

Blas Dyfi Taste - Report

Facilitation of a food and drink business cluster in the UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere, carried out with businesses by ecodyfi

Summary

This project came at a time of rising interest and enthusiasm for food and drink with local provenance. It has facilitated the definition of a brand that can be used by growers, suppliers and commercial users of local produce. 'Blas Dyfi Taste – grown/made in a UNESCO Biosphere' is a sub-brand of the Dyfi Biosphere.

Appropriate businesses can demonstrate their commitment to local, fresh and seasonal produce through use of the brand on packaging of appropriate produce, on menus and websites, and at their premises.

The eligibility criteria have been worked out with participating businesses. Window decals (stickers), mini paper stickers (for menus or jars etc) and tent cards (for tables) have been produced, along with logo files and information about the Dyfi Biosphere. Participants will be featured on www.dyfibiosphere.wales/food-and-drink and <https://www.biosfferdyfi.cymru/bwyd-a-diod>.

A significant number of café and restaurant owners and some retail outlets in the UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere area are keen to make more use of local produce and to promote this to customers. Some producers (mostly growers) are willing partners, but most production is livestock geared to larger markets outside the area. The local horticulture sector is growing rapidly, partly due to additional demand stimulated by the Covid19 crisis, but it starts from a very small base.

The potential benefits include increased demand for local produce from hospitality businesses, improving the viability of growers and processors, together with additional business for participating cafes and restaurants. The increased profile and awareness of the value of local produce and of its links to good agricultural, horticultural and environmental practice are of value in themselves.

The direct benefits of the project itself provide the platform for delivering these benefits: increased collaboration between businesses, the brand, and the tools for its use. However, the businesses are small and find it difficult to devote time to collaborations. There is also still a partial divide between the Aberystwyth and Bro Ddyfi business communities. The local food network is real, but it is informal.



A. Background

This work was commissioned as part of the Dyfi Biosphere Cooperation Development Project, which is a two-year pilot supported through the LEADER scheme. This project is being supported on a cooperative basis by Cynnal y Cardi (Ceredigion), Arwain (Powys) and Arloesi Gwynedd Local Action Groups (LAG). All three areas provide financial support and support for implementation. The Cynnal y Cardi LAG is the lead partner.

This project received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government. It is also part funded by Gwynedd Council, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), Ceredigion County Council and Powys County Council.

The work supported many of the main principles of LEADER as detailed in the diagram below:

- Bottom up working – while ecodyfi facilitated the process, it was the participating businesses who led the definition of the criteria for participation, for example;
- Innovation – the Dyfi Biosphere is the only area in Wales to have ‘Biosphere Reserve’ status from UNESCO, and this was the first attempt to bring together producers and users of food and drink in this area;
- Networking and cooperation – the businesses involved straddle the county boundaries of Gwynedd, Powys and Ceredigion and the networking brought together those who cluster naturally around Machynlleth with Aberystwyth businesses.



There is a UK-wide trend for visitors and locals to look for food and drink with local provenance, as part of a wider interest in authentic place-based experiences. The Dyfi Biosphere area is not capitalising on this very well despite some excellent produce. Café and restaurant businesses are interested in exploring how to collaborate around this agenda. Could an association with the Dyfi Biosphere brand be useful?

This commission aimed to inspire and support the continued development through LEADER animation activity of a small food and drink cluster that emerged during two exploratory meetings, held by the Biosphere's Development Project in June and July 2017. Some of the participants were members of the Dyfi Biosphere Tourism Association. Momentum had been lost with the departure of the project officer, but goodwill remained.

B. Activities and collaborations

The engagement process involved one to one contacts by email, phone and face to face. This included two days going into cafes and restaurants in Aberystwyth and speaking to the owners, managers or other staff as available. An interview was held with the owner of the Treehouse.

Cluster meetings were held on 16th April 2018, 17th May 2018 and 20th May 2019.



Showcase at the Wynnstay June 2018

Showcase events to bring together suppliers and buyers were held in Machynlleth on 28th June 2018 and in Aberystwyth on 5th December 2018.

From the engagement process a network of producers and suppliers was created on Google docs so that all businesses could access it - and add their recommendations to the list. Initial entries came primarily from the old Food and Drink in Mid Wales directory produced by Tourism Partnership Mid Wales. This was supplemented with information provided by organisers of Food Festivals and from a Gwynedd LEADER-funded project.

Market research concerning a Dyfi Biosphere food and drink festival was carried out at the Aberystwyth Food Festival on 28th June 2018 and at a Cywain event at Corris Craft Centre on 13th November 2018. Discussions were held subsequently with the owner of Camlan Garden Centre, who had organised a Food and Farming Festival at Cwmlinlau.

Publicity included a press release and facebook, but most effort was by direct contact using email, phone and visits to hospitality businesses, especially in Machynlleth and Aberystwyth.



Ecodyfi collaborated with the Pathways to Farming project, managed by social enterprise Mach Maethlon with support from Arwain (LEADER in Powys).

<https://www.machmaethlon.org/pathways-to-farming/> That project primarily aims to expand the supply of locally grown produce through training and mentoring new horticulturalists, and secondly to explore new local markets for such produce. Ecodyfi presented the Biosphere cluster work at their 'New markets' event, where branding and other issues were discussed.

Collaboration with Howell Consultancy's TAIS-funded Blas Cambria project led to Nerys Howell providing 'surgery' advice at our Machynlleth Showcase, and to consistency between the emerging criteria for the Dyfi and Cambria clusters.

The co-design process with local businesses led to the definition of 'Blas Dyfi Taste' as a sub-brand of the Dyfi Biosphere. This has subsequently been offered to business users and to suppliers as an opportunity for co-branding alongside their own product and business branding. Through the animation process criteria for participation/use of the brand were defined and a 'Toolkit' of logos, stickers and Biosphere information was produced. It was an opportunity to pilot and test the toolkit and brand through this commission. It was also an opportunity to gain feedback on what could work for local businesses in terms of suppliers and producers. From this case studies will be produced as part of the overall evaluation being undertaken as part of the Dyfi Biosphere cooperation project.

C. Businesses involved

Of those providing written evidence of their involvement, 37 businesses participated in various meetings and events, while a further 11 stakeholders were consulted. Key hospitality participants included Caffi Cletwr at Tre'r Ddol, Caffi Crochan at King Arthur's Labyrinth in Corris, Caffi Pen Dinas at the National Library, and the Café at the Centre for Alternative Technology. An additional 43 businesses were talked to.

On the producer side, Jo's Veg of Pennant is using the brand on his vegetable packaging. Wainwrights Honey has agreed to use the branded stickers on the jars of a selected local honey, and Felin Ganol will consider this for their flour packaging. There is much more potential.



D. Opportunities, recommendations and next steps

While there is enthusiasm, this will need to be translated into formal sign-up and active participation from more businesses so as to develop customer awareness and value. This will be done in partnership by ecodyfi (on behalf of the Dyfi Biosphere) and the Pathways to Farming project being delivered by Mach Maethlon.

<https://www.machmaethlon.org/2020/03/19/feeding-our-community/>



The collaboration between Pathways to Farming (PtF) and the Biosphere (through ecodyfi) offers a route to future development. Specifically, PtF has decided to promote Blas Dyfi instead of creating its own local food brand. Their Katie Hastings will do this when she visits hospitality businesses in the Dyfi Valley, and ecodyfi will follow up by asking them to join formally.

Also, PtF has created the framework for an e-shop on the Open Food Network, although this has not opened yet. The weekly timetable allows producers to state what they have available that week, for buyers to order on that basis and for deliveries to be arranged collectively. The intention was to restrict buying to retail and hospitality businesses but the Covid19 crisis has raised the possibility of opening it to end consumers, as does the Aber Food Hub.

At the end of the commission, it was agreed that the Steering Group of the PtF project be reformulated so as to take forward the Dyfi Biosphere food and drink cluster. Those signing up to the Blas Dyfi brand will be encouraged to attend, but meetings will also be open to others interested in developing the local food economy.

More broadly, ecodyfi led an application to Welsh Government's ENRaW funding stream, on behalf of Mach Maethlon, Aber Food Surplus and Ysgol Bro Hyddgen. If successful, it will provide significant capacity to develop more food resilience in the area.

However, the Covid19 crisis has changed many things, including highlighting the fragility of mainstream supply chains and stimulating demand for local food. Voluntary and commercial action to increase the volume and variety of local production has mushroomed, mainly under the banner of Planna Fwyd! Plant Food! This loose grouping of enthusiasts is deciding how to constitute itself, whether independently or as part of Mach Maethlon.

<https://plantfood.machynlleth.wales/>

Meanwhile, based on information about the past, ecodyfi's project Mixed Farming: Histories and Futures continues to stimulate conversations about whether and how to re-introduce cropping into some farm plans, whether for fodder or human consumption.

<https://www.dyfibiosphere.wales/mixed-farming-histories-and-futures>

The Covid19 restrictions mean that the proposal to build on the pilot Food and Farming Festival held at Brynuchel in Cwmlinau on 10th August 2019 has had to be put on hold. This event can be expanded in association with the Dyfi Biosphere. In addition, producers see the potential for a food-focussed festival in the grounds of Y Plas, Machynlleth. While opinions varied about the best time of year for this, it would be held outside August and not clashing with the Aberdyfi, Aberystwyth or Sea to Shore Festivals.

Future collaborations may include a virtual/printed 'Trail'.



E. Appendices

1. Blas Dyfi Taste – Charter. English and Welsh versions separately.
2. Blas Dyfi Taste - Criteria for participation. English and Welsh versions separately.

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June 2020

