

Welsh Government pledges ongoing support for Food Sector

The visit to Peter's Foods in Bedwas comes exactly one year on from the launch of the Economic Action Plan which focuses on growing Wales' regional economies and spreading wealth and well being across Wales and identifies food as one of four foundation sectors where the Welsh Government wants to work proactively with businesses to improve sustainability, quality and long term prospects.

The other three Foundation Sectors identified in the Economic Action Plan are Tourism, Retail and Care.

Peter's Foods began as a family owned business in the mid 1970s selling pastry products. While its management has changed over the years, its reputation for producing award winning savoury pastries and sausages remains firmly intact. It currently employs 700 people.

Speaking at the visit to Peter's Foods Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"One year ago I was proud to launch our new Economic Action Plan which sets out a clear vision for building stronger foundations for growth, supercharging the industries of the future, and empowering Wales' regions.

I have been really encouraged by the positive response it has received from the business community and as a result of the Action Plan we now have over 100 Economic Contracts in place with companies across Wales who are seeking our support.

The Plan also identifies four foundation sectors – food, tourism, retail and care – that really are the backbone of our local economies.

These are sectors that provide vital jobs and essential goods and services to people right in the heart of our communities. Indeed food and drink manufacturing alone contributes turnover of £4.8bn to our economy and employs 23,000 people across Wales.

Today I want to reiterate my commitment to supporting our regional economies and working the food sector and with companies just like Peter's, so we can help them to seize opportunities to innovate, evolve, increase their productivity and grow. We are also working closely with the sector to promote working in the food sector as an attractive career option that can offer long term prospects and a clear progression route."

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs said:

“I am impressed by the range of award winning savoury pastries produced by Peter’s Foods over many years here in Bedwas where the company is a major employer and I welcome the appointment of David Lloyd from Food Innovation Wales as the new Non Executive Director.”

Mike Grimwood, managing director, Peter’s Food Service, said:

“We welcome the visit by both the Cabinet Secretaries to Peter’s today.

Welsh Government has been extremely supportive of this iconic Welsh company over many years, recognising the important role the company plays in both the sector, and the local community – we are a major employer, employing almost 700 local people.”

Boost for Llanelli as Welsh Government helps create 85 new jobs at Calsonic

The plant currently employs a workforce in excess of 300 to manufacture cooling systems and air conditioning components for many of the major automotive companies worldwide.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“First and foremost, this is a real vote of confidence in the workforce at the company’s Llanelli plant. To have a company of such international standing commit to securing their current workforce alongside creating a further 85 jobs during such uncertain times is excellent news.

“For our part, our £4.4m investment has not only helped secure these jobs over a period of at least the next 5 years, but also ensures that Calsonic Kansei, and Wales have the necessary capacity and expertise to be a global leader in emerging Electric Vehicle technologies, particularly battery cooling developments.

“This move to a more sustainable model aligns directly with our Economic Action Plan and sees the company commit to growth, fair work, reducing their carbon footprint and promoting health, up-skilling and learning in the work place.

“It’s an opportune moment to for us to ensure this important

regional employer plays a continued role in our growing economy and builds on our commitment to make sure our businesses are ready and equipped to make the most of the opportunities presented by the technologies of tomorrow.”

Keiichiro Miyanaga, CEO of Calsonic Kansei in Europe greatly welcomed this award, adding:

“This support will help us secure the necessary skills, products and investment in our Llanelli site to meet the rapidly evolving requirements from electrification within the Automotive Industry. Through investment in product development and manufacturing capacity within the site, we can ensure we have the required capability to meet the future product needs of our key customers.”

[Progress on plans to improve NHS dental services in Wales](#)

Mr Gething said his target for the expansion of the contract reform programme had been exceeded and in addition 73 applications had been received for support from a new £1.5m innovation fund to develop services.

He said:

“We are escalating the roll-out across Wales of the reform of dental contracts to deliver a better service for NHS patients and improve oral health. The new system aims to make better use of skills in dental practice teams, better understanding of individual patient need and more emphasis on prevention.”

Initially 22 dental practices, across Wales, took part in the first stage of the reforms, which included new personalised plans to help patients make better choices to improve and maintain oral health themselves.

The Health Secretary added:

“Early evaluation of the first stage has been positive and we are now increasing the number of practices taking part. In July I asked health boards and the dental profession to support expansion of the reform programme at pace and for a minimum of 10% of dental practices to be taking part by October.

I am pleased to say that ambition has been achieved and indeed exceeded, with a total of 53 practices – one in eight of all practices in Wales – now actively participating. I now expect a minimum of 20% of dental practices to be taking part in each area from April 2019.

We have also received 73 applications for funding from the £1.5m innovation fund to test new ways of working in dental practices, improve skills and recruit more dental care professionals.

There is still unequal disease experience and unequal access to dental care across Wales. These reforms aim to tackle those inequalities and empower people to maintain and protect their own oral health.”

Over 95% of Basic Payments 2018 paid to farm businesses

This means over £213m has been paid into bank accounts of more than 14,700 Welsh farm businesses during the first week.

In response to the exceptionally hot and dry weather during the summer, the Cabinet Secretary introduced a BPS loan scheme to help farm businesses manage their cash flow and plan their finances, whilst their BPS claims were being processed.

The BPS loan, which closed for applications on 30 November, has seen an additional £23.1m paid to over 1,200 farm businesses this year.

Rural Payments Wales has also received cross border data from their counterparts in England, allowing the Welsh Government to process 2018 BPS claims to over 75% of Welsh cross border farms.

The BPS 2018 payment window opened on 3 December, and will run until 30 June 2019.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“I am pleased to confirm over 95% of farm businesses have been paid either their BPS payments or loan applications during the first payment week.

“The BPS loan, which I introduced in response to the hot and dry summer, has provided certainty to farmers whilst their BPS claims were processed and helped 1,200 farm businesses manage their cash

flow and plan their finances.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone, including the industry, who have worked with my officials to introduce the BPS loan scheme and contributed to an excellent payment performance once again this year.

“This year, we have also seen a significant improvement with cross border farm payments compared to previous years. My officials are continuing to press the Rural Payments Agency in England for the remaining data and are working hard on processing the remaining BPS claims as soon as possible.

“I expect all but the most complex cases to be completed before the payment window closes next June.”

[Housing conditions steadily improving in Wales](#)

The Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18 collected information about the condition and energy efficiency of all types of occupied housing in Wales. The survey also revealed steady improvements in energy efficiency and safety in housing.

Energy efficiency and environmental performance is measured by the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP). Overall the average SAP rating across all housing tenures in Wales increased by 11 SAP points between 2008 – 2017-18 to 61, which is equivalent to an Energy Performance Certificate Band D. The private rented sector in Wales showed the biggest increase, with a rise of 13 SAP points.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“It’s really encouraging to see that since the last survey, housing conditions have improved across all tenures in Wales. Housing is one of the Welsh Government’s strategic priorities; we want everyone to live in a home that meets their needs and supports a healthy, successful and prosperous life.

“The links between poor housing and poor health are well documented. We are investing £1.7bn in housing because it is an investment to tackle fuel poverty and to improve people’s health and wellbeing.

“This survey demonstrates clear improvements in the quality of

homes in Wales. Across all tenures of housing there has been a reduction in the percentage of homes with structural defects and serious health and safety hazards and an improvement in energy efficiency.

“However, I want to ensure that we use this survey to effectively target resources to improve housing in Wales. We are currently examining options to help to reduce carbon emissions across existing Welsh homes and to build better housing for the future. Whilst this survey shows improvements, I am clear that there is more to do to reach our ambitious carbon reduction targets and to tackle fuel poverty.”

Work will continue on the Housing Conditions Evidence Programme to maximise the use of existing data and to consider options for a future Housing Conditions Survey.