

Developing the markets for organic food in the Welsh hospitality and tourism sector

Questionnaire Survey Report

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Better Organic Business Links

The Better Organic Business Links (BOBL) project, run by Organic Centre Wales, is a four year project designed to support the primary producer in Wales and grow the market for Welsh organic produce in a sustainable way.

The aim is to develop markets for organic produce whilst driving innovation and promoting sustainable behaviours at all levels within the supply chain, to increase consumer demand and thence markets for organic produce, especially in the home market, and to ensure that the primary producers are aware of market demands. The project provides valuable market information to primary producers and the organic sector in general.

Delivery of the project is divided into five main areas of work:

- Fostering innovation and improving supply chain linkages
- Consumer information and image development of organic food and farming in Wales
- Market development
- Providing market intelligence to improve the industry's level of understanding of market trends and means of influencing consumer behaviour
- Addressing key structural problems within the sector.

In all elements of the work, the team are focused on building capacity within the organic sector, to ensure that the project leaves a legacy of processors and primary producers with improved business and environmental skills, able to respond to changing market conditions, consumer demands and climate change.

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1. Background

The overall aim of this work is to support the development of organic food tourism initiatives and to identify the current market for organic food in the hospitality and tourism sector throughout Wales. The information supplied will enable the BOBL project to help those businesses develop and achieve greater success. Six cases studies of successful organic hospitality and food tourism businesses in Wales have already been undertaken and in this part of the project a questionnaire survey has been undertaken of all the known organic agri-tourism providers in Wales.

1.1 What are the benefits of organic agritourism?

Organic farming has the potential to make beneficial contributions to the quality of life, the environment and sustainability in various fields beyond those derived from the standards of organic production. The development of organic agritourism can add to these contributions by linking tourism, food production and the environment; and by creating new markets for organic food and short food supply chains. Agritourism can also benefit organic farming by providing markets in areas of low population and low consumer demand.

In a study of organic farming in the National Parks of Wales, Frost and van Diepen (2007) found that many organic farms had diversified into tourism in order to safeguard income and to take advantage of marketing opportunities created by the high level of tourism in the three National Parks in Wales, Snowdonia, Brecon Beacons and the Pembrokeshire Coast. Similarly, the RAFAEL EU Interreg project found examples throughout the EU Atlantic area where local supply chain opportunities were being achieved by linking them to tourism, conservation measures, health and public procurement. A review of the project stated that, "More practical guides for tourists to visit authentic food producers or to stay on a farm and learn more about how food is produced are needed." (Frost *et al*, 2007).

Further afield, a survey of farmers engaging in 'farm vacation tourism' in Lower Saxony, Germany (Schulze *et al* 2007) found that many farmers who start tourism activities to provide additional income eventually adopt it as their main economic activity and they point out that for the individual farm business it is important to network with other local businesses and organisations. This research also revealed that visitors from the city who choose this type of holiday as an escape have a strong interest in seeing children learn about farm activities.

1.2 What factors affect the success of agri-tourism businesses?

Schulze *et al* found that the majority of successful agri-tourism farmers judged their personal skills as the most important factor for success, and also that size of enterprise and economies of scale are very important. Similarly, in their review of the literature on agritourism, Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) found that farm-owner characteristics impacted on business performance and the most significant of these were business networking, principal occupation (i.e. farming or other occupation), age and gender. Farm characteristics that influenced performance were length of time in business, size of farm and number of employees. The researchers concluded that the performance of agritourism farms depends in large part on their access to financial, marketing and business resources.

2. Objectives

The questionnaire survey aimed to identify the key factors that affect the performance of organic agritourism farms in Wales, the role that food plays in those businesses and the

current state of the market for organic food in the hospitality and tourism sector throughout Wales. The survey acknowledged that many factors contribute to the success of individual businesses, including the characteristics of the farm, the farmers, their social networks and the resources available

Organic guides, previously produced by Organic Centre Wales, have been widely welcomed by organic farm tourism providers as a means of promoting their businesses. Organic Centre Wales recognises that tourism and food service represent important potential markets for Welsh organic producers, and this survey will go some way to making links between the producers and providers.

3. Methods

3.1 Survey design

The survey population was compiled from datasets from two OCW regional guides entitled *Where to Stay and Where to Eat*, information from the OCW producer survey carried out in 2009 and from the OCW *Where to Buy* survey carried out in March 2010. Further data was obtained from Linda Moss' *Organic Places to Stay*, see www.organic-holidays.com, as well as anecdotal information about producer diversification obtained via OCW staff.

3.2 Questionnaire design

Examples of similar questionnaires used by other organisations were considered. One of these was from the University of California Small Farms Programme which has an agricultural tourism section. They originally conducted a survey in 2005 and repeated it in 2009, see www.sfp.ucdavis.edu.

A questionnaire, also based on this Californian model, was used in the report 'The Development of Agri-Tourism in new EU countries' for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (Wacher, 2006). However, for the BOBL project, it was concluded that whilst some of the questions were relevant, food was an important part of the survey and therefore additional questions relating to the provision of food should be included.

The questionnaire was trialled on the six case studies, reported in Francis *et al* 2010 "Case studies identifying six successful organic hospitality and food tourism businesses". Whilst the questionnaire was considered to be generally satisfactory for the case studies, more questions on the importance of food and provision of food to the visitors were included in the survey version.

3.3 The questionnaire survey

A total of 58 questionnaires with a Welsh language option, together with a covering letter and reply paid envelope, were dispatched to producers in the first week of March 2010. Completed questionnaires from 20 producers were returned in the post. In the third week of March those producers who had not returned the form were contacted by telephone call, and this resulted in an additional 22 completed questionnaires. Of the 16 producers who failed to respond to letter or 'phone calls, three appear to have gone out of business.

4. Findings

4.1 The farm businesses

All of the 42 businesses that responded to the survey farmed organically. The majority (85%) were licensed by Soil Association Certification and the remainder were equally divided between Organic Farmers and Growers Ltd and Quality Welsh Food Certification. Most of the respondents had been farming for a long period, 73% had been farming for more than 10 years and none of the respondents were in their first year of farming. The largest group, 38%, said they had been farming for more than one generation. As with farming in general, the respondents were mature in age with 85% over 40.

When respondents were asked to give their main reason for starting an agri-tourism enterprise, the most frequently cited reason was to supplement the farm income. This was the main reason for 35% of respondents and a further 15% said that their reason was because of the reduction in government support for farming. Another 16% of respondents said they wanted to start a new business and 18% of respondents said that making better use of existing facilities was their main reason.

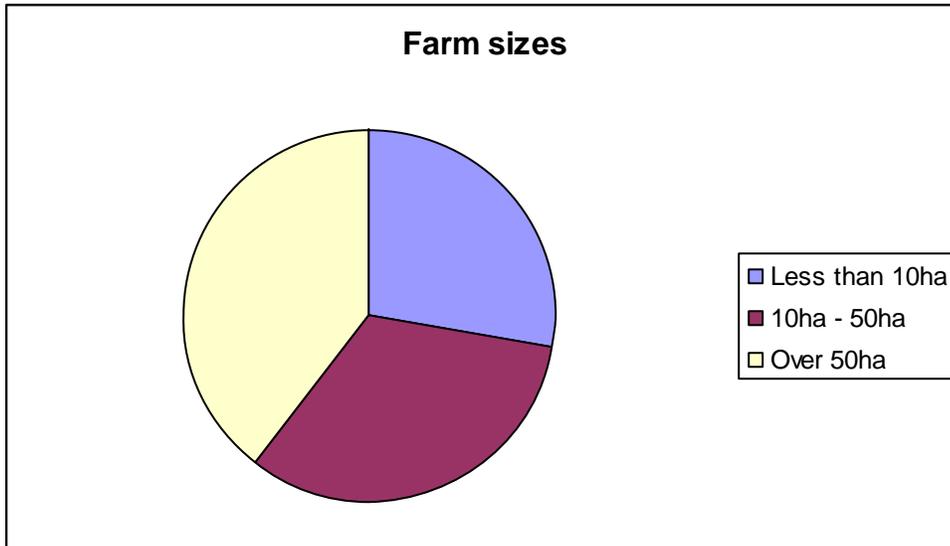
Table 1 Main reason for starting an agri-tourism enterprise

	Percentage
To supplement farm income	35%
Making better use of existing facilities	18%
To develop a new business enterprise	16%
Reduction in govt. support for farming	15%
Social benefits of meeting new people	6%
Developing employment opps for family	3%
Other	7%
Total	100%

4.2 The farms

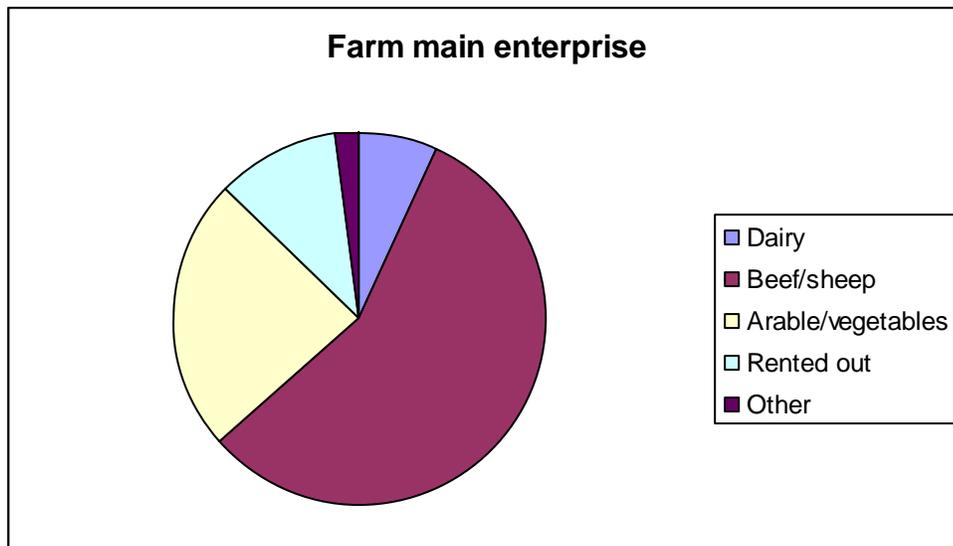
Farm sizes tended to be small, with 60% of respondents' holdings being 50ha or less.

Figure 1 Size of farms with agri-tourism business



The predominant enterprise on the farms surveyed was beef and sheep, which was the main enterprise on 62% of farms, with 26% growing crops (cereals and/or vegetables) and less than 8% in dairy farming. The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) said their holding was a working farm or smallholding.

Figure 2 Main enterprise on farms with an agri-tourism business



4.3 The agri-tourism businesses

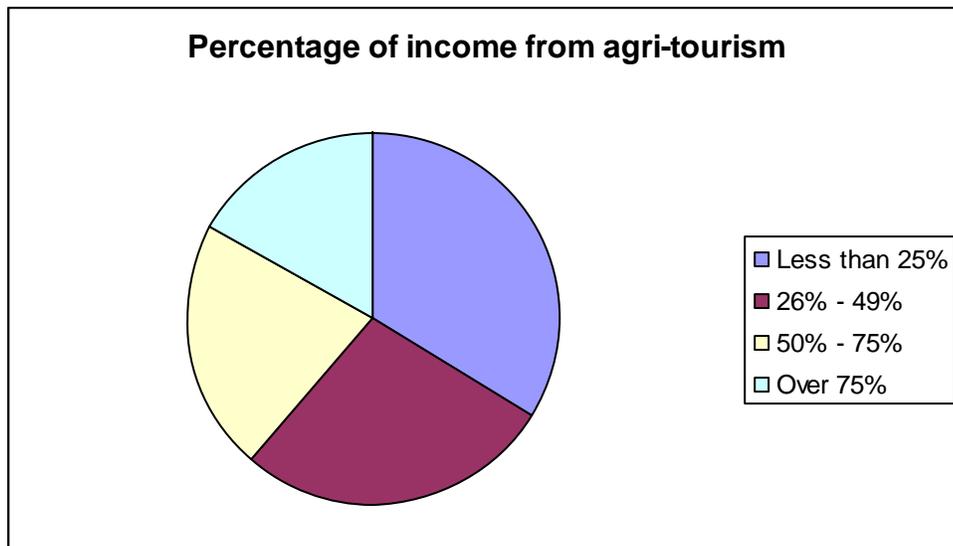
Most of the businesses in the survey, 61%, were registered with Visit Wales. Visit Wales' accredited accommodation is graded on a star rating of one to five. The star rating reflects the quality and range of facilities and services, with a special focus on atmosphere, ambience, guest care and attention to detail¹.

Two thirds of the respondents had not received any grants or financial support towards their business whereas one third had. Over 50% had been in agri-tourism for more than 6 years and 90% had been involved for more than 3 years. In all but one case, responsibility for the agri-tourism business lay with a member of the farming family and businesses relied primarily on family labour. Although 43% of the respondents said they employed full-time labour and 76% employed part-time labour in 98% of cases this meant the employment of family members and only 2% employed non-family labour.

The contribution of agri-tourism to respondents' total business income was varied with 34% saying it contributed less than 25% while at the other extreme 17% said it contributed more than 75%.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/grading/schemes/>

Figure 3 Proportion of business income coming from agri-tourism



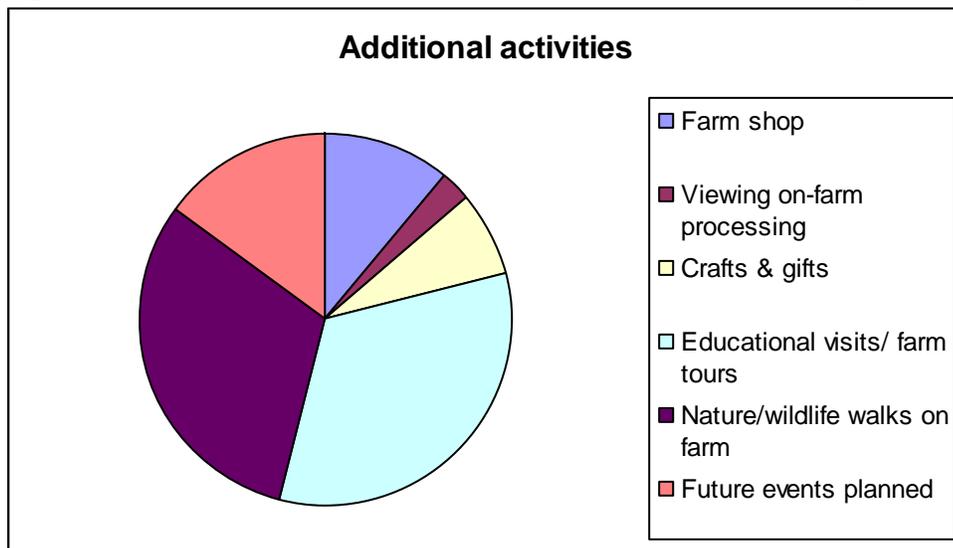
The majority of businesses (85%) offered self-catering accommodation. Of the remainder, 11% provided Bed and Breakfast and one farm offered accommodation for groups of visitors. Overall, the 42 farm businesses comprised 71 accommodation units providing 367 bed spaces. The 62 self-catering units provided 295 bed spaces, an average of 4.8 spaces per unit, ranging from the smallest unit of 4 bed spaces, to the largest with 27. The B&B units provided 36 bed spaces and the one group unit provided 36 bed spaces. An additional 29 camping/yurt/caravanning units on the farms provided almost 100 further bed spaces.

Table 2 Accommodation provided by organic agritourism businesses in Wales

Type of accommodation	Units	Bed spaces
Self-catering	62	295
B & B	8	36
Group accommodation	1	1
Camping/yurts/caravans	29	95
<i>Total</i>	100	427

Businesses also offered a wide range of additional activities for visitors especially educational visits and guided farm tours (on 20 farms) and farm nature and wildlife walks (on 20 farms). Seven of the farm businesses had a farm shop, 4 sold crafts and gifts and 2 offered visitors the opportunity to view on-farm processing. Eight farms businesses were planning future activities for their visitors.

Figure 4 Additional activities for visitors on farms with agri-tourism businesses



4.4 Organic food and the agri-tourism businesses

More than two thirds of the respondents (71%) offered food to their guests in some form and more than one third (38%) offered breakfast and/or evening meals. Some offered special food services:

“We offer meals on arrival, if they are booked in advance.” (FN 28)

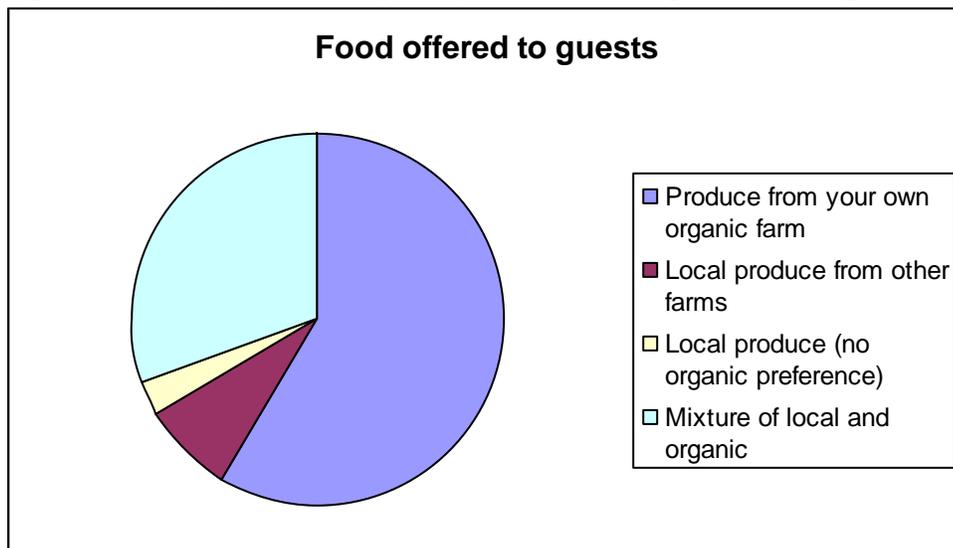
“We offer packed lunches” (FN 29)

Table 3 Food offers to guests at agritourism businesses in Wales

Type of meal	No of businesses
Breakfast only	10 (20%)
Evening meals	9 (18%)
Welcome pack	9 (18%)
Ready meals to purchase from farm	4 (8%)
Meat or produce from freezer or farm shop to eat on holiday or take home	12 (24%)
Other	5 (10%)

Of the 29 businesses that offered food, over half (51%) offered produce from their own farm and 18% offered food from other local producers. For 24% of these businesses, their food offer was a mixture of local and organic produce. Most businesses thought that organic food was an important part of the overall package they were providing, with 75% rating it ‘important’ or ‘quite important’.

Figure 2 Food provided by respondents to agri-tourism guests



4.5 Marketing the agri-tourism business

All of the respondents marketed their businesses as organic but most (90%) marketed their agri-tourism as an enterprise on an organic farm rather than as an enterprise providing organic and local food, though this was the case for 10% of the respondents. In some cases respondents would have promoted organic food, but found sourcing difficult: *“The fact that we are organic is used as a marketing tool. But providing organic food is not practical because of a lack of infrastructure of organic produce in the locality, i.e. very few veg. growers.”* (FN23). The need for more assistance in marketing was expressed by respondents, one of whom was concerned about the frequency of misleading claims, *“I feel that too many are advertising as agri-tourism, but are not on 'working farms'. Single units need help to develop websites, etc. because you can't afford to pay 25-30% fee to agents. We will plod on.”* (FN 33)

“Marketing the business is the main challenge for our educational and gardening courses.” (FN 48)

Some businesses have their own websites, but many felt that more promotion and marketing was needed and that Visit Wales was not providing the right marketing for their particular needs, *“We have a good website but need to have direct links to organic tourism businesses in Wales. The SA links directly to Linda Moss. We need help with promotional/marketing material and literature to educate visitors about local/organic food. Also to help local businesses that try and support local and organic produce and give them a higher profile.”* (FN11)

“Visit Wales is not efficient at targeting marketing. There are fewer people coming from 'organic' magazines.” (FN 46)

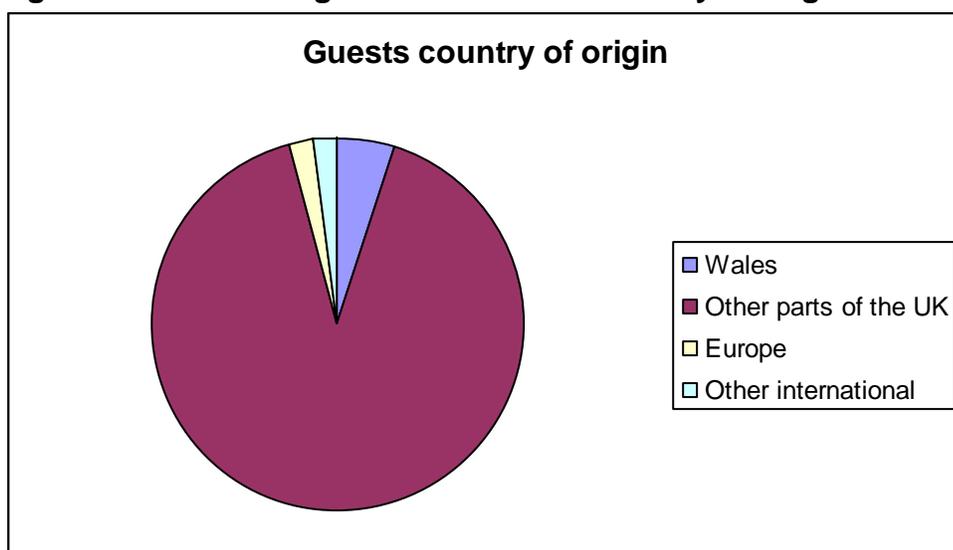
As the Welsh Tourism Alliance (WTA) point out however, with decreasing funding streams, Visit Wales are becoming more efficient by focusing on major target markets. Visit Wales

does not have the resources to target micro markets and promotion. Marketing the organic farm tourism business needs to be the responsibility of the provider – especially in view of forthcoming public sector budgetary cut-backs. Marketing and promotion costs need to be planned into financial planning for the business. WTA also suggest that for anyone involved in tourism accommodation and carrying out their own marketing a website is essential.²

4.6 Characteristics of visitors

According to the survey respondents, 90% of their visitors came from other parts of the UK, with just 5% from within Wales and the rest from mainland Europe and elsewhere internationally.

Figure 5 Visitors to agri-tourism farms: country of origin



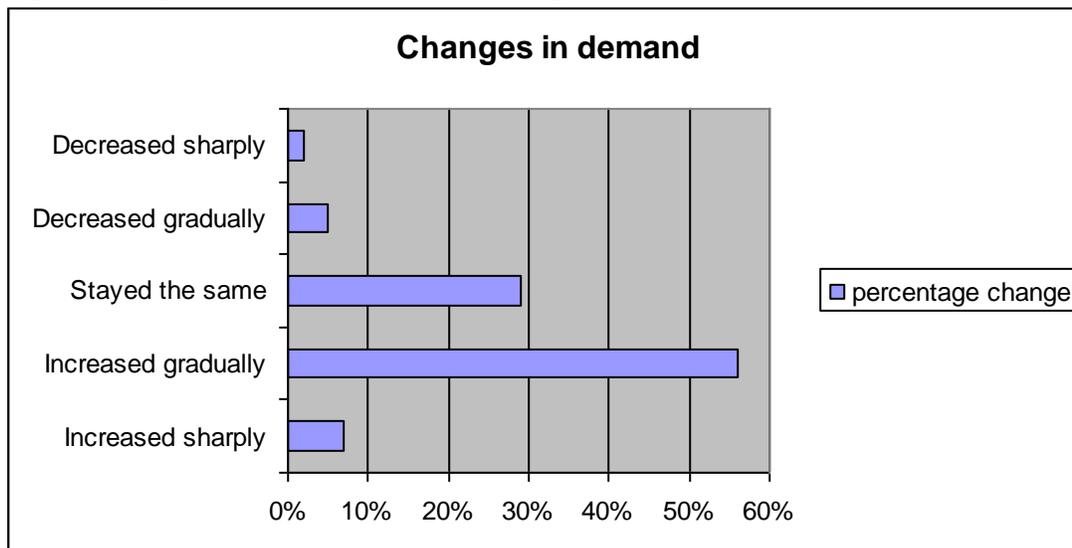
Respondents were also asked if they targeted particular any particular interest groups and over half (53%) replied that they particularly marketed to families. Youth groups (13%), young independents (9%) and empty-nesters (11%) were almost equally targeted by a further third of respondents. But as one respondent showed it is possible to have a strategy that targets more than one group: *"We market in-season to families, but out of season to empty-nesters"* (FN 44)

4.7 Demand for agri-tourism

Respondents were asked about the level of demand and over 56% said that demand had risen gradually since they started the business. A further 29% said that demand had stayed the same. A minority of businesses (7%) had seen a sharp rise in demand and another minority (7%) reported a decrease in demand.

² Adrian Greason-Walker, Welsh Tourism Alliance, pers comm.. 10/09/2010

Figure 6 Agri-tourism demand: changes since start of respondent’s business



When we compared the level of demand for agri-tourism reported by respondents with the type and origin of the food they offered to guests, those enterprises offering food from their own farm had seen the most increase in demand (78%) and the lowest incidence of decreased demand (4%). Where a mixture of own organic food and other local produce was offered a high level of increased demand was also reported (75%). The numbers of respondents offering only local produce (organic or no preference) were too low to be analysed further.

Table 4 Changes in demand for agri-tourism by type of food provided

	Increased demand	Demand the same	Decreased demand
Food from own organic farm	78%	17%	4%
Mixture of local and organic produce	75%	8%	17%

4.8 Agri-tourism: profitability and challenges

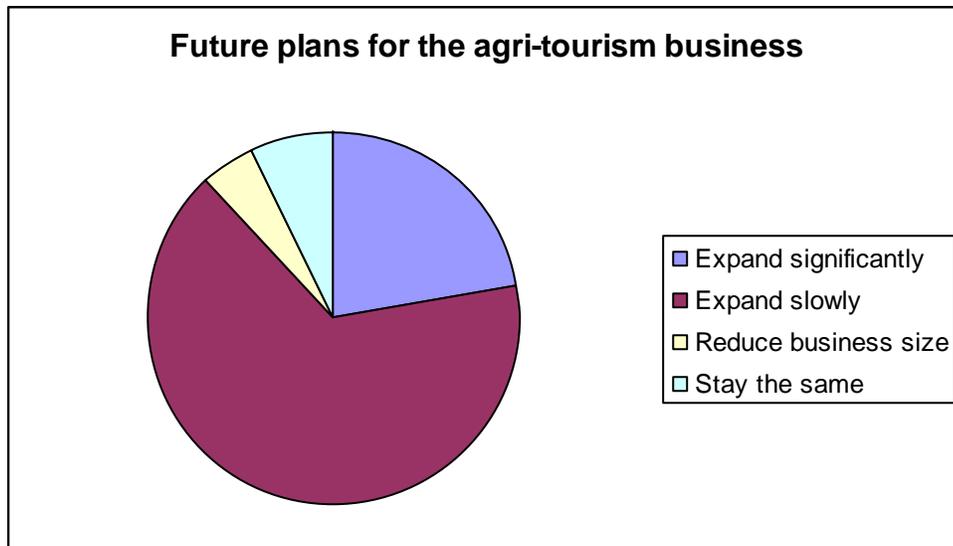
Respondents were asked to what extent they were satisfied with the profitability of their agri-tourism businesses. Replies were almost evenly divided between those who felt “It could be more profitable” (49%) and those who said “it generates a satisfactory amount of profit” (49%). Respondents cited a number of challenges and barriers they had faced at start-up, most of which involved finance and marketing but when asked “What are your plans for the future of your agri-tourism business?” the majority of respondents (74%) said they would expand. Some respondents also reported on-going challenges such as the problems of combining farming with agri-tourism, restrictive planning regulations in National Parks, lack of broad-band access, the lack of funding support, ill-health and local labour shortages:

“Time management is difficult with farming tasks like lambing.” (FN46)

“The business also offers conference facilities but we suffer through lack of broadband” (FN12)

“Being a small business means that it is sometimes difficult to get people to do small jobs, like gas checks for one caravan.” (FN25)

Figure 7 Respondents’ plans for the future of their agri-tourism businesses



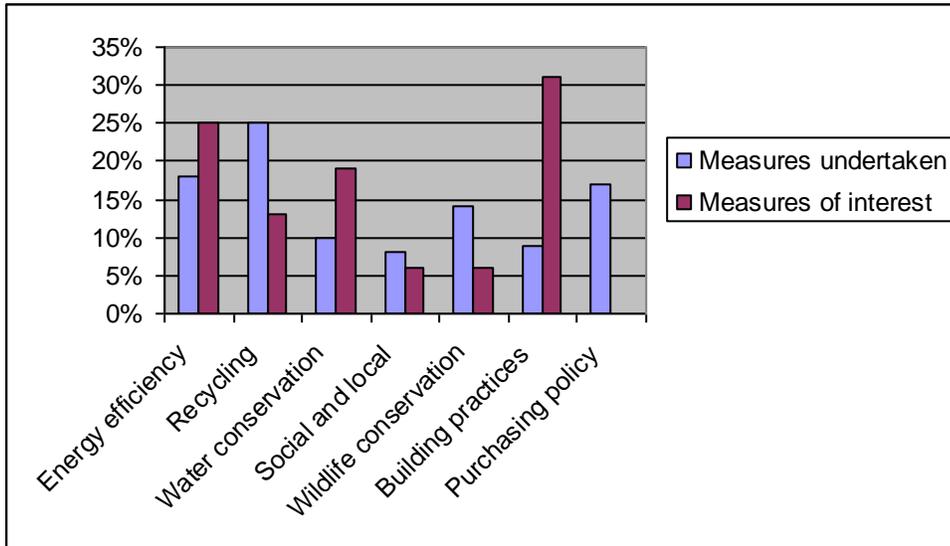
4.9 Environmental sustainability

All of the respondents claimed to have made efforts to ensure that their agri-tourism business is environmentally sustainable. The main efforts made towards environmental sustainability reported by respondents were recycling, energy efficiency, purchasing policies and wildlife conservation. Respondents were also asked what measures they are interested in undertaking to ensure that the business is environmentally sustainable. The main measures respondents expressed an interest in undertaking were building practices, energy efficiency, recycling and water conservation.

Table 5 Efforts to ensure that businesses are environmentally sustainable

	Percentage of respondents who have already undertaken these measures	Percentage of respondents interested in undertaking these measures
Energy efficiency	18%	25%
Recycling	25%	13%
Water conservation	10%	19%
Social and local	8%	6%
Wildlife conservation	14%	6%
Building practices	9%	31%
Purchasing policy	17%	0

Figure 4 Efforts towards environmental sustainability already undertaken by respondents and measures they are interested in



5. Discussion

The survey design, which used existing databases from previous recent projects resulted in a target survey population of 58 organic holdings in Wales that offer tourist accommodation. As no further farms or holdings in this category were identified in the course of the survey, it is likely that this is a fairly accurate picture of organic agri-tourism in Wales. Of the total, 42 farms participated in the survey representing a 72% rate of response. As details of most of the non-respondents are available publically on their websites, it is possible to be reasonably certain that the 72% response rate means that the survey is representative of the total population of organic agri-tourism providers in Wales.

The findings from the survey show that most organic agri-tourism providers in Wales are well established in farming rather than being new entrants to the organic sector. They also tend to be in the mid and older age cohorts rather than young farmers.

In recent years, farmers have responded in many ways to lower economic returns and the general effects of the cost-price squeeze. Four main strategies have been identified; these are developing value added produce, expanding into new markets, diversifying into non-farm income generating activities and taking non-farm jobs to supplement agricultural income activity. Agri-tourism is an option that takes many forms and can include elements of each of these categories³.

In the survey, a large majority (93%) of the agri-tourist providers were operating working farms and these were predominantly small organic livestock farms. For most respondents, the reason for going in to agri-tourism was financial, for example to provide supplementary income, to start a new business enterprise and to make better use of their on-farm facilities. This suggests a reaction by respondents to the low net farm incomes from smaller organic livestock farms in Wales in recent years (even though gross margins on organic farms have been superior to those of conventional farms). A comparison of organic lamb, suckler stores and finished beef production in upland areas using 2005/06 and 2006/07 data found that *“the red meat sector relies extensively on support payments, and that the costs of production far exceed the financial return achieved from the market”*. (Frost, Morgan and Moakes, 2009 p.19).

The majority of organic agri-tourism providers in the survey reported that the business makes a substantial contribution to total farm income. For 64% of farms it represented over 25% of Total Farm Income (TFI) and for 17% it represented over 75% of TFI. Agri-tourism also provided employment with 43% of respondents employing full-time staff and 76% employing part-time staff. Although only a minority of respondents said they went into agri-tourism to provide employment opportunities for family members, it is clear from the survey findings that organic agri-tourism is a source of full-time and part-time employment for farming families. The survey found that 98% of employees in the agri-tourism businesses were family members.

Although only just under half (49%) of respondents reported that their agri-tourism business generates a satisfactory level of profit most respondents (74%) said they were planning to

³ See, Busby & Rendle (2000) for a summary of the options considered by farmers.

Developing the markets for organic food with sustainable tourism

expand their business. In some cases, respondents were relying on financial help to expand, as one said, *“If further funding is available, we plan an additional 4/5 bed spaces. I believe that Wales has an advantage in agri-tourism.”* (FN3) In other cases respondents were concerned about the current economic situation, *“Got planning permission for another 2 stone dwellings on yard, i.e. 10 more units. Don’t want to borrow money in current climate.”* (FN42). In another case a farmer was going ahead with expansion despite a disappointment with visitor’s green credentials and the lack of funding, *“Not many visitors engage in recycling. Doing up a new cottage without grant.”* (FN31)

The evidence is that there are perceived opportunities for expansion in organic agri-tourism in Wales. The overall market for farm tourism in Wales is competitive at present however, and this raises concern about the future level of demand and the need for agri-tourism businesses to be distinctively different in order to attract visitors in a competitive market. As the Welsh Food Tourism Action Plan notes,

“In an increasingly competitive tourism market place, destinations are becoming more aware of the need to compete through promoting and developing what makes them distinctive and different from other destinations.” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009 p 5).

Some respondents had already noted a tightening of the market and changes in visitor expectations:

“Seems to be a large increase in the supply of tourism accommodation available in the area” (FN30)

“Getting harder as more people involve in agri tourism. Visitors expect higher standards.” (FN43)

“Visitor behaviour has changed, they stay for a couple of nights at very short notice. I am 77 but will keep going.” (FN15).

Self-catering accommodation is one sector where there is current concern about over-supply. Visit Wales occupancy figures indicate that the occupancy rates for self-catering in Wales in June 2009 was 65% compared to 56% in June 2008 - but there were wide differences between occupancy rates for different grades of self-catering accommodation and between coastal and inland locations⁴. Before diversifying into on-farm self-catering accommodation it is important to undertake a rigorous appraisal of market opportunities and to plan for an enterprise that is distinctive in its organic food offer and its green credentials and to target marketing on the most appropriate groups of potential visitors.

⁴ The Visit Wales Occupancy Survey is a monthly survey of a panel of establishments located throughout Wales. The self-catering occupancy is measured at the individual property level by expressing the number of weeks let each month as a proportion of the weeks and units available for rent, www.tourismhelp.co.uk/objview.asp?object_id=337

5.1 Future demand for agri-tourism in Wales

Many factors influence the level of demand for tourism in Wales, but one most frequently voiced is the weather. Tourism is highly climate and weather-sensitive and one key factor in the future demand for agri-tourism in Wales will be the influence of climate change. A study for Visit Wales looking at climate change for the periods 2010 to 2039 and 2040 to 2069 produced UKCP09⁵ pan-Wales projections for more attractive conditions for visitor activity in the future (Goodess, 2009). Summers in particular will be increasingly warmer and drier. The study was part of a wider assessment of the impact of climate change on the Welsh tourist economy. The final report of this project noted that together with higher fuel prices and air fuel duty, climate change mitigation policies may encourage UK residents to take fewer holidays abroad and more in Wales. The Welsh market could also gain as tourists switch from Mediterranean destinations and as southern European residents shift their holiday preference northwards in search of a more comfortable climate. Overall, the report concluded that in the medium term (2010 – 2039), the impacts of climate change on the Welsh tourism economy will be favourable for a number of tourism activities and this, coupled with the increased cost of air travel, will result in the growing appeal of Wales as a domestic holiday destination. In the longer term (2040 – 2069) there will be further increased marketing opportunities for Welsh tourism, although some summer days could become too hot for outdoor activities in urban areas. The findings from this project suggest that the demand for tourism in Wales is likely to grow, although there are caveats – not least that climate is only one factor affecting visitors' decisions on where to holiday (Frost *et al*, 2010).

Other factors influencing the decision to holiday in Wales include Wales' landscape and scenery, its wildlife, its heritage and its cultural and creative traditions. To these we can add a reputation for organic food and farming – According to the Defra June Survey of Agriculture, organic farming covers over 8% of Wales agricultural land area compared to an average of 4-5% for the rest of the UK; and Wales has been the cradle for many leading organic businesses and organisations since the 1970s. The appeal of organic farming for consumers and for tourists has two main elements – the quality of organic food and the environmental benefits of organic as compared to conventional farming.

5.2 Organic food and agri-tourism

The provision of organic food in agri-tourism is part of what has been termed the quality 'turn' or turn to quality by food researchers (Goodman 2003). This turn to quality is part of the response to decreasing financial returns in agriculture. In agri-tourism, the provision of farm produce is one way in which a proportion of the holdings' economic return can be retained by producers rather than being siphoned off in food chains that otherwise lead to multiple retailers, processors and wholesalers (Whatmore *et al*, 2003). Although most accommodation provided on organic farms is self-catering, there are opportunities to supply guests with produce from the farm and to provide them with information on where to buy other organic produce in the area. In Wales, OCW has produced 'Where to stay and where to eat' guides which include details of hotels, restaurants and cafes that use organic produce⁶.

⁵ UKCP09 - UK climate projections. UKCP09 provides probabilistic projections of climate change based on quantification of the known sources of uncertainty. <http://ukclimateprojections.defra.gov.uk/content/view/868/531/>

⁶ <http://www.organiccentrewales.org.uk>

The survey showed that in Wales, the majority (71%) of Welsh organic agri-tourism businesses offered food to their visitors and most considered organic food to be of high importance (41%) or quite high importance (34%) to the overall package they are providing. In a majority of cases (59%) organic food was provided from their own farm, though only 10% of agri-tourism businesses were promoting themselves specifically as providers of organic and local food, so there is an opportunity here for additional promotion both at the individual farm level and for the organic sector in Wales as a whole. There is also a need to provide more information concerning the regulations governing the sale of food to encourage more providers to sell their own produce and to add value to their produce through on-farm processing. As one respondent put it, *“We need fact sheets on legislation for selling food from farm to visitors, including meat pies, etc.”* (FN13)

The experience of organic agri-tourism also underscores the wider need to promote understanding of the nature of organic food and farming. As one respondent noted, *“We are disheartened with the way that visitors leave the place. They don't seem to be very interested in embracing the organic/sustainable ethics, even if they come via Linda Moss. We offer the phone number of an organic food distribution service, but uptake is disappointing”*. (FN10). Despite being disheartened however, this respondent was planning to expand: *“We also now have an empty house we could utilise.”* (FN10)

Another respondent reported on efforts to promote understanding of the organic message, *“Many of our guests are 'gob-smacked' at being on a farm. Whether it is organic or not is a detail in the scale of their understanding. We willingly explain when asked.”* (FN9)

5.3 The green potential of organic agri-tourism

The second appeal of organic farming for visitors is its green credentials: the environmental benefits of organic farming methods compared to conventional farming and its sustainability as an agricultural system in new paradigms of rural development (Shepherd et al, 2003; Kitchen and Marsden, 2009). An interest in organic farming is compatible with the growth of sustainable tourism⁷ and eco-tourism⁸ as well as food tourism⁹ and although the boundaries of these categories may overlap the overall growth in terms of numbers of tourists has been clearly demonstrated (see for example, Middleton, 1998; Scott, 1996; Stamou and Paraskevopoulos, 2003; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; Macagno *et al*, 2009).

In Wales, organic agri-tourism providers are also engaging with wider environmental concerns by making efforts to ensure that their agri-tourism businesses are environmentally sustainable. The survey showed that organic agri-tourism providers had already put in place recycling, energy efficiency, sustainable purchasing and wildlife conservation measures, with further interest expressed in sustainable building practices and water conservation. One problem in Wales is the poor transport infrastructure and lack of public transport networks. As

⁷ Defined as, “Tourism which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future.” *The World Tourism Organization* (UNWTO), <http://www.unwto.org/>

⁸ Defined as, “Tourism that contributes to environmental conservation, supports local economies and provides recreation and environmental learning experiences.” Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2003)

⁹ Defined as, “Any activity that promotes high quality, distinctive, local and sustainable food experience linked to a particular place.” Welsh Assembly Government (2009)

one disgruntled respondent noted, “*Tourism is unsustainable, they all arrive in cars (only one couple by train in 18 years) and all generate mountains of rubbish.*” (FN7)

Although Welsh organic agri-tourism providers have a commitment to environmental sustainability, only a small proportion is accredited by any environmental accreditation scheme. Details of the most widely recognised accreditation schemes are listed in Appendix 1. These schemes operate across many holiday destinations but only three schemes currently include references to organic and local food: ECEAT, The Green Tourism Business Scheme and Greenbox. The Brecon Beacons National Park is currently working with two accreditation schemes; Green Tourism Business Scheme and the Green Dragon scheme, which is managed by Groundwork.

Visit Wales has recently introduced a new classification scheme for “alternative type accommodation such as wigwams, Romany caravans and nomadic structures, also for single caravans”. This “Alternative type accommodation, Bye gone era and single caravans” scheme may be suitable, for example where an organic farm provides holiday accommodation in yurts¹⁰.

6. Conclusions

The main motivation for Welsh organic farms venturing into agri-tourism is financial. Agri-tourism businesses provide additional income, make use of existing facilities, develop new market outlets for farm produce (especially when combined with on-farm processing or farm shop enterprises) and they provide additional employment for farming families. The importance of financial motivation reflects the difficulties faced by smaller organic livestock farms in Wales in recent years, but it shouldn't completely obscure other benefits of on-farm organic agri-tourism such as making social contacts and providing an educational experience for visitors with little or no prior knowledge of (organic) farming.

The majority of organic agri-tourism businesses are planning to expand. For expansion to be successful, demand for organic agri-tourism needs to rise as the tourism market in Wales is becoming increasingly competitive. There is evidence that the popularity of Wales as a tourist destination for visitors from elsewhere in the UK and from Europe may increase as a result of the impact of climate change and this could help expand the market for Welsh organic agri-tourism. One key message is the need for businesses to be distinctive. Food and organic food in particular, can help Welsh organic agri-tourism promote itself as distinctive and different. Welsh organic agri-tourism already sees organic food as an important part of the overall package and there are opportunities both for individual businesses and for the organic sector as a whole to promote Welsh organic agri-tourism as a specialist provider of organic and local food. Local organic producers could assist their own marketing and also contribute to the development of Welsh organic agri-tourism by engaging with local businesses and developing sales and distribution networks, as has been pioneered in the Peak District¹¹. Local forums

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/grading/schemes/> For an example of yurt accommodation provided on an organic farm, see Francis et al, 2010

¹¹ Peak District Foods is a group local food producers and food businesses in the Peak District, all promoted in a local food guide 'Savour the Flavour of the Peak District'. They have adopted the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark (EQM), a pioneering award for businesses that contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the Peak District National Park. The aim is to forge links between four business sectors - farming, food and drink, tourist accommodation and arts. See: www.peakdistrictfoods.co.uk

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bringing together organic producers and tourism providers in Agriscôp¹² type action learning groups could also provide stimulus to develop Welsh organic agri-tourism which would contribute to the overall aim of the Welsh Food Tourism Action Plan which is to “*support the competitiveness of Welsh Tourism, hospitality, food and drink businesses in a way that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable*” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009 p. 3).

Welsh organic agri-tourism providers are committed to environmental conservation and many sustainable measures have been adopted by businesses and on the farms. By providing organic food (often from the home-farm) and engaging with sustainability in a wide area of farm and business practices, agri-tourism practices can continue to appeal to a wide range of so-called ‘green’ and ethical tourists. All of the businesses in the survey were on certified organic holdings and over 60% were accredited by Visit Wales, but only a very small number were accredited by a green tourism scheme. The development of these schemes, particularly to include criteria for organic food and farming in accreditation of agri-tourism would help the sector and provide additional promotional opportunities.

In the next phases of this BOBL project the tasks are to produce farmer-focused guides to agri-tourism, to produce regional guides and to hold workshops in order to disseminate what has been learnt in the initial phases; and to further develop the markets for organic food in the Welsh hospitality and tourism sector. This work may go some way to meeting the needs expressed in recommendation 2 below.

¹² Agrisgop aims to assist farmers develop their business. The scheme was developed as part of the Welsh Assembly Government Farming Connect programme. It works with groups of farmers to create and develop business ideas and opportunities. The scheme helps farmers to consider the future; how they would like to see their business develop in 5–10 years, and to help them reach that goal.

<http://www.menterabusnes.com/english/5/122/agrisg-p.html>

7. Recommendations

1. **A demand-side study of visitors to Welsh organic agri-tourist farms should be undertaken.** The current survey has focused on the supply-side of Welsh agri-tourism. One finding is that many respondents are considering expansion, but that the market is competitive. In order to gauge potential future demand and to be able to provide advice to those considering expansion and to new entrants, it is necessary to find out more about visitor's expectations and motivations. A survey of visitors could provide the necessary information.
2. **More support should be provided to organic agri-tourism providers.** The sector is under-resourced and additional help in the form of explanatory fact-sheets on food marketing; technical assistance to build web-sites; promotion and marketing, etc should be provided through BOBL and other funding streams.
3. Farmers involved in the organic food agri-tourism sector should work together and pool resources (ideas as well as monetary) to promote themselves.
4. **Local business forums should be set up** comprising providers of organic agri-tourism and local organic producers in order that new supply lines and distribution methods can be developed.
5. **Work with consumers is needed** to promote greater understanding of organic food and farming and this should be extended to include the benefits of organic agri-tourism.
6. **The benefits of tourism environmental accreditation schemes for organic agri-tourism should be examined.** There needs to be engagement with these scheme providers to ensure that use of organic food is a criterion for accreditation.
7. Where appropriate, **organic agri-tourism providers should become accredited by tourism environmental accreditation schemes.**

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Appendix 1 Tourism environmental accreditation schemes

The following are amongst the most widely recognised accreditation schemes operating across many holiday destinations. The last three (ECEAT, The Green Tourism Business Scheme and Greenbox) specifically include organic and local food

The Green Globe Company Standard (EC3 Global) is underpinned by Earthcheck Science and operates in Asia, the Americas and Europe but only four certifications have been awarded in the UK. <http://www.ec3global.com/products-programs/green-globe>

EU Flower is an EU Eco-Label available to a range of products and services. It sets out specific ecological criteria with which products must comply to be certified as environmentally friendly as possible, including healthy nutrition and environment. <http://www.ecolabel-tourism.eu>

The Green Key originated for hotels in Denmark in France and is an international eco-label awarded to leisure organizations and hotels. It is international and supported by consumer groups, NGOs, authorities and business. See: <http://www.green-key.org/>

Green Dragon Environmental Standard is a stepped environmental management system that can help businesses to operate in a more sustainable manner. Companies and organisations receive a certificate demonstrating their achievements. <http://www.groundworkinwales.org.uk/greendragon/index.html>

ECEAT offers a high level of expertise in the field of sustainable tourism. The emphasis is on rural areas and organic farming, with over 1300 small-scale sustainable accommodation units all over Europe. <http://www.eceat.org>

The Green Tourism Business Scheme: Businesses opting to join are assessed against a rigorous set of criteria, covering energy and water efficiency, waste management, biodiversity and purchasing policy including food. It has over 1400 members across the whole of the UK. <http://www.green-business.co.uk>

Greenbox: Published in 2009 as Ireland's first Ecotourism Handbook, this guide for providers offers suggestions to environmental, community and local issues, the support of organic and artisan food producers, environmental education and the reduction of carbon footprint. <http://www.greenbox.ie/>