

Community Foodie evaluation:  
**Executive Summary**  
Final report



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Prepared by :

**f3** - making local and sustainable food happen

[www.localfood.org.uk](http://www.localfood.org.uk)

0845 458 9525

127 Bute St, Cardiff CF10 5LE

Principal authors:

Simon Michaels, Alec Duthie, Katrin Hochberg

With thanks to :

Phil Chappell, Wendy Mackay, Rob McGhee, Kate Blair, Katie Jones

# 1 Project achievements

## 1.1 The programme

The Community Foodie programme is an initiative jointly developed and delivered as a Co-operation project between the counties of Torfaen, Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan. It began in mid 2011 and will run until the end of 2013.

The aim of the programme is : 'To engage local people in the growing and celebration of food through a shared interest and understanding.'

The programme builds on core objectives within Wales under *the Community Grown Food Action Plan* and *Strategic Action Plan for the Welsh Horticulture Industry*. Additionally, research carried out by The Wales Rural Observatory identified the need for more locally-focused facilitation for community food development.

Community Foodie was designed to offer hands-on support at community level for food growing projects. This distinguishes it from the wider support in Wales offered through the Tyfu Pobl project (run by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens) and which focuses on training and information sharing for community groups, and the Growing the Future project (run by The National Botanic Garden of Wales) which aims to raise the level of home growing skills. The programme links well with other initiatives such as Community Land Advisory Service and Communities First. There are some parallels with the work of Groundwork.

The programme is only available to community organisations within the rural wards.

The programme offers hands-on advice and facilitation by county officers. This includes technical support such as assisting with planning applications and legal agreements, practical advice on site development and growing techniques, and also offer financial support for capital works such as site reclamation.

This **final report** is based on the interim report and has been updated to reflect updated data from all three counties. The Community Foodie programme has now finished in Bridgend will continue in Vale of Glamorgan and Torfaen for another six months..

## 1.2 What's been achieved?

To date a range of projects have been instigated or supported in each of the three counties. A simple summary of this activity (at time of writing) is as follows:

### Vale of Glamorgan:

- four main projects developed, including a community orchard, a new allotment and community open space, and an urban micro-allotment area
- a wildlife project is being developed
- six smaller projects assisted through a 'starter kit' initiative
- at least 92 people have been involved in the projects although the numbers of participants in only four of the projects in the county are reported.

### Bridgend:

- 9 projects developed, including allotment and community food growing areas, edible hanging baskets, small plots in a social housing area, a community-building growing and green space with a retail unit and a future market garden - 6 active, 2 starting and 1 disbanded.
- four more projects in the pipeline
- at least 200 people have been involved in the projects to date (figures from 6 projects).

### Torfaen:

- 9 projects have been supported; the first is a growing area linked to a vegetable box distribution scheme; at Llanyrafon Manor, there are two components including a kitchen garden and hay meadow
- 3 active, 1 new project, 2 on hold, 2 disbanded, 1 starter kit.
- At least 30 people have been involved (figures from 4 projects).

Additionally, some study tours have taken place to visit community gardens, a market garden, and a visit to Todmorden. With Riverside Market Garden, a reciprocal study link has been formed with a group in the Czech Republic. Many public events such as fairs or sector conferences have been attended and workshops hosted.

At least 90 people have benefitted from horticultural training, cookery and gardening demonstrations through a range of workshops.

Partnerships to deliver training and awareness-raising have been made with the NHS, food co-ops, and Blackmill.

In some cases it has been difficult to exactly define the **attribution** of the impact of the Community Foodie programme, as many of the projects were already underway in some form. However, the feedback from project leaders is generally very clear in clarifying the importance of the support through this programme, in overcoming barriers to project delivery or completion. In particular the areas where Community Foodie has provided critical catalyst, include issues to do with land ownership, planning permission, or technical expertise.

### 1.3 How well has it met social, economic and environmental outcomes?

Community food projects typically offer exceptional outcomes in terms of **social and human** development. The evaluation of the Local Food programme in England underscores this finding. The Community Foodie programme has already demonstrated its strength in this area.

For example, the Evanstown community garden appears to have given a focus for the community in its neighbourhood, as well the local doctor's surgery reporting a drop in prescription drugs required for many stress-related illnesses (this potential impact on public health deserves further research, perhaps with community members to gauge their own perceptions of changes in health and well-being) . Many positive comments have been recorded by participants, for example:

*'We think we're going to regenerate the community spirit.'*

*'It's affected an awful lot of people in an awful lot of ways.'*

*'People are coming down here... didn't used to talk much...now they are getting together and chatting.'*

There is no hard evidence about how well the programme has affected dietary habits and the effect this may have on health, but it seems logical to assume that if more fresh vegetables are being grown, especially by high risk low income communities, they are also being consumed, helping meet health targets.

Direct feedback from participants indicated that they had:

- learned a lot more about food growing,
- eaten a lot more vegetables/salads/fruit,
- got a lot more exercise in the fresh air,
- met a lot of new people or felt a lot more involved in the local community,
- felt a lot more confident about making things happen locally.

There is little direct evidence that the programme has had an impact on **local food culture**, other than the consumption of more seasonal vegetables.

In terms of **educational** outcomes, many of the participants are growing vegetables for the first time, and there is good evidence of interest from schools in gaining awareness of seasonal local food systems. Many participants have benefitted from the horticultural and practical experience of the county officers. Links with other community projects and enterprises have been established including one from the Czech Republic and a rooftop garden in Hong Kong.

The objective to find new uses for **underused land** is being met by most of the projects supported. Whilst the total land area is small some of the spaces are in locations where a little regeneration goes a long way, such as in the centre of housing areas where derelict spaces have found positive new uses. The environmental impact of such new uses is evidently of significant local value, including a in some conservation focused projects which have recreated habitat or which are using Welsh heritage varieties.

As one participant noted:

*'The project has turned an overgrown eyesore into a haven of vegetables, fruit and herbs involving a cross section of the community.'*

To date, there is little evidence of significant impact on **economic outcomes**. In general it appears that the vegetables and fruit produced have been for individual local consumption. In some cases however, a small amount of produce is either being directly incorporated into a local supply chain, such as the food Co-op at Garnsychan and the cafe at Llanyrafon Manor, or limited plant sales such as at Evanstown where a more significant enterprise opportunity to raise plants is being created (the business plan is in preparation).

There is little evidence of new employment resulting from the projects, other than administrative activity directly supported by grant monies.

Many of the projects have helped lever in additional funding on the back of financial support from Community Foodie. Funding from the programme directly to projects is reported as £66770.12 and funding from other sources is reported as £33,296.72. These figures reflect reports from 15 projects. It is likely that both these figures would be significantly higher with full reporting.

## 1.4 How sustainable are the projects it has supported?

Most of the projects appear to have been developed to a point where local participants will maintain the on-going management of the land and related activities.

However, if problems arise in the future, particularly with regard to resolving issues such as land ownership and planning permission, financial planning, construction and horticultural skills, the project leaders may be inadequately experienced. With some of the projects there is a well-established management group, whilst with others the ongoing leadership and motivation and recruitment of new members seems less likely. Some groups appear to have become a little static in terms of membership after the initial wave of interest, perhaps due to a lack of on-going promotion to the wider community.

It has also been difficult in many cases to engage as fully as hoped for with local people, and the resulting involvement of volunteers. In many cases it appears that the project participants are largely middle-aged or older people, and it has cleared difficult to involve young people who will be required if the projects are going to be maintained in the future.

In terms of financial sustainability, small amounts of income might be generated by the larger projects where there is a surplus of produce which can be sold or traded locally. With some exceptions, however, it is unlikely that income will meet the expenditure levels which would be incurred if the projects aim to develop or invest further in physical infrastructure, even for simple requirements such a security fencing.

For those groups which have less strong leadership, or are still at start-up or early-stage, there may be a lack of the kind of project management and leadership which the Community Foodie officers have provided.

## 1.5 What distinguishes the approach of the programme and in what way has this been successful?

The programme set out to provide facilitation at a local level, enabling local community groups to receive a significant level of support advice and hands-on help. This contrasts with the more generic information sharing or training programs available through other initiatives. This **close handholding** seems to be very effective, especially where the groups are inexperienced in the development of projects which may require a range of skills and experience.

Additionally, it seems to be highly beneficial to have **project officers within local authorities**, where they have easy access to other departments and can resolve planning and other matters within the local authority remit quickly.

At the early project stages it has been clearly important for the county officers to provide leadership; or in other cases where there is good leadership it is as being the opportunity to resolve complex problems particularly through the local county council which has been the unique contribution.

This is supported by comments from project participants, as follows:

*'..we needed someone like a project manager.'*

*'You need someone standing back with the overview.'*

*'Without Community Foodie we couldn't have got off the ground.'*

*'Without the help we've had .. we wouldn't be anywhere near where we are now.'*



## 1.6 How has the programme met performance indicators and helped meet local and national targets?

Key Performance Indicators under RDP Axis 3 were used to define local targets for the programme. These indicators may not always fit easily with the nature of unique initiatives, and we have found some difficulty in the interpretation of this data and possibly some inconsistency in the allocation of activity to specific indicators. Additionally, some of the indicators have little meaning in practice, such as the population in the local area which could benefit from improved services, yet had no involvement or even awareness of the Community Foodie projects. Given this proviso, performance against these targets shows a variable picture to date<sup>1</sup>.

For example, in the Vale, against targets of 10 groups to be assisted, to date that number is 16. Similarly for a target of 6 promotional activities, 19 have so far been carried out. However, activities to raise awareness of the environmental consequences of a project were planned at 16 and 3 have taken place. At least 92 people have participated (figures from 4 projects).

In Bridgend, the number of groups and projects supported is 23 out of a target of 28, but considerably more promotional activities were held than planned, and the involvement of local people is at least 200 to date out against a target of 48 (figures from 6 projects).

In Torfaen, which started later, 8 groups have been assisted delivering 9 separate projects, involving at least 30 people (figures from 4 projects).. It is generally meeting or exceeding its targets in other ways.

At a national level, the policy context was well defined through the *Community Grown Food Action Plan, 2010*, although it seems that much of this action plan has not been followed through. County level policy and strategy with regard to community food growing is largely absent, however, an issue which should be addressed if there is to be real local level buy-in to significant development of this sector.

A video about the programme is soon to be launched, and may provide useful evidence and inspiration for many others in the sector. In its draft form it runs for over 30 minutes, however, which may be too long for many viewers (we recommend creating a shorter version).

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<sup>1</sup> Performance indicators have been recorded by county officers and a full audit has not taken place under this evaluation, although evidence of diligent record keeping has been shown.

## **1.7 How well has it been managed?**

The programme appears to have been well managed and administered, both at the strategic level, and also at officer level. All project activities have been recorded in detail by the project officers.

It has, however, been a little difficult to obtain a full up-to-date picture of all project activities. An updated (quarterly?) summary of projects, spending and how each project has met performance indicators would be valuable.

## **1.8 Has it worked as Co-operation project and in partnership with other programmes?**

The programme has been distinctive in its very real approach to cooperation, both between the three county officers who have worked closely together and shared their knowledge, but also through partnerships with other local agencies such as the NHS, the Welsh food Co-ops, and with Bridgend College.

A particular success seems to be been the coach trip around the three counties in June 2013. This allowed participants to learn from each other and was highly motivating.

The project has also promoted itself actively and runs a Facebook page which indicates 107 'Likes', a modest achievement.

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens runs the Tyfu Bobl project, which offers awareness advice and training at a national level for community food growing. With Community Foodie operating at a local level, there does not seem to be much evidence of a continuum or integration between the two programmes, which might need to be developed more strongly in future programmes of this nature.

Similarly the Community Land Advisory Service has been established to provide help with planning and land access issues for community groups, yet the programme appears to have limited capacity and has not been involved to date with Foodie projects.

## 1.9 Does it provide good value for money?

A dilemma in the evaluation of initiatives where the outcomes are qualitative rather than quantitative, is in how to value the benefits of social, human, environmental, community and health benefits. It is therefore difficult to assess the value for money of the Community Foodie programme.

From the evidence of interviews with project leaders and participants, it is clear that there has been significant benefit in all these areas.

Of the £347k budget for the project, approximately £93k was set aside for capital works and £59,095.56 has been spent to date which seems to have been a highly effective and well targeted programme of spending given the range and extent of physical site improvements.

The greatest part of the budget is accounted for by staff costs at £195k. For a two-and-a-half-year programme with three county project officers, programme managers and administrative support, this seems entirely appropriate.

A further £20k of the budget was earmarked for promotion and publicity with £13,186.04 having been spent to date, and although a large number of events and publicity has been created, not all of the performance indicator targets have been met so far. It is also important to recognise that the performance indicators are not able to reflect the significant changes to participants' lives and communities demonstrated in the interviews and feedback questionnaires.

In terms of direct economic benefit, such as trading turnover in the local economy or employment creation, there seems to be little point in applying commonly used economic analyses, as the outputs are currently insignificant, as has been noted above. Future employment opportunities could be developed however, with the larger projects where trading activity can be a major component such as at the Evanstown nursery.

## 2 Key findings and recommendations

There are few surprises in terms of the outcomes from the community Foodie programme. As with most community food projects, the most evident benefits are community integration, personal skills or education and more consumption of vegetables, with little economic impact. In terms of environmental impact, whilst not much land has been improved, its impact on urban environment and nature conservation in particular may be very significant. There has been a sense of pride in communities affected and personal empowerment for many involved. These findings mirror other national community food programmes.

Shortcomings and barriers to project development are also predictable, mainly relating to land ownership agreements, planning and highways issues, and insurance. There was initially some distrust of the initiative if seen as 'another council project', and it seems that the most successful projects are those which have really been driven from the bottom up.

As with most funded programmes, there will inevitably be some projects which fail to thrive or develop fully when the support stops.

Of more interest, arguably, is the nature of the delivery model and how this informs future programmes for community food (or indeed other types of community intervention programmes). In this respect the Community Foodie programme can be argued to be a useful model, the key aspects being:

- offering hands-on help at a very local level, accessible to groups of people who may otherwise be daunted by higher level or national support programmes
- delivery officers being based within local authorities, ensuring easy access to fellow officers, for example within planning or legal departments
- not offering significant capital funding, forcing local groups and the officers to be creative in identifying financial or other forms of support
- the creation of the 'starter kit' model - a very simple kit of parts for modest projects
- the close co-operation of officers and groups across county boundaries, enabling accelerated learning

In looking ahead, a key question is 'what's needed to enable community food growing projects in Wales?'

Some critical initiatives are in place already, under the Tyfu Pobl , Community Land Advisory Service, and Growing the Future initiatives, but much remains to be done.

We have made the following recommendations based on the evaluation of this programme, and our understanding and experience of community food initiatives across the UK.

1. Community food growing projects clearly have an important place in helping Wales to meet its objectives under food, community and sustainability strategies. In many cases these projects meet multiple

objectives, such as regenerating conserving or improving pockets of land, which make a really significant difference to people's daily lives. They can be highly effective vehicles for building community integration, and along with that offering opportunities for exercise, improvement in diet, and make a real difference in terms of mental health. Human skills which may contribute towards employability, and improved socialisation, often seem to improve, whether through formal educational programs and training, or whether simply by participating in a collaborative project.

2. However, these projects are often not easy to develop. First of all there needs to be the motivation and interest by local people, and the confidence to create an idea and see it through. There often needs to be a leader or social entrepreneur, or a motivated small group of people, to make things happen. **Programmes of support for these local social entrepreneurs should be created.**
3. Assuming that a community group or social entrepreneur has an idea, the practical considerations and tasks in treating the growing project can also be considerable. One of the first major issues is identifying land, and getting the agreement, formally or informally, to its use for this kind of project. Related closely with the issue of planning permission where there is a change of use, or a need for new physical infrastructure. Addressing these issues has been a key success of the Community Foodie project, and a recommendation is that the **facilitation of this nature should be made available in all localities.** We note the recent development of the Community Land Advisory Service which will help with land access issues.
4. A success of the Community Foodie programme has been the interaction at both officer level and by project participants. Study tours and visits are always highly motivating, as well as helping to establish relationships beyond one's immediate horizon. It will always be important to keep telling the story of the success of such projects, and to draw in new project members and volunteers, through a programme of publicity and awareness-raising . We therefore recommend that this form of **networking and awareness raising** continues to be facilitated at County and sub-regional level.
5. As the individual project participants develop skills and experience, the opportunity to share information and ideas will grow. Furthermore, a programme of **mentoring** by people with expertise from within this community food network, and for others with appropriate experience such as horticultural skills or enterprise development, would be desirable. This will need some degree of project management at either a county or sub-regional level.
6. If community food growing is to be developed, it will require co-ordinated efforts by many parties. At the local or unitary authority level, this will require the parallel buy-in and effort by officers and members with diverse remits, including community development, health and well-being, economic development, environmental management and planning control. A strong **policy context and local strategies** will need to be developed in each authority, to enable this joint effort, as a key driver towards taking effective action.

7. We have noted the benefit of project officers being accommodated within, or seconded from, local authorities, so that planning and other matters can be resolved internally. However, national co-ordination will be important, to ensure information sharing and to build on the success of the co-operative nature of the Community Foodie programme to date. A **national-level administration** would also manage budgets, website, social media and promotions, generation of guidance documents, and form the point of linkage with other national programmes and organisations. This remit could be developed on from the current administration, or accommodated within another body such as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.
8. Finding finance for initial capital works, and ongoing maintenance, is the next challenge. Whilst very small grants are available from a range of organisations, and there may be some opportunity for funding by individuals or local businesses, this may still be inadequate. Therefore we consider that a capital and to a lesser degree a revenue funding **grant scheme should be developed**. In England over the past five years Big Lottery has provided major support for community food initiatives: the Local Food fund has provided around £60m of project funding, whilst enterprise support and other research has been in place under the Making Local Food Work programme with a £10m budget. Wales was not included in these programmes and has lost out as a result. There is much to be learned from these programmes.