

Lesley Griffiths visits Catalonia and Basque Country to promote Welsh food and drink exports

During the visit, the Cabinet Secretary will meet with various food clusters to see how they are used in the promotion of their food and drink industry and how Welsh Food Clusters can learn from these to help our own businesses increase their trade and competitiveness.

In the Basque Country, the Cabinet Secretary will meet the Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to discuss the development of a new EU network of 'renowned food regions' – the REGAL network. The network is focused on developing food culture and supporting entrepreneurship and innovation. This visit is one in an ongoing exchange of Ministerial visits between Wales and the Basque Country as we continue to strengthen collaborative links between the two.

Food clusters are groups of businesses with a common interest working together for the benefit of all. They aim to remove the isolation of firms, especially SMEs and connecting them to innovative systems. There are over 450 companies involved in the Welsh Clusters, generating business through increasing collaboration within the sector.

In February, the Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the Welsh food and drinks industry turnover has increased and stands on the edge of meeting the Welsh Government's ambitious 30% growth target.

Welsh food and drink exports increased overall by 8% from £403.8m in 2015 to £435.6m in 2016, including a rise in the value of these exports to the EU.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Cabinet Secretary said:

"I am pleased to be visiting Catalonia and the Basque Country to promote our thriving Welsh food and drinks industry, to learn from the success of their pioneering cluster initiatives and explore future collaborative opportunities.

"We've seen Welsh companies become global brands, such is the high quality of food and drink we produce in Wales. Our Welsh food and drink Clusters are powerful engines for driving future growth and opening up new market opportunities for our industry. This visit will help us to build on this, enabling us to learn from the experiences of Catalonia and the Basque Country and to strengthen the links between our countries.

"There are undoubtedly challenging times ahead. The EU remains our biggest export destination by quite a stretch. That is why it is more important than ever that we use every opportunity to build

collaborative partnerships within Europe and learn from the successes of their food and drink industries.

“The food and drinks industry is a key ‘foundation’ sector for us post-Brexit. This visit is therefore particularly timely as we work to secure a resilient and thriving industry in Wales after leaving the EU.”