

# Smaller Welsh food & drink companies to benefit from €1.8million boost to increase global competitiveness

Wales will become the latest nation to join the Atlantic Area Export Project, which supports businesses from across the Atlantic Arc to work together to overcome the barriers smaller businesses in the sector face when they try to expand into international markets.

Currently over 72% of food and drink exported directly from Wales goes to the EU. This figure is much higher for Welsh red meat, where 90% of exports go to the EU.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, will make the announcement during the second day of the Royal Welsh Show.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We’ve seen Welsh companies become global brands, such is the high quality of food and drink we produce in Wales.

“We want to help more small companies break into new markets. Today’s announcement will help them to do this – just one breakthrough can be a real game changer, providing a significant boost to our rural economy.”

Exports of food and drink have grown by almost 20% in the past year.

The latest boost to smaller businesses follows the Welsh Government’s announcement in March that £21million would be made available through Project HELIX to help smaller food manufacturers in Wales increase production and reduce waste. Since then the project has supported 162 small and medium sized businesses and safeguarded 120 jobs.

The Welsh Government has committed to investing £2.4million over the next two years to expand the food and drink industry’s export market and raise Wales’ global profile.

As part of this commitment, the Cabinet Secretary will today announce the successful BlasCymru/TasteWales event, which brought global food and drink industry members to Wales to connect with Welsh food and drink producers earlier this year, will be returning in 2019.

The announcements come as initial findings from research undertaken by the Welsh Government on UK consumers views on the value of Welsh products, found 8/10 shoppers prefer to buy Welsh products and 75% think Welsh food equals excellent quality.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

“We will continue to push the UK Government to prioritise full and unfettered access to the single market and avoid any new barriers which impede Welsh food and drink businesses from operating effectively. There are many opportunities and we are supporting our food and drink sector to be in a position to make the very best of these.”

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## Ultrafast Fibre for Royal Welsh Young Farmers

This year the Young People’s Village at the show has a fibre connection which gives those staying there access to faster wi-fi and allows organisers to run a more efficient online booking system.

Around 4,000 young people stay in the village every year with around 12,000 attending events and concerts in the arena there. They will now all be able to access fast wi-fi.

The ultrafast connection was made possible after Superfast Cymru delivered Fibre to the Premises ultrafast broadband to a neighbouring farm – bringing with it access to some of the fastest speeds available in the UK.

Nia Lloyd, head of Young Farmers Club in Wales said:

“With over 4,000 young people staying with us and many more attending events a good internet connection is vital. For this year’s event we have a much stronger wi-fi signal, thanks to the new fibre connection, which I know will be welcomed by the young people.

“It’s also great for us as an organisation as it’s a boost for our online booking system, meaning we can access information quicker and provide a better service.”

Minister for Skills and Science Julie James said:

“The Royal Welsh showground itself already benefits from superfast broadband, but this did not reach the Young People’s Village which is slightly further afield.

“The village is very popular with the young farmers community and is a vibrant and exciting place. It’s very good news that it’s now easier for them to use their devices, keep in touch and plan events.”

Superfast Cymru is a partnership between the Welsh Government, BT, European Regional Development Fund and UK Government. It brings superfast broadband to areas which would otherwise not receive it.

Over 647,000 premises in Wales can now access superfast broadband thanks to the programme.

The Royal Welsh showground itself has been able to access superfast broadband since 2014 when the cabinet was enabled by Superfast Cymru. 48,768 premises in Powys now have access as a result of the programme.

Ed Hunt, Superfast Cymru programme director for Openreach, said:

“Providing ultrafast broadband speeds to the Young People’s village builds on what we’ve already done to improve connectivity on the Royal Welsh Showground.

“High speed access to the internet is an important part of everyday life and with this infrastructure now in place in time for the show young people staying at the village will be able to stay better connected.”

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## [New £4.2m EU-backed veterinary facility at Aberystwyth](#)

Aberystwyth University will lead the Vet Hub 1 project, backed with £3m from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Welsh Government, to construct a fully-equipped, high-specification laboratory and office spaces.

The Environment Secretary told a packed audience at Aberystwyth University’s education pavilion at the Royal Welsh Show that the cutting-edge development would benefit the farming industry in Wales and the wider world.

She said:

“This EU-backed investment will help tackle some of the great challenges of our time, food security, climate change as well as

the Welsh Government and Aberystwyth University's long term focus on supporting animal health and veterinary science.

"It will also unlock a range of opportunities over the coming years for businesses throughout the livestock supply chain, and in associated industries which will benefit from the new facility and collaborative research opportunities leading to the development of new products and services for the global market."

Through Vet Hub 1 researchers will work with industry to develop tests and vaccines that will help reduce losses in the livestock industry and improve animal health.

The researchers will particularly be looking at developing solutions for animal borne diseases that could pass to humans.

The facility will also lead to the further development of veterinary practices and other animal health care as well as biotechnology, animal food manufacture and other allied industries.

Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University, Professor Elizabeth Treasure, said:

"Universities have an important role to play in developing research which has an impact on the communities they serve. Vet Hub 1 will make a valuable contribution to the rural economy and to the livestock industry here in Wales and farther afield. We are proud to be working in collaboration on this project with the Growing Mid Wales Partnership, the Wales Veterinary Science Centre and other partners.

"The facility also heralds another step forward in the development of Aberystwyth as a centre for veterinary expertise. Our discussions with the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) are progressing on proposals to offer a joint programme whereby veterinary science students at Aberystwyth can spend some of their time studying at the RVC and students from the RVC can come here to undertake aspects of their training, particularly large animal practice."

Aberystwyth-based veterinarian Phil Thomas and Director of Iechyd Da, a consortium of independent veterinary practices based in Wales together with Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers Ltd and Aberystwyth University, said:

"Vet Hub1 is an exciting development for animal veterinary services in Aberystwyth and Mid Wales. Following the launch of the Wales Veterinary Science Centre by Iechyd Da and Aberystwyth University in 2015, these new laboratory facilities will give an integrated approach to disease diagnosis and elimination for the benefit of both livestock producers and consumers alike. The development could

also provide a focus for businesses to develop new products and services, as well as the potential to create new high quality jobs in the area.”

Aberystwyth University has secured a further £650k investment from CIEL (Centre of Innovation Excellence in Livestock) for an animal sciences facility working alongside Vet Hub 1.

The university is one of the 13 elite research institutions within the CIEL framework across the UK to provide a focussed gateway to world-class research institutes to develop new industry-needed solutions in partnership with 19 commercial companies.

The involvement with CIEL will strengthen the commercial partnership within Vet Hub 1 and ensure that it retains its focus on bringing new products to market.

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## **“UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Bill could put us back decades” – warns Cabinet Secretary**

Speaking at the Royal Welsh Showground, the Cabinet Secretary said devolution had enabled Welsh Government to create policies for the specific needs of Welsh farmers, with their input.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“Devolution has allowed us to tailor our policies for Welsh farmers with an understanding of their distinct needs. I’m worried the Withdrawal Bill, coupled with their lack of engagement with us to understand the needs of Welsh farmers, will mean this understanding is lost and the industry in Wales will move back decades.

“This view was clearly reflected in last week’s report from the House of Lords’ EU Committee, which fully supported our position on the future governance of the UK.

“In Wales we have a higher proportion of sheep farmers than in England and 90% of Welsh red meat exports go to the EU. I want to make sure the support they currently get is not jeopardised by Brexit.”

The Bill as it stands means Wales will have fewer powers and flexibility than

it had when in the EU. It would take away the Welsh Government's ability to interpret EU law and tailor it for Welsh needs. It will give the UK greater power over issues such as farm payments and animal health, which have been devolved to Wales for almost two decades.

The Cabinet Secretary reassured farmers she will continue to stand up for their interests. She will today meet with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, and will raise her concerns.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

"Since this process started we've been working with our stakeholders to make sure the approach we're taking in Wales benefits everyone – something that's not happening in England.

We're taking this process seriously. Our policy paper, Brexit and Devolution, highlights leaving the EU must be about the future, not the past. We want to work with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to develop a strong future which benefits everyone.

"Today I'm meeting with Michael Gove and I'll be raising all these concerns with him. I'll be making clear this Bill has shown a complete disregard for devolution as did his decision to cancel the next two planned meetings of UK agriculture and environment ministers. These meetings are crucial as the negotiations move forward and cancelling them shows a complete lack of commitment to working together."

As part of a continued programme of actions to support the specific needs of the Welsh food and farming industry the Cabinet Secretary will this week announce Wales will join the Atlantic Area Food Export Programme, meaning SMEs will benefit from €1.8million to increase their competitiveness in international markets.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"We'll continue to rally behind the Welsh food and drink industry – only last week new figures showed the industry had grown by almost 20% over the past year and we want to see it continue to grow year on year with our support."

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**[Ken Skates demands £700m from UK](#)**

# Government for scrapping electrification across South Wales

Proposals for powers over rail infrastructure to be devolved to Welsh ministers should now also be progressed with immediate effect, Economy Secretary Ken Skates has said.

In a letter to UK Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, Mr Skates described the decision as “extremely disappointing” and demanded answers on how and when Welsh communities would see the money promised for electrification of the mainline to Swansea.

Ken Skates wrote:

“Funding and delivery of electrification to Swansea was announced in 2012, and restated in 2014 by the Prime Minister David Cameron. There was a commitment for £105m for the delivery of the Cardiff-Bridgend section of the Main Line electrification scheme, part of a wider investment estimated at £700m to electrify the line to Swansea.

“The scheme would have delivered important journey time, reliability, efficiency and emissions benefits, promoting economic growth across South Wales. For the UK Government to announce the cancellation of this scheme at this stage and through the press, with no prior warning, was hugely disappointing.

“Yesterday’s announcement did not describe how the £105m promised would be allocated to the Welsh Government now that the Cardiff-Swansea scheme has been cancelled. Neither did it address the hugely damaging historic underspend in Wales over recent years.

“Passengers across Wales experience poor network reliability, low speeds, and capacity constraints which results in a much smaller proportion of people choosing to travel by train than in England and Scotland. It is imperative that our rail infrastructure gets the urgent funding it needs to deliver the fast, reliable and frequent services needed to support our communities and businesses, and to grow our economy.”

Mr Skates pointed out that although the Wales route area has around 11 per cent of the railway track, since 2011 it has only benefited from around 1.5 per cent of the money spent by the UK Government on rail enhancements.

He added:

“This is damaging to our economy and to our communities and either

urgent investment is needed to correct this historical under-investment and the £700m shortfall, or the long awaited proposals to devolve powers to Welsh Ministers over rail infrastructure should be progressed with immediate effect, alongside a fair and proportionate funding settlement.

“I would welcome a commitment from you to ensure the estimated £700m funding that would have been provided to deliver electrification to Swansea is instead ring-fenced for projects in Wales. This must be in addition to a fair proportion of funding allocated to Wales for other rail enhancements in the future.”