

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 23 October 2023

LOCATION: Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference

TITLE: Food Centre Wales

Background

Food Centre Wales was built by Ceredigion County Council at Horeb, Llandysul, and opened in 1996, to provide technical support for the food industry in Ceredigion as well as Mid and South West Wales. Its location, being accessible to rural, farming communities in Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire highlights one of its key objectives, which is to support farming businesses that wished to diversify into added value processing.

Food Centre Wales provides technical services to business start-ups, SMEs and national food manufacturers. The Centre's suite of modern facilities includes an innovation and manufacturing hub designed and equipped to accommodate small scale product and process development and commercial manufacturing.

The Centre also manages four specially designed incubator units to give start-ups industry standard premises and a supportive environment in which to establish a foothold in the food and drink industry.

Current provision

Food Centre Wales has formed a partnership with another two food technology centres in Wales, located in Llangefni and in Cardiff to provide Wales-wide support for the food industry. Branded Food Innovation Wales, the partnership delivers one of the Welsh Government's key strategic support initiatives for the industry through the Helix project. The Helix project, funded through the Welsh Government, and previously through the European funded Rural Development Plan, provides a significant proportion of the funding for Food Centre Wales. Project HELIX offers support that is tailored to each company's needs. Project HELIX delivers practical knowledge transfer activity, supporting Welsh companies to develop and reformulate innovative products from concept, design, development and manufacture, through to the consumer's shopping basket. Project HELIX works with Welsh companies to forensically analyse each step of the manufacturing process, identifying ways of introducing efficiencies across process controls, site design and systems development. Project HELIX's strategic approach enables food producers in Wales to benefit from best practice and industry intelligence from across the world. For example, companies can receive help to achieve third party certification such as BRCGS and SALSA which open new markets for their products. As well as delivering support for food businesses through Government-funded programmes, Food Centre Wales also delivers commercial services into the sector. Currently, 12 food

businesses have their manufacturing base at the centres' Manufacturing and Innovation Hub, and a further 4 companies operate from the incubator units on the site. The team also provides off-site advice and support on issues such as accreditation, factory design, and technical training on a commercial basis.

Impact on the economy

Through the HELIX project since 2016, the Food Centre Wales team has delivered good results against the targets set. The achievements and impact of interventions on the businesses supported through the project are summarised below:

COMBINED HELIX TOTALS	
Output	Achievement
Actions Supported	17
Businesses Supported	244
Unique Individuals Supported	598
Number of Training days given	510.8
New Business Start Ups	152
New Food and Drink Products	554
New Markets Accessed	262
New Jobs Created	59.53
Jobs Safeguarded	220
Third Party Accreditations	21
Financial Impact	£49,990,770.13

Approximately 30% of the businesses supported are in Ceredigion.

Future proposals

In 2019, Ceredigion County Council purchased a further 5 acres of land adjacent to the current estate at Horeb to facilitate future growth plans. Two projects are currently being developed and assessed for inclusion in the Growth Deal programme for mid Wales:

- i. The establishment of a Food Manufacturing Innovation Centre, that would bring state-of the art, industrial scale pilot facilities aimed at enabling the growth of more mid-sized food manufacturing businesses in mid Wales.
- ii. The provision of grow-on food manufacturing facilities, building on the current incubator units at Food Centre Wales.

These developments would further enhance the provision of services for the agri-food sector in Ceredigion, which is key to its economic well-being, and will help to future-proof the facility and

its long-term relevance and viability.

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To provide background and an update for the Committee on a key asset that supports the agri-food sector in Ceredigion, in advance of a proposed site visit to further explore its role now and in the future.

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: As a key asset for Ceredigion County Council that exists to support the development of one of Ceredigion's key economic sectors, this is an opportunity for the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the current work of Food Centre Wales, and to assess the early plans for the future development of the site and how it can support the agri-food sector in Ceredigion adapt to change,

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why Not at this stage – the Business Case for future investment, currently being developed will include an Integrated Impact Assessment.

Summary:
Long term:
Integration:
Collaboration:
Involvement:
Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S): That the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides feedback on the issues raised within it and undertake a site visit to further review the site's work and its future plans.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To help ensure that the appropriate actions are being undertaken to support the growth of the economy in Ceredigion.

Contact Name: Russell Hughes-Pickering, Arwyn Davies
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Date of Report: 13/10/23

Acronyms: BRCGS – British Retail Consortium Global Standards
SALSA – Safe and Local Suppliers Accreditation
FCW – Food Centre Wales

Appendices: