

Evaluation of Innovative Food Safety and Technical Support Delivered to Welsh Food Sector SMEs through Project HELIX 2016–2019.

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Introduction

Since 2016, a Pan-Wales partnership between the Welsh Government/European Union, small to medium enterprise (SME) partners and Food Innovation Wales was established and using a collaborative approach, implemented 'Project HELIX' across Wales, UK¹. This enabled knowledge transfer of reportedly lacking and required technical and food safety /science skills to the FDMP (food-drink-manufacturing-and-processing) sector².

This study aimed to analyse Project HELIX cumulative outputs/outcomes and key-performance-indicators (KPIs) impacting food safety management and technical innovation.

Methods

A quantitative and qualitative mixed methods approach was carried out to analyse the projects' process and output data based on FDMP business participation in product delivery programs between 2016-2019. Welsh Government and Project HELIX documentation, reports and media articles ($n \Rightarrow 150$) were reviewed and analyzed using a content analysis approach.

References

1. Food Innovation Wales (2020) Food Innovation Wales Annual Report 2018-19. Online source: <https://foodinnovation.wales/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FIW007-Helix-FIW-Annual-Report-2019-ENG.pdf> (Accessed 09/20)
2. Ellis, L., Mayho, S. and Redmond, E.C. (2020) Development of food safety and technical knowledge in Wales. In preparation.
3. Welsh Government (2020) 'Food for Wales, Food from Wales 2020-2020' Food Strategy for Wales December, 2020. Online source: <https://gov.wales/food-strategy-wales-2020-2020> (Accessed 09/20)

Results

- Substantial Project HELIX outputs were delivered during the implementation period (3 years) and key findings are presented in Figure 1*.
- Most frequent technical activities reported during project delivery to 336 Welsh food-sector businesses included **quality systems development, provision of technical information, training / mentoring and skills, and validation of systems.**
- Factors including **training, upskilling, knowledge transfer, job creation/safeguarding, new product development and accessing new markets**, combined with **strengthened food safety cultures and increased third-party certifications** within supported businesses have enabled increased **business sustainability** and **potential growth** of the sector.
- Qualitative data indicated positive SME MD reports of project implementation (see example quote). Many MDs indicated demand for continued support of critical food safety and technical systems to enable continued business development and performance.
- In addition to KPIs, **secondary outcomes** associated with HELIX implementation have been identified the following areas: local supply chain development, nutrition and health, investment, environmental efficiencies, export, tourism, awards, site upgrades/new premises and market development.

"The excellent support of ZERO2FIVE has helped us successfully maintain our BRC Storage and Distribution certification which is essential for our business to achieve continued growth."
SME Managing Director (MD).

Significance

- Project HELIX facilitated improved food safety/technical knowledge and compliance in Welsh FDMP SMEs, positively impacting the security of the food supply.
- Outputs significantly contributed to The Welsh Government's 2014-2020 strategic economic and ecological needs for the Welsh Food and Drink sector³.

