘volume price promotion’ such as buy-one-get-one-free. Additionally, location restrictions will apply to store entrances, aisle ends and checkouts in relation to these products when a retail store is over 185.8 square metres (with online equivalent key locations).⁷¹

51. New Health Impact Assessment Regulations will come into force in April 2027, which will require specified public bodies to “undertake Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) when proposing decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise their functions”.⁷²

Our view

We welcome Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) and their positive impact on reducing food poverty and family finances. However, we must make the most of the opportunity UPFSM presents, and address issues relating to the quality of the food served in some settings, how school kitchens operate, workforce challenges and levels of take-up. These issues were gaps in the interim evaluation, and will need to be explored more systematically in the next phase of

⁶⁷ Canada Broadcasting Corporation, [Supreme Court dismisses challenge of CDN-NDG bylaw restricting fast-food restaurants](#)

⁶⁸ Fora, [Dublin fast food ban](#)

⁶⁹ Welsh Government, [Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales delivery plan 2025 to 2027](#)

⁷⁰ Welsh Government, [The Food \(Promotion and Presentation\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2025: Implementation Guidance](#)

⁷¹ Welsh Government, [Explanatory Memorandum to The Food \(Promotion and Presentation\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2025](#)

⁷² Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, [Written Statement: The Health Impact Assessment \(Wales\) Regulations 2025](#)

the UPFSM evaluation. If the next Welsh Government continues with the policy, it will need to prioritise solutions which address them.

We heard about the importance of initiatives such as Food and Fun, Big Bocs Bwyd, and Nutrition Skills for Life in supporting children and families, to help develop food literacy. The next Welsh Government should expand these and other programmes further during the Seventh Senedd.

The food environment surrounding children and families often works against healthy choices, with the widespread availability and aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods, coupled with high concentrations of hot food takeaways and the lack of local shops selling fresh produce, creating structural barriers to healthier eating. Local communities need to be empowered to challenge these structural barriers, and the Welsh Government should explore how to achieve this through strengthened national guidance or planning reforms.

Overall, the evidence points to the need to view school food, food education and community food access as interconnected parts of a wider system. Placing school food at the centre, while supporting families, improving local food environments and investing in food literacy across all ages, has the potential to improve health, reduce inequalities and build a more sustainable food system for Wales.

Recommendation 2. The next Welsh Government should ensure the next evaluation of Universal Primary Free School Meals fully explores a number of issues raised during our inquiry. These include the quality of the meals being served, the reasons for differential take-up rates across different local authorities and the operation of school kitchens. Based on the findings of this review, the Welsh Government should prioritise taking appropriate action to address issues raised.

Recommendation 3. The next Welsh Government should build on proven successful initiatives to expand support for children and families. This should include supporting expansion of Big Bocs Bwyd, Food and Fun, the Nutrition Skills for Life and other programmes. This should be informed by mapping current provision and identifying gaps.

Recommendation 4. The next Welsh Government should develop a phased approach to reducing the presence of ultra-processed foods in school meals and food served in government-funded early years settings, with a view to them

ultimately being eradicated. This should be informed by international experience and best practice.

Recommendation 5. The next Welsh Government must take action to strengthen regulations and planning guidance, similar to the Public Health England guidance introduced in England to support local authorities who seek to limit the availability of hot food takeaways in local communities, particularly around schools. It should start work on this within the first year of the Seventh Senedd.

4. Supporting the horticulture sector

52. Wales is highly dependent on imports of fruit and vegetables, in 2022, just 6% of spend on fruit and vegetables bought by the Welsh public sector was on products sourced from Wales.⁷³

53. The Welsh Veg in Schools programme was widely praised for creating predictable demand, enabling growers to expand production and supply 15 local authorities, and supporting broader horticultural growth. Sustain's Bridging the Gap report described the programme as demonstrating "how using public procurement as a tool for change can help build stronger local sustainable food systems while supplying healthy food to school children".⁷⁴

54. However, Simon Wright pointed out that, while Welsh Veg in Schools has been a successful initiative, a more comprehensive approach is needed to build on its achievements.⁷⁵

"You look at south-west Wales: there are far more suppliers now than there were five years ago. There is evidence that Welsh Veg in Schools, the initiative, has actually catalysed some of that. If that little bit of investment can catalyse that, think what more investment could do. This means more jobs, it means more economic activity in rural communities, it means things not going half the way across the country".⁷⁶

⁷³ Brookdale Consulting, [Welsh Public Sector Food Procurement – Update on Spending and Welsh purchasing](#)

⁷⁴ Sustain, [Bridging the gap: How to fix the food system for everyone](#)

⁷⁵ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 148](#)

⁷⁶ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 273](#)

55. A number of stakeholders called for a horticulture growth plan to be developed by the next Welsh Government. Food Poverty Alliance Cymru's manifesto for the 2026 Senedd election calls for this growth plan to include a number of measures, including targets, investment in community food infrastructure and skills, and support for community growing.⁷⁷

56. Similarly, the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee recommended the Welsh Government adopt Food Policy Alliance Cymru's target that 75% of vegetables consumed in Wales be produced here sustainably⁷⁸. This recommendation was rejected by the Welsh Government, who said it "may not be suitable or deliverable due to the seasonality of vegetable growing in Wales".⁷⁹

57. Food Sense Wales told us that significant investment in horticulture and building relationships across the supply chain are required to "build the kind of Food Security that is needed for the future".⁸⁰

58. The Future Generations Commissioner called for all free school meals to include locally and sustainably produced seasonal vegetables, especially given that 94% of school-served vegetables in 2023 were imported and none were organic.⁸¹

Our view

We heard about examples of good practice in supporting the horticulture sector, particularly the Welsh Veg in Schools initiative, but also about the need to build on this to deliver better food security and resilience. Stakeholders made a persuasive case for greater investment to support the growth of the sector, and to support the development of its workforce. Public procurement will continue to be a key lever for driving change.

We recognise that food security and resilience are essential to ensure access to healthy, nutritious food whilst protecting our environment. The Food Policy Alliance Cymru is calling for a 75% increase in veg and fruit grown in Wales. An

⁷⁷ Food Poverty Alliance Cymru, [Put food at the heart of the Welsh Government](#)

⁷⁸ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, [Bringing home the harvest: Supporting the Welsh food processing industry](#)

⁷⁹ Welsh Government, [Food Processing Inquiry The Welsh Government Response to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee report](#)

⁸⁰ [Written evidence, FP02 Food Sense Wales](#)

⁸¹ [Written evidence, FP01 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

ambitious growth plan for edible horticulture needs to be part of the policy mix if we are to achieve the ambition of a healthier Wales.

Recommendation 6. The next Welsh Government should secure greater investment in edible horticulture aligned with a leveraged public procurement plan as part of an ambitious growth plan for the sector. The growth plan should include ambitious but deliverable targets, investment in community food infrastructure and skills, and support for community growing. A draft of the growth plan should be ready by the end of the first year of the Seventh Senedd and no later than July 2027.

5. Building a food system that works for all

59. The Welsh Government says it is determined to build a food system for everyone, by:

- *Funding Local Food Partnerships, giving communities a voice in shaping food systems that meet their needs and ensuring healthier food is accessible and affordable.*
- *Setting a target to increase public sector procurement of Welsh food by 50% by 2030, strengthening local supply chains and ensuring schools, hospitals, and public services serve nutritious, locally sourced meals.*
- *Embedding food literacy in education, so that every child leaves school with the skills to prepare healthy meals and understand nutrition.*
- *Supporting the expansion of edible horticulture and community growing projects, reducing reliance on imports and strengthening local resilience.⁸²*

⁸² Written evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and the Deputy First Minister, March 2026

60. Other Welsh Government strategies and policies in this area include introducing Universal Primary Free School Meals, the Community Food Strategy (CFS) and the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Delivery Plan 2025-27.⁸³

61. There is recognition of the cross-departmental work and positive policies in place, for example Simon Wright felt there were “some really ambitious policy initiatives, particularly in relation to school food, universal free school meals in primary schools, Welsh Veg in Schools.”⁸⁴ However, many stakeholders wanted the Welsh Government to build on these, and develop a more co-ordinated, robust approach for the future.

62. Janet Hayward: pointed out “that, between Cadoxton and Cowbridge, there is a 20-year difference in healthy life expectancy is just huge, and we know that's largely because of the food that our children are eating. We have far more understanding now of the danger of ultra-processed food and what that can do to our children cognitively. So, as well as not having enough food, it's about having the right food.”⁸⁵

63. Food Sense Wales said that, while there is value in the current strategies:

...Scotland have a Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, England have a national food strategy, and Northern Ireland have a framework for food, and what these all do, or do to an extent that the Food Matters and community food strategy don't, is look at that wider national food plan and national food resilience plan...[a..] clear vision with defined outcomes of what they want to see from the food system, with clear targets and goals...⁸⁶

64. The Future Generations Commissioner called for the development of a national food resilience plan for Wales:

This plan should set a strategic vision and direction of travel for food policy in Wales and set out cross-departmental policy actions to work towards improving Wales' food resilience. The plan should ensure that access to food for current and future generations is integrated across

⁸³ Welsh Government, [Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales delivery plan 2025-27; Community Food Strategy; Universal Primary Free School Meals](#)

⁸⁴ Equality and Social Justice Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 147](#)

⁸⁵ ESJ Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 150](#)

⁸⁶ ESJ Committee, 19 January 2026, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 29](#)

Welsh government policy – ensuring a coherent approach across Ministerial portfolios.⁸⁷

65. The Cabinet Secretary said, “there's no lack of vision, there's lots of cross-Government working, but we just need to make sure that we implement the commitments that we've got.” She stated that Food Matters Wales 2024, which summarises food related policies across ministerial portfolios, provides that strategic framework.⁸⁸

Our view

We welcome the positive strides taken over recent years to develop a more coherent strategic approach to food across Welsh Government portfolios. The next Welsh Government should build on that to create a food resilience plan, including a clear vision for the food system, with clear outcomes and targets to provide focus and support accountability. We note that Scotland has introduced legislation in the form of the Good Food Nation Act and are keen for the next Welsh Government to explore the effectiveness of that Act and whether a similar approach would be beneficial in Wales.

Recommendation 7.

The next Welsh Government should build on Food Matters Wales 2024 and the Community Food Strategy by developing a single, cross-government Food Resilience Plan with clear outcomes and targets. This should set out how all parts of government will work together to ensure no community is denied access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food. The Plan should be published within the first year of the Seventh Senedd and no later than by Spring 2027.

⁸⁷ [Written evidence, FP01 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

⁸⁸ [ESJ Committee, 02 March 2026, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 5-6](#)

Annex 1: : List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee’s website.

Date	Name and Organisation
<p>19 January 2026</p>	<p>Pearl Costello, Food Sense Wales</p> <p>Hannah Gibbs, Sustain</p> <p>Chloe Masefield, Bwyd Powys (hosted by Cultivate)</p> <p>Chris Nottingham, Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership/Tai Calon Housing Association</p> <p>Janet Hayward, Big Bocs Bwyd</p> <p>Sarah Germain, Farshare Cymru</p> <p>Katie Till, Trussell Trust</p> <p>Robbie Davison, Can Cook - Well Fed</p> <p>Simon Wright, Cegin y Bobl & Wright’s Food Emporium</p>
<p>2 March 2026</p>	<p>Jane Hutt, MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, Welsh Government</p> <p>Claire Germain, Deputy Director, Tackling Poverty & Supporting Families, Welsh Government</p> <p>Keith Smyton, Deputy Director, Food, Welsh Government</p>

Annex 2: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee’s website.

Reference	Organisation
FP 01	Future Generations Commissioner
FP 02	Food Sense Wales
FP 03	Size of Wales

Additional Information

Organisation	Date
Welsh Government	20 January 2026
Welsh Government	18 March 2026
Cadoxton School	25 January 2026
Conwy Food Partnership	28 January 2026
Fareshare Cymru	29 January 2026
Sustain, Bridging the Gap Report	November 2025
Dieticians, NHS Wales	09 February 2026
Fishguard Bay Sustainable Food Initiative	15 February 2026

The Committee held an online Focus Group with stakeholders on 2 February 2026. A [note of the Focus Group](#) is available on the Committee's web page.

The Senedd Commission's Citizen Engagement Team also carried out citizen engagement activities on behalf of the Committee. The [Engagement Summary](#) is available on the Committee's web page.