

Innovation is at the heart of our Welsh food and drink success story – Lesley Griffiths

With just days to go until Wales' largest international food and drink event BlasCymru / TasteWales returns, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, says innovation lays at the heart of the Welsh food and drink success story.

Latest figures show almost two years since its launch at the inaugural BlasCymru / TasteWales event, an initiative, known as Project Helix, to boost innovation and efficiency in the Welsh food and drink industry has already had an impact of over £82 million.

Using state of the art manufacturing facilities, the scheme has provided technical support and bespoke training that's helped develop hundreds of new products, helped businesses innovate, be more productive, improve skills and reduce waste in the supply chain.

Half way through the scheme, Project HELIX is well on its way to meet its targets early. To date, the scheme has delivered clear benefits to the sector including:

- 225 jobs created and a further 1150 safeguarded
- 234 businesses assisted
- 129 new businesses established
- 203 new markets accessed, and
- 273 new products developed.

The innovation scheme is delivered in partnership with three food centres based in Cardiff, Ceredigion and Anglesey as part of Food Innovation Wales.

The latest figures come as Food Innovation Wales has become a network partner of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Food, Europe's leading food innovation initiative. Supported by Welsh Government funding, this will establish a dedicated EIT Food presence in Wales, linking the Welsh industry to a wider consortium of key industry players, startups, research centres and universities from across Europe.

EIT Food aims to collaborate closely with consumers to develop new knowledge and technology-based products and services, ultimately delivering a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle for all European citizens. Being a member of EIT Food will enable Food Innovation Wales to be at the forefront of technology and research and build international partnerships to further bolster the Welsh food and drink industry and beyond.

Next week, BlasCymru / TasteWales will also return to the Celtic Manor bringing together over 100 Welsh food and drink producers and 200 buyers – a

third of whom are international. As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, the event will provide a fantastic opportunity to showcase Wales' quality food and drink and open new potential global markets.

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

"The success of Project HELIX shows how collaboration between academia, industry experts and producers on the ground can make such a big difference.

"Supported by Rural Development Programme funding, the scheme is already delivering and boosting the sector. An £82 million boost, new jobs created and others safeguarded, new products, new businesses launched, a more skilled workforce – all helping build Wales's great and growing reputation in the international food and drink industry.

"As we prepare for the challenges Brexit will bring, innovation is making the food and drink more resilient and plays a key role in our Welsh success story. I am therefore delighted that Food Innovation Wales has become a member of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Food.

"To support this, Welsh Government funding support will create a new Welsh base to further strengthen vital European collaborative links through EIT Food. It will put us at the forefront of cutting edge research and crucially enable us to forge new partnerships especially during these challenging times. It is more important than ever that we strengthen our partnerships with nations and regions across Europe and next week's Blas Cymru / Taste Wales provides the perfect opportunity to demonstrate our ambition to co-operate internationally is stronger than ever."