



## Growing more food in Powys for local and regional markets

Policy briefing for Powys County Councillors, March 2026

### The food challenges what we face in Powys

- Our food system is very fragile. The groundbreaking report last year by Tim Lang, [\*Just in Case: narrowing the UK civil food resilience gap\*](#), shows how our highly centralised just-in-time food distribution system, on which we are wholly dependent, is not resilient to shocks that we already see happening - cyber-attacks, closed ports, global conflict, extreme climate events.
- Food prices will rise inexorably, driving food poverty, driven by climate over-heating and war.
- The extreme price of farmland land is blocking farming from a new generation of farmers.
- There are hardly any opportunities for new start-ups on the Council's 10,500-acre estate. In the three years before three new farms were built at Sarn in 2025, there were only two new rentals.

### Three proposed flagship policies to catalyse profound change

- 1. Use available County farmland suitable for horticulture for growing for local/regional markets.**
  - Enable the building of more small mixed farms, following the pilot at Sarn, and connected to local and regional markets like Birmingham.
  - Develop partnership with ClwydAlyn Housing Association to build affordable farm homes, an initiative of UK-wide interest.
- 2. Retain public/community ownership of land that is suitable for horticulture, so that its use for food security is held in perpetuity as a community asset.**
  - All publicly/community owned land that is suitable for growing for local markets is a priceless asset for future food security and needs to be protected.
- 3. Build rapid expansion of local growing into all future plans for the County.**
  - This includes diversification on Powys farms with suitable land, new mixed farms, and community projects in every town serving families who cannot afford fresh food.

### The benefits of this action

- Make Powys food more secure by diversifying our food sources, particularly of fresh food.
- Support new enterprise development on farms, linking to expanding markets for fresh food.
- Support the rural economy through new businesses and local trading.
- Keep ownership of supply chains close to farmers, so farmers get a better deal.
- Open farming to a new generation of farmers.
- Repopulate our agricultural areas.
- Contribute to climate change mitigation, regenerate biodiversity and keep our rivers clean, by implementing agroecological methods to grow fresh food.
- Protect communities from ever increasing food prices and expanding food poverty.

The [Future Farms Partnership](#) is making a start, with a goal to build 100 new farming enterprises through diversification, new farms and community projects. The partnership is:

- building new farms, starting with [three at Sarn](#) last year;
- rebuilding local and regional supply chains, including into Birmingham (which is soon to place its first order for agroecological produce from Powys farms as part of a pilot);
- developing the concept of “affordable farms” with ClwydAlyn Housing Association; and
- building new skills with Black Mountains College.

## Voices

Professor Tim Lang, message to Powys, February 2026:

*“The Future Farms initiative in Powys sets out to address the gap between business-as-usual and the hard evidence that the food system must change, if we are to feed all the people well. It will be a template for how the country can engage with the harsh realities now coming into the food system.”*

James Rebanks, in a [BBC discussion](#), November 2025:

*“We have a just in time food system... but it’s not robust or resilient enough. Through public policy we have to design a system that has far more resilience. **What we need is lots of local food production.** We need British veg production, British horticulture, British fruit. If you live in Manchester, you need thereto be some food production near to you.”*

Guy Singh-Watson, in a [joint letter to the Prime Minister](#), July 2024:

*“Almost half of our veg and more than 80% of our fruit is imported. This cannot go on. **We urgently need more – not less – home-grown fruit and veg, or we face further disaster for supermarket shelves, our health, and the environment.** With the right support from government, growers can be empowered do grow more, and in a nature-friendly way, like our organic and regenerative producers who are nurturing the land, restoring wildlife and protecting waterways. Your intervention could make it possible for all fruit and veg producers to thrive – from field scale horticulture, to orchards, organic farms, market gardens; .... could help restore the resilience of our food supply, improve the fairness of our supply chains, and get more British produce on people’s plates.”*

Students and alumni of Black Mountains College, open letter to the Council, March 2026:

*“We are students at Black Mountains College, studying agroecological farming. **We are developing the skills to practice this farming, but we are blocked from practising it.** We ask you to change this.... The price of land is prohibitive [and] this kind of farming needs homes for people living and working on the land. We urge Welsh Government and all rural local authorities in Wales to develop policies and plans that open up many more thousands of acres for affordable small farms with homes. In so doing, we can build food security, rejuvenate the rural economy and respond to climate over-heating, biodiversity loss and river pollution.”* Full letter in Annex.

## The detail

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## 1. The challenges

### 1.1 *Just in Case* report on food security, Tim Lang, 2025

A major report on food security, published last year, [\*Just in Case: narrowing the UK civil food resilience gap\*](#), by Professor Tim Lang, describes the fragility of our food system and its extreme vulnerability to shocks that we already see happening – cyber-attacks, closed ports, global conflict, extreme climate events. Severe problems lie ahead for which we are wholly unprepared. Tim Lang makes a powerful case local action, which we have set out in a website, [FoodSecurityAction.org](https://FoodSecurityAction.org).

### 1.2 Food insecurity and future food poverty

Food prices will rise inexorably. [Food price inflation in 2025 was 4.2%](#), which would lead to a doubling in price in 17 years. But Tim Lang’s analysis shows that the pressures will get worse. Severe climate over-heating in Europe will increasingly restrict our future imports of fresh food. The [UK imports](#) 84% of the fruit it consumes and 50% of the vegetables. (For a recent analysis of future global food supplies and price rises, see Guardian, [How climate breakdown is putting the world’s food in peril – in maps and charts.](#)) Domestic growing of fresh foods is concentrated in the East of England, the part of the country particularly vulnerable to both flooding and drought. Meanwhile, global conflict is escalating, restricting global trade routes and driving up the price of fuel used by our carbon-intensive food system.

The inability of people to afford food is one of the cruellest consequences of poverty. In January 2025, one in seven UK households struggled to afford food, according to the Food Foundation’s [food insecurity tracker](#). This problem is going to get steadily worse as prices rise.

### 1.3 Land price inflation blocking new farming

As economic inequality grows and the rich become richer, the price of all assets rises, including land. In Wales, land is already priced at three times its agricultural value because it is seen as a good investment by those with wealth. This is gradually sucking farmland out of farming. In 2023, non-farmers [bought more than half of the farms and estates sold in the UK](#). Land is more valuable as a safe asset for storing wealth than for growing food.

This does not happen in France, because farmland is protected in law: it cannot be sold out of farming. Consequently, the average price of farmland in France is a third that in UK: [£2,600/acre in France](#) and [£8,200 in UK](#) (2024 figures).

The original vision for County farmland was to enable new farmers to start. In the three years before three new farms were built at Sarn in 2025, there were only two farm lettings to new entrants. This is compounded by the fact that there is no longer anywhere for farmers on the estate to move to because of the extreme price of land.

## 2. The opportunities

Powys County has vast resources for growing more food. If we develop more farming enterprises on our land, growing food agroecologically for local and regional markets, then:

- We will open farming to a new generation of farmers and repopulate our rural areas.
- We will support the rural economy through new businesses and local trading.
- By promoting agroecology, we will benefit the environment – climate, nature, our rivers.
- By growing food for the local and regional economy, we will make the most important contribution to food security – diversifying our food sources.
- By rebuilding rural-urban supply chains, we will open new market opportunities for farms.
- By keeping local ownership of supply chains, farmers will get a better deal.

The market for organic fruit and veg is [growing in the UK](#). Large cities are paying attention to food security. Birmingham has a [food strategy](#) that includes buying more fresh food from its rural hinterlands. The City Council will soon place its first order for fresh food from Powys farmers, as part of a pilot towards restoring once vibrant food trade links between Powys and the city.

## 3. The Future Farms Partnership

The Future Farms Partnership has been set up in Powys to address the challenge of growing more food for local and regional markets. The Partners are currently:

- Social Farms and Gardens
- Our Food Trust
- Powys County Council
- Cultivate
- Black Mountains College
- Coleg Cambria
- Roddick Foundation
- Lantra
- Landworkers' Alliance
- Wildlife Trusts Wales
- Gwlad Consortium

The Partnership will welcome any new organisation that is committed to and can contribute to its mission.

### 3.1 The start: three new small farms at Sarn, 2025

The Partnership started with building [three new small farms in Sarn](#) on 35 acres of farmland leased from Powys County Council. (The entire programme was funded externally from the Council budget and has increased the income being received by the Council from the farm estate.) Five farmers moved in during 2025 and are now trading and organising community events. (Follow them on [Facebook](#).)

(Is this small-scale farming viable? See Annex.)

In November, BBC's [Escape to the Country](#) programme filmed in Powys picked this project as emblematic of the whole County. (Feature starts at 35m38s.)

*Lydia: "I would never have been able to even think about getting seven acres of my own if I had to fund it all myself. If you want to live on site as we are, it's unbelievably expensive.... I feel really blessed!"*

Prior to this, there was a two-year period of research to develop new planning guidelines for Powys: [Rural Enterprise Dwellings for Small-Scale Horticulture](#). (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park issued [similar guidelines](#) shortly after.)

### **3.2 Next: 100 farming enterprises – building farms, facilitating access to markets (including Birmingham), building skills**

The next step for the Future Farms Partnership is mainstreaming this in order to create [100 new farming enterprises](#), growing agroecologically for local and regional markets. There are several ways to do this:

- Diversification on existing farms, primarily through new supply chains to secure markets.
- New small farms on more land either purchased into community ownership or leased very long-term from the Powys County Council.
- Community growing projects designed to make fresh food available to households who cannot afford it.

Welsh Government is considering funding a study to assess the economic, environmental and social benefits of building new small farming enterprises in Powys.

A partnership is being discussed with ClwydAlyn Housing Association to build farmhouses through Wales' social housing programme. This would enormously contribute to the financial viability of building new small farms in the context of hugely inflated land prices. (It would also be a major innovation in farming, of international interest. The Centre of Food Policy, established by Tim Lang at the University of London, is planning a major research programme with this Powys housing/land/farming initiative as the centrepiece.)

The Future Farms Partnership's 100-farm programme has several components:

1. Facilitate access to secure new markets to enable farmers to diversify and create new enterprises on existing farms. Build collaborative marketing and sales operations to retain more of the revenue.
2. Secure land for new farms and build affordable farms with homes.
  - Land leased from Powys County Council, as happened in the pilot at Sarn. The Partnership is seeking more land to lease.
  - Land purchased by the community.

- Development of Farmland Trust, a local charitable community benefit society designed to secure land into community ownership to be held in perpetuity for growing local fresh food.
3. Advocate for public policies, locally and nationally, that prioritise food security and enable the creation of new farm enterprises.
  4. Develop skills and pathways into farming for a new generation of farmers. Provide work experience to bridge the gap from graduation from Black Mountains and other colleges to running farming businesses.
  5. Facilitate business support to farmers.
    - Government funded support worked well for the farmers at Sarn. Expand this as more new enterprises start.

## 4. What Cardiff says about land, planning, local food, and expanding horticulture

### 4.1 Welsh Government Horticulture Strategy (2024) and Community Food Strategy (2025)

Welsh Government has a [horticulture strategy](#) that aims to strengthen food security and to create employment in Wales. This has led to business support for new horticultural enterprises.

The [Wales Community Food Strategy](#) addresses local food growing and horticulture and promises to change planning policy to favour both.

*“Objective 6: To increase the production of fresh, nutritious and sustainable locally sourced food in Wales, maximising the opportunities for developing community growing and small-scale horticulture in Wales.*

*“In the past, Wales had a rich and varied horticultural industry. The movement to a global food system with specialisation increased the economy of scale and this led to a steep decline in Welsh, and indeed UK, horticulture production.*

*“Small-scale horticulture in Wales presents numerous opportunities and benefits, particularly in terms of environmental sustainability and biodiversity. Small-scale horticulture also offers economic benefits, like creating local employment opportunities and supporting rural economies.*

*“We will update Planning Policy Wales to emphasise the specific focus and importance we place on horticulture as a land-use, acknowledging its unique operational needs. The update aims to increase small scale horticulture in Wales by giving explicit mention to horticulture, our definition of and vision for the sector. This will enable local planning authorities and applicants to have the awareness and the knowledge needed for planning permission. We*

*will subsequently look to update the relevant Technical Advice Notes (TANs) to reflect our ambitions to expand the horticultural sector in Wales. This will offer clarity for planning officers and growers, recognising the distinct requirements for evaluating horticultural planning applications from the current wider agriculture guidance. We want the guidance to enable improvements to the quality and evaluation of planning applications and the timeliness of approvals.”*

## 4.2 Future Generations Report 2025

The [Future Generations Report 2025](#) has a strong food theme and addresses planning issues. It singles out for commendation Powys’ change in planning guidelines.

*“One of the biggest barriers to growing more local food is access to land. Local authorities should look to Powys’ Rural enterprise planning policy, which supports small-scale horticulture businesses by providing planning guidance for rural enterprise dwellings. By adopting similar policies, councils can unlock opportunities for new horticultural enterprises, shorten supply chains, and promote community supported agriculture.*

*“Public bodies face increasing tensions between balancing competing land uses, for example, housing and infrastructure, renewable energy deployment, food production, nature recovery and economic growth. We need a smarter, more joined-up approach to land use decisions, one that ensures that carbon emissions, nature recovery and food resilience are considered in every decision.*

## 5. What Powys County Council can do

### 5.1 Tim Lang’s call for local and regional action

In his groundbreaking report Tim Lang sets out three types of action needed at local/regional level.

1. **Grow more food for regional and local markets.** This diversifies our food supplies away from an astonishing over-dependence on nine supermarkets, which use a “just in time” supply system that will dry up in days in a major crisis.
2. **Build community resilience,** so that every community has capacity to look after people in a crisis when food prices spiral out of control.
3. **Make regional plans for emergencies,** for example stockpiling of essential foods and making plans to serve isolated households in a crisis.

The recommendations that follow home in on the first of these actions: growing more food.

### 4.2 What Powys County Council is already doing

The Council is promoting local, sustainable food systems through initiatives like [Bwyd Powys Food](#), a partnership established to promote food system change.

The Council has made available to the Future Farms Partnership 36 acres of council-owned land in Sarn for agroecological fruit and vegetable production, supplying local and regional markets.

The Council is supporting small-scale horticulture via new planning guidance for [Rural Enterprise Dwellings](#).

Powys County is part of the [Marches Forward Partnership](#) with the Councils of Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Shropshire. This will include a focus on building local food supply chains, food and farming business clusters, skills development, housing and rural-urban connections. A Marches Investment Platform is being developed to fuel the process financially.

#### 4.3 Three flagship policies to catalyse profound change

##### **Use available County farmland suitable for horticulture for growing for local/regional markets.**

- Enable the building of more small mixed farms, following the pilot at Sarn, and connected to local and regional markets like Birmingham.
- Develop partnership with ClwydAlyn Housing Association to build affordable farm homes, an initiative of UK-wide interest.

##### **Retain public/community ownership of land that is suitable for horticulture, so that its use for food security is held in perpetuity as a community asset.**

- All publicly/community owned land that is suitable for growing for local markets is a priceless asset for future food security and needs to be protected.

##### **Build rapid expansion of local growing into all future plans for the County.**

- This includes diversification on Powys farms with suitable land, new mixed farms, and community projects in every town serving families who cannot afford fresh food.
- Relevant future plans are:
  - the Local Development Plan;
  - the Strategic Development Plan for Powys, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire;
  - affordable housing provision in Powys - linking housing and community food growing;
  - the Transforming Towns agenda – developing local markets for produce;
  - the Wellbeing Assessment and Plan – health, wellbeing and economic opportunity relating to food and farming;
  - social value contracting in public procurement – local food supply chains serving social care and development sites;
  - education and schools – supplying schools with local food and teaching children about local food.

## **Annex: Is small-scale farming viable?**

There is an argument in wide circulation that small-scale farming is not economically viable. This assertion is wrong. Small-scale farming is hard work, like all farming, but it is economically viable.

Intensive agroecological horticulture, typical of small farms, generates a net income of about £20,000/acre in a year – after all costs, including additional labour, but before paying the farmer. One acre needs the farmer’s full-time attention. So a two-acre market garden, managed by a couple, can earn £40,000/year, just enough to live on.

The farms that the Future Farms Partnership is envisaging are bigger – up to 10 acres. This enables a variety of other farming activities.

Small-scale farms work as networks. They specialise in what they grow and buy and sell from each other in order to provide their customers with a complete product.

## **Annex: Open letter from Black Mountain College students to public authorities – 'let us farm!'**

[To: Powys County Council, National Park Authority, Welsh Government]

We are students at Black Mountains College, studying agroecological farming. We are developing the skills to practice this farming, but we are blocked from practising it. We ask you to change this.

The kind of farming that we are preparing for is crucial for the future. It enables our regions and cities to diversify their food supplies, which is vital for food security. Our methods specifically reduce carbon emissions, restore nature and do not pollute our rivers. We build the soil biome and produce food that is high in nutrition and quality and good for health. We help to rejuvenate rural communities. Small farms working together support farmers' social welfare and mental health. Our methods have been shown across the world to be extremely productive and economically viable, albeit very hard work, like all farming.

Horticulture and mixed farming were once mainstays of farming in this area. Economic incentives enacted through agricultural policies have all but eliminated it.

We cannot practise agroecological farming, however. The price of land is prohibitive – it is valued as a financial asset, not as a food-growing asset. Also, this kind of farming needs homes for people living and working on the land, but there have been decades of rural depopulation and a planning system that still reinforces the emptying of people from farming areas.

We warmly welcome the work already underway in Powys and Bannau Brycheiniog to change planning policy and build three small farms at Sarn. Within months the new farmers were selling produce and were holding community events. We also welcome the technical and financial support these farms have received from Welsh Government services.

We urge Welsh Government and all rural local authorities in Wales to develop policies and plans that open up many more thousands of acres for affordable small farms with homes. In so doing, we can build food security, rejuvenate the rural economy and respond to climate over-heating, biodiversity loss and river pollution.