

Y Rhaglen HELIX
The HELIX Programme

 Bwyd a Diod Cymru
Food & Drink Wales

Project HELIX Annual Report

2024-25



Foreword

Launched in 2016, Project HELIX has been one of the Welsh Government’s key programmes for supporting the Welsh food and drink industry over the last decade.

Its impact, both financially and in terms of employment, is a testament to the effectiveness of the knowledge that has been shared between industry, government and academia through the Project.

Innovation, efficiency and strategy have always been at the heart of the support delivered through Project HELIX, but it has evolved over the years in response to changing economic, social and political factors.

Food safety certification scheme compliance, especially SALSA and BRCGS, has consistently been a vital part of Project HELIX support to ensure food safety, retailer and customer confidence, and market access.

A growth area for Project HELIX assistance has been innovative new product development in response to continually changing consumer preferences, an ongoing obesity crisis, and inflationary pressures.

In the last few years, increasing process efficiencies and reducing waste have also become even more important to Welsh manufacturers, resulting from the rise in cost of raw materials, energy and labour, and the ever-presence of climate targets.

This report provides an overview of Project HELIX outputs and activities since 2016, with a focus on the period 1st July 2023 – 31st March 2025 (the duration of the latest phase of Project HELIX).

None of these outputs would be possible without the collaboration of hundreds of food and drink businesses across Wales and we acknowledge their contribution in making Project HELIX a success.

The Welsh food and drink industry will always face challenges and opportunities. With ongoing funding from the Welsh Government, the newly launched HELIX Programme will continue to transfer knowledge to the sector to help it overcome obstacles and make the most of any opportunities.

Angela Sawyer
Food Centre Wales

Martin Jardine
Food Technology Centre

Prof. David Lloyd
ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre

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Project HELIX outputs

July 2023 – March 2025



Company testimonials

199 businesses supported

Hannah Turner, Owner, Brooke's Wye Valley Dairy Co:

"Food Innovation Wales has been a huge support to us, particularly when setting out on our diversification into cheese making. We have benefitted from their expertise in product development, technical knowledge and also with preparation for our SALSA certification audit. For about two years we were able to use the production facilities at Food Innovation Wales before seeking guidance on the design of the cheese dairy we then built on our farm."



103 new start-ups supported

John Ritchie, Owner, Smashed Cow:

"The Project HELIX support was fantastic and allowed me to fast forward my business plans. Food Innovation Wales's help in setting up HACCP, shelf-life analysis and training enabled us to skip the homemade processes and move straight to setting up the business to a standard befitting a small-scale modern manufacturing process. This help will undoubtedly help me secure a much larger group of future clients."



822 unique individuals supported

Huw Williams, Managing Director, Big Dog Coffee:

"Working with Food Innovation Wales was a huge help for our business. The two workshops that we attended helped us with the main principles of HACCP and the one-to-one mentoring helped us to improve our food safety management procedures and production flow. With Food Innovation Wales's professional and helpful approach, we have completed our HACCP plan and are now working on the improvements needed to achieve SALSA certification."



188 new jobs created

Glenn Lloyd, Owner, Trefaldwyn Cheese:

"Food Innovation Wales played a vital role in helping us establish our cheese production facility in Caersws, Powys. Their support allowed us to create skilled jobs locally and meet the necessary legislative and design requirements to get our operations off the ground. As we've grown, we've also benefited from Food Innovation Wales's expertise in product development, which has helped us expand our Ruby Red Brie range, build capacity and strengthen the long-term viability of the business."



533 new food and drink products developed

Ellen Wakelam, Director, In the Welsh Wind Distillery:

"Food Innovation Wales has assisted us and supported us in a number of ways since we founded the distillery in 2018. Everything from developing our HACCP documentation, to testing our Welsh Cask Vinegar, and R&D support as we developed our Single Malt Welsh Origin Whisky from barley grown here in Ceredigion. They have been a great asset for us as we grow our business."



277 new markets accessed

Claire Jesse, Owner, Welsh Homestead Smokery:

"We're incredibly proud to see our business enter this next phase of growth with our new, expanded production facility. This allows us to continue manufacturing on our homestead while significantly increasing our production capacity. Food Innovation Wales has been instrumental in our journey, supporting us from our early days at the kitchen table to the UK-wide distribution we have today."



Philippa Galway, Owner, Flavour Moments Ltd:

"Working with Food Innovation Wales has been invaluable to this project and helping my business. I have had interest from both Selfridges and Ocado and many smaller shops who are now all waiting on samples and orders!"



1,347 training days given

Mark Parry, Co-owner, Charcuterie Môn:

"The Food Innovation Wales butchery specialist has been exceptional. Their industry knowledge and real-world experience in operating their own business has been evident throughout. Working with them under Project HELIX has given us the confidence to develop our business, knowing we comply with the relevant legislation and food safety standards. Without this support, we would not have had the confidence to begin producing charcuterie with consistent and safe results."



6,131 jobs safeguarded

Tom Moore, Production Director, Henllan Bakery:

"We undertook a project for own brand label NPD. This created new jobs and safeguarded others. Food Innovation Wales has been a great help."



Carmen Roberts, Owner, Cancha Mojo:

"From day one, Food Innovation Wales helped turn my ideas into realities with their expert guidance and unwavering support. It's no exaggeration to say that without their help, my business would not exist. Food Innovation Wales understood my vision and offered tailored support that truly made a difference. I would urge anyone in a similar situation to sign up and take advantage of this incredible initiative."





149 third party certifications

Nick Cook, Operations Manager, Peak Supps:

"Food Innovation Wales's expertise took the guesswork out of trying to understand the exact requirements needed to pass the SALSA standard. This has resulted in a robust food safety management system that continues to deliver for the business. The system has also been used to achieve Soil Association certification and for Trading Standards visits."



£303 million financial impact to the Welsh food and drink industry

Lauren Evans, Managing Director, Fablas Ice Cream:

"We have greatly benefited from the waste support provided by Food Innovation Wales. It has allowed us to review our processes, from deciding flavours to identifying waste streams, which in turn has helped us to save costs. We will continue to work with the waste support team to strengthen the core of our business."



Alex Rus and Greg Davideanu, Co-founders, Monarchs Crisps:

"Food Innovation Wales is the foundation on which our success is built, and it aided our start-up to grow in so many ways. The move into the on-site incubator unit allowed us to hire our first employee, fulfil our first international order and transition into a profitable small business. Accessing their manufacturing space, storage facilities and testing services enables us to keep developing products, scale-up production and expand our team."

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Overall Project HELIX outputs (June 2016 – March 2025)

930
businesses
supported

558
new business
start-ups

897
new jobs
created

2,079
individuals
supported

2,696
new food and
drink products

10,355
jobs
safeguarded

2,943
number of
training days

1,446
new markets
accessed

288
third party
certifications

£676 million
financial impact

Combined outputs from 09/06/2016-31/03/2025



Other key projects

Collaboration with key stakeholders

Food Innovation Wales works alongside key stakeholders across Wales, the UK and the rest of the world on projects and committees that benefit the sector. In 2024-2025, we worked with a range of partner organisations to support Welsh food and drink producers, including Mentera, the IGD, Kantar, Category Insight and local authorities. We also collaborated with Cywain to deliver lamb workshops for farmers and partnered with AMRC Cymru to undertake autonomous tractor trials in Welsh grassland farming.

Food Innovation Wales has representatives on the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board, the Food Standards Agency's Welsh Food Advisory Committee, the Institute of Food Science and Technology's Wales Branch Committee, Hybu Cig Cymru's Sustainable Innovation & Research Working Group, and the European Hygienic Equipment Design Group.

Community engagement

Food Innovation Wales takes part in a range of projects that benefit local communities and future generations. Over the last year, we have supported local food banks, colleagues are actively volunteering in local food partnerships, and we promoted our services to local not-for-profit organisations, including social enterprises and farmers markets.

Nurturing the next generation of food industry professionals

Food Innovation Wales encourages young people to consider careers in the food and drink industry by engaging with secondary schools and colleges across Wales. In 2024-2025, we have partnered with Food and Drink Skills Wales, Tasty Careers Wales, the Young Farmers Club, Careers Wales and the Welsh Government's Seren Academy to organise and take part in a range of engagement activities, including food science summer schools, school and college visits, careers advice workshops, practical skills workshops, and enterprise challenges.

Food Innovation Wales has also encouraged student ambassadors to take part in our conferences and events, enabling the next generation of technical professionals to develop their industry networks.

Industry conferences

Food Innovation Wales brings together expert speakers and industry specialists at the annual United Kingdom Association for Food Protection Conference. This key event in the UK's food safety calendar provides an opportunity to share the latest updates, insights and trends with industry professionals. Last year's conference discussed how we can build resilience in the sector to prevent food crime. Attendees heard about the work of the Food Standard Agency's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU), retailer and manufacturer perspectives on food crime and the legal framework and enforcement regime in the UK.

Business Leaders Network

In 2024-25, Food Innovation Wales continued to lead the south Wales Business Leaders Network (formerly CEO Cluster). Since April 2025, the Business Leaders Network has been developed and now includes networks across Wales.

The Business Leaders Network engages with senior leaders to stimulate ideas, share expertise and encourage business-to-business collaboration. It brings together CEOs and MDs from leading food and drink businesses in Wales. Areas of focus this year included food safety culture, business exit planning and non-executive directorships.

A Technical Leaders Forum is managed in parallel with the Business Leaders Network and brings together senior technical managers from Welsh food and drink manufacturers. These quarterly events encourage open and constructive discussions about the challenges faced by technical leaders.

Welsh Food and Drink Directory

Food Innovation Wales continues to manage the Welsh Food and Drink Directory, which has nearly 500 food and drink businesses listed from across Wales. We promote the directory at food and drink exhibitions and events as well as through a variety of online channels.

Pembrokeshire Gold



From their family farm near Tenby, Harry and Kim Thomas run Pembrokeshire Gold. With a strong focus on quality and provenance, Pembrokeshire Gold uses homegrown oilseed rape to create a premium cold pressed rapeseed oil that is rich in unsaturated fats, vitamin E and natural carotenoids. Since launching their first bottle in 2021, Harry and Kim have continued to build on the brand's success with the introduction of flavoured oils and, more recently, a range of salad dressings.

Support from Food Innovation Wales

Since 2021, Food Centre Wales has supported Pembrokeshire Gold from its early diversification stages through to product expansion. Initial support focused on facility layout and equipment sourcing for oil pressing, as well as adding value to their homegrown rapeseed. In 2022, the focus shifted to new product development, with the team exploring ways to enhance the base product through flavour. Chilli, garlic and herb, and smoked varieties were trialled as part of this work. Further support followed in 2024, when Food Centre Wales helped develop a new range of salad dressings. This included identifying suitable ingredients and refining processing methods to maintain product structure and stability in the bottle. The technical team also carried out a full label review to ensure compliance with current food labelling legislation.

Following the product launch, Food Centre Wales responded quickly to a microbiological stability issue, identifying vulnerable points in the manufacturing process and helping implement practical improvements to enhance product safety and shelf life.



Benefits of the support

The Project HELIX support from Food Centre Wales has enabled Pembrokeshire Gold to expand from cold pressed rapeseed oil to a broader portfolio of value-added products. Their increased range has helped them to reach new retail and hospitality customers, while the process improvements have strengthened product consistency and quality, giving the company the confidence to scale-up further.

Harry Thomas, Co-owner, Pembrokeshire Gold:

"Working with the Food Centre Wales team has been a huge help in developing our product range. Their expertise in new product development gave us the knowledge and belief to turn our cold pressed rapeseed oil into something more – and something we're really proud of. Knowing they are always there at the end of the phone gives us the confidence to develop new products and expand into being Wales's go-to sustainable oil."



Llanfairpwll Distillery



Established in 2018, Llanfairpwll Distillery is a multi-award-winning craft distilled spirit company based in Gaerwen, Anglesey.

Their range of premium craft distilled spirits use as many locally sourced ingredients as possible, from the mint and rosemary in their dry gin to the fresh blackberries in their blackberry gin.

Support from Food Innovation Wales

Llanfairpwll Distillery wanted to reduce their waste by utilising pot ale, a co-product from their rum production process. Through Project HELIX, Llanfairpwll Distillery worked with the Food Technology Centre to develop a HACCP food safety management plan so that they could sell this liquid left over from their rum distillation, which is rich in nutrients, as animal feed to local farmers and food producers.

Benefits of the support

As a result of the Project HELIX support, Llanfairpwll Distillery has been able to eliminate waste from their rum production process and supply local meat producers, Snowdonia Wagyu, with feed for their cattle.

Robert Laming, owner of Llanfairpwll Distillery:

"The Food Technology Centre helped us to develop the HACCP plan and other associated procedures for the co-product, which allowed us to register as a feed business operator. The requirements around animal feed were new to me so having the support and knowledge from the Food Technology Centre was invaluable to us."

"They also provided support with nutritional analysis of the product so that the farmers could ensure their livestock get a balanced diet. This work has enabled us to manufacture our rum with zero waste, which helps to reduce pollution and preserve resources whilst saving money for both the farmer and us."

Sioned Pritchard, owner and founder of Snowdonia Wagyu:

"At Snowdonia Wagyu, we are always looking for ways to enhance the quality of our beef while supporting sustainability and innovation. The opportunity to incorporate the pot ale co-product from Llanfairpwll's rum distillation into our cattle's feed has been a game-changer for us. This collaboration has not only benefited our cattle and our business but also supports the wider community by helping to reduce waste and promote sustainable practices."





Mario's Ice Cream

Based in Carmarthenshire, Mario's Ice Cream combines Italian heritage with the finest Welsh ingredients to produce luxury dairy ice cream, sorbets, ice cream desserts and dairy free options. The company supplies the largest independent wholesaler in Wales, supermarkets, local authorities and major foodservice customers.

Due to the growth of the business, Mario's expanded into a second factory unit in 2023 and in recognition of their achievements were named Food Producer of the Year at the Wales Food and Drink Awards 2024.

In early 2024, Mario's decided to begin the process of securing BRCGS Start intermediate level certification to drive further business growth. BRCGS Start intermediate level is a globally recognised food safety certification for small to medium-sized businesses that bridges the gap between SALSA and the BRCGS Global Standard.

Support from Food Innovation Wales

ZERO2FIVE initially conducted a gap analysis of Mario's food safety management systems to identify the processes and paperwork that needed to be put in place to meet the requirements of BRCGS Start.

An action plan was then put in place to mentor the Mario's site team to implement the food safety management systems required for BRCGS Start. ZERO2FIVE supported Mario's to update a range of procedures, including corrective actions, traceability and recalls, site security risk assessments, new product development and good manufacturing practices.

Other areas of assistance included supplier approval and performance management, setting food safety key performance indicators, and the management review of food safety. Finally, as part of the support, ZERO2FIVE delivered a bespoke food safety culture workshop and mentoring on how to develop a food safety culture plan.

Benefits of the support

Mario's successfully passed their BRCGS Start Intermediate audit in February 2025. Securing the certification will enable the company to target a greater number of customers who require the standard. As a result of the continued support from ZERO2FIVE through Project HELIX, Mario's has safeguarded 18 jobs within the company.

Riccardo Dallavalle, Director of Operations, Mario's Ice Cream, said:
"The support from ZERO2FIVE has been vital in enabling Mario's to secure BRCGS Start certification and as a result drive further business growth. We hope to take the next step to the full BRCGS Global Standard in the next few years and with the solid foundations from BRCGS Start intermediate level in place, we are well on our way."



Introducing the HELIX Programme

Project HELIX launched in 2016 as a pan-Wales strategic initiative that has been delivered by the three Food Innovation Wales partners (Ceredigion County Council, Cardiff Metropolitan University and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai).

Over the last decade, its unique triple helix approach to collaboration between industry, government and academia has provided a comprehensive package of support for Welsh food and drink manufacturers.

The Welsh Government's HELIX Programme builds on the success of this previous project and aims to:

- Encourage sustainable growth in the Welsh food and drink foundation sector through a strong emphasis on productivity improvement, innovation and attaining industry leading standards, with a focus on:
 - New product development
 - Technical support and the adoption of industry certifications such as SALSA and BRCGS
 - Increasing process efficiency
- Deliver targeted research and development expertise with the associated transfer of knowledge between academia and industry
- Boost the economic health and productivity of the food manufacturing sector by promoting the key drivers for sustained business development
- Promote Wales as a place for high quality, authentic and sustainable food and drink
- Be part of a wider food and drink ecosystem in Wales to encourage innovation and collaboration

The four organisations collaborating to deliver the HELIX Programme are:

- **Food Centre Wales**, Ceredigion County Council – Mid and West Wales
- **Food Technology Centre**, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai – North Wales
- **ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre**, Cardiff Metropolitan University – South Wales
- **AberInnovation**, Aberystwyth University – Pan-Wales academic knowledge transfer

