

Plum choice – Denbigh fruit given protected food name status

The fruit, which had its application submitted by the Denbigh Plum Group, boasts the only native variety of plum in Wales and has seen a resurgence of plums being grown in the area over the last decade.

The Denbigh Plum is the 16th Welsh product, and Wales' first fruit, to gain the EU's prestigious protected food name status.

The EU Scheme recognises quality agricultural food and drink products that surpass strict qualifying criteria. Food and drink products awarded protected food name status under the EU Scheme receive Europe-wide protection against imitation, misuse and fraud.

The European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, which forms part of one of three special European Protected Food Name (PFN) designations will help raise the profile of Denbigh town and its surrounding area too.

The Welsh Government is working with Defra to ensure the current PFNs continue to enjoy protection rights within the UK once we leave the European Union through the creation of a new scheme replicating the existing benefits.

The new scheme will continue the successful legacy of PFNs in Wales and provide vital support as the EU Scheme transitions into a new UK scheme. The scheme will also continue to support producers in Wales to achieve the EU status under new terms once we exit Europe.

The Welsh Government has provided support to PFN producers for more than six years and its funded programme is part of the reason why Wales has been so successful in developing and achieving new PFNs in the last decade.

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“I'm delighted The Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum has been honoured with protected food name status and hope it will prove a welcome boost for businesses in the area.

“With Brexit fast approaching, we are determined to support Welsh food and drink businesses and ensure they are given all necessary help in a challenging marketplace.

“This prestigious title should help strengthen the Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum's identity and allow it to further its brand not only in Wales, but across Europe and other markets too.

“We are proud that so many Welsh food and drink businesses have been successful in their applications for protected food name

status. It is testament to the high quality and unique nature of their produce.”

Peter Jones, chairman of the Denbigh Plum Group, said: “This will have a positive effect on not only Denbigh but the whole of the Vale of Clwyd.

“Over the last ten years we have seen a massive resurgence in plums being grown in the area and it is fantastic to see this hallmark of quality is now being recognised across Europe.

“We have long campaigned for this protected food name status and will now concentrate our efforts on further promoting the Vale of Clwyd Denbigh Plum and supporting efforts to cultivate it and grow it in the area.”

Estyn to be in schools more often as curriculum preparations continue

The change is just one of a series of measures designed to improve standards in schools – turning the focus to teaching and learning, the well-being of pupils and teachers and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.

Under proposals for revised inspection arrangements – to be phased in from September 2021 – Estyn would be in schools more than once within a seven year cycle, providing more frequent assurances to parents and the wider community about the standards being achieved and priorities for improvement.

In the shorter-term, Estyn will play a greater role in supporting schools to prepare for the new curriculum.

In order to allow for these changes to take place, the Welsh Government will be consulting on extending the current inspection cycle from 7 to 8 years.

This would mean there would be a partial suspension in school inspections from September 2020- August 2021 but inspections of schools causing concern, local authorities and independent schools will still continue.

Revised inspection arrangements will start to be phased in from September 2021 but this will be a gradual process over a period of years – helping schools to adapt to the new curriculum whilst maintaining and raising standards.

Kirsty Williams said:

“An effective Inspectorate is one that provides assurance that standards are being met, whilst also supporting schools to maintain improvement.

“The proposed changes are part of a broader culture change that we need to see in our schools – and culture change always takes time. There is no big-bang approach when it comes to an issue like this.

“We are moving to a model of evaluation and improvement more in line with high performing education systems across the world. What remains constant is our focus on raising standards and attainment for all.

“Estyn will have a crucial role in making this happen and that’s why they should have a greater role in supporting schools both prior to and following the roll out of the new curriculum.”

The Chief Inspector of Estyn, the education and training inspectorate in Wales, Meilyr Rowlands, said:

“I welcome today’s announcement and look forward to continuing to work closely with headteachers and schools on curriculum reform. We will soon be launching a consultation to gather views on all of today’s proposals before we implement any changes.”

Rolls Royce supplier creates 23 new jobs with Welsh Government support

Economy Minister, Ken Skates visited Consort Precision Diamond in Conwy to discuss the expansion plans, which will be supported by £200k from Welsh Government.

The Minister also spoke to the company’s management team about the types of challenges they are facing in the run up to Brexit, and urged them to take advantage of the range of support offered to Welsh business to help them prepare and build resilience ahead of Brexit.

Ken Skates said:

“I am delighted that the Welsh Government is supporting Conwy based

Consort Precision Diamond in its plan to expand its facilities and create an additional 23 highly skilled jobs at Kimmel Bay.

The support from Welsh Government will help fund the first phase of a five year plan that will see Consort Precision Diamond building a new premises and increasing its head count to just shy of 170.

It was also good to speak to the company about its Brexit preparations and to ensure they are aware of, and are accessing the full range of Welsh Government support. This includes our popular Brexit portal and diagnostic tool which is being used by thousands of businesses across Wales to help them prepare for life outside of the EU.

Consort Precision Diamond actually exports extensively to markets outside of the EU, meaning that it is in a stronger position to deal with the changes and challenges that Brexit will bring.

I would urge any business in Wales to access our comprehensive range of exporting support and advice so they can put themselves in the strongest possible position to navigate the journey ahead.

Of course we know that what business really needs, and continues to call for, is certainty. For our part we will keep pushing the UK Government to take No Deal off the table and work to secure a Brexit that protects Welsh jobs and our economy.”

The Minister’s message mirrors a new TV ad campaign launched this week that is aimed at helping Welsh SMEs prepare for Brexit. The ad encourages businesses to explore and access the Brexit support available through the Welsh Government’s comprehensive Business Wales service so they can put themselves in the strongest position possible.

Consultation on banning third party sales of puppies and kittens launched

Currently, puppies or kittens can either be purchased via a third-party seller, directly from a breeder or from a rescue/rehoming centre. Commercial third-party sellers are those who are licensed pet sellers; in Wales they will hold a licence under the Pet Animals Act 1951.

According to estimates, between 40,000 and 80,000 puppies and kittens are sold via third parties in Great Britain each year.

There are concerns commercial third-party sales lead to poorer welfare

conditions for the animals, compared to when people buy direct from the breeder. For example, this might include the introduction to several new and unfamiliar environments and the increased likelihood of multiple journeys the puppies or kittens have to undertake.

The consultation will last for three months and will gather information on the supply chain of puppies and kittens and help identify where Government intervention will have the greatest impact.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“Ensuring high standards of animal welfare is a priority for the Welsh Government.

“There is clear evidence that the sale of puppies and kittens via third parties has the potential to contribute to an increased risk of disease and a lack of socialisation and habituation for the puppies and kittens compared to when people buy directly from the breeder.

“The vast majority of those buying a new puppy or kitten do so with the best of intentions. However, it is not always immediately apparent to the buyer where their new pet originated, or in what conditions it was raised. This consultation is an opportunity to gather as much information as possible to enable us to make lasting improvements to the welfare of puppies and kittens bred in Wales. Banning commercial third party sales of puppies and kittens may only be one aspect of this.

“I urge anyone with an interest in animal welfare to get involved and share their views with us on how we can improve the conditions of sale and ensure good welfare practices.”

The consultation on the impact of a ban on third party sales of puppies and kittens in Wales will run from 19 February 2019 until 17 May.

[Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines an increase in councillors' allowances this year](#)

The Panel has determined an increase of 1.97% to the basic salary for elected members of principal councils to begin to address the erosion of the salary

in relation to average earnings. This will take the basic salary to £13,868.

The salaries of leaders and members of the executive have not been increased for several years (except for the increase in the basic element). The Panel consider that holders of these posts have significant functional responsibility and compared to remuneration of many other public sector roles are not well paid.

The Panel has therefore determined that there should be a modest increase of £800 to the Band 1 and Band 2 senior salaries payable to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Members. This is inclusive of the £268 increase to the basic salary that all members will receive.

The Panel are continuing with the three bands of Community and Town councils according to the level of income or expenditure. This is to reflect the wide variation in responsibilities of community and town councils across Wales.

The Panel is continuing mandating a payment of £150 as a contribution to costs and expenses for members of all community and town councils. They furthermore propose that every community and town council reimburse the costs of care for all members if necessary. These measures are aimed at enabling councillors to fulfil their role.

This final report and the Panel's previous reports and determinations can be viewed

at: <https://beta.gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-wales-annual-report-2019-2020>.

Ever thought of becoming a councillor? Watch this short film to see what the role entails and the remuneration and allowances you can receive: <https://youtu.be/h3o0eKrX2Ds>.