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Welsh Food Tourism: Bringing Home the Bacon?

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Title: Welsh Food Tourism: Bringing Home the Bacon?

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Abstract:

Food is playing an increasingly important role in the tourism offer in tourism destinations, on the basis that local food enhances the visitor experience and facilitates competitive advantage, through cultural distinctiveness, authenticity, and sense of place. Furthermore, some authors (Bramwell, 1994; Scarpato, 2002; Sims, 2009; Everett, 2016) argue that food is pivotal to sustainable tourism studies, particularly in relation to economic, socio-cultural, and environmental elements. As such, food tourism features in an increasing number of Destination Management Plans (DMPs) and National Tourism Strategies. For example, the *Food Tourism Action Plan for Wales 2015–2020* defines food tourism as any activity which promotes high quality, distinctive, local, and sustainable food experiences linked to a particular place (Welsh Government, 2015) and aims to ensure that food tourism is integrated into all of Visit Wales's activities by 2020.

Tourists are demanding distinctive, high-quality local food (Hardy, 2012), with 76% of visitors to Wales believing that it is important for them to sample local food and drink (Visit Wales, 2009) and 75% of producers identifying 'Welsh' as the most commonly used theme in their product branding, demonstrating that Welsh provenance is a positive strength (Welsh Government, 2014). In 2013, 89 million day visits were made to Wales, generating expenditure of over £3 billion, 40% of which was spent on food and drink (Welsh Government, 2015).

Food tourism is also of value to the food industry, in that tourists and tourism businesses are attracted to short food supply chains (SFSCs) where they can buy produce directly from the producer (e.g., farmer's markets) or local outlets (e.g., farm/village shops, cooperatives), reducing overhead for food producers. Moreover, once tourists have made a geographical connection, there is an increased likelihood that they will gravitate to food products from that area, consequently addressing the challenge of placeless foodscapes (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000).

Unfortunately, however, Wales is underperforming in relation to the exploitation of the opportunities inherent within food tourism. The 2013 Food and Drink Producers Survey (Welsh Government, 2014) recorded that less than half of the 300 food businesses surveyed are current suppliers to the tourism sector, with 6% finding it a 'difficult market' to operate in, and over a third have not considered the potential in the tourism sector. Reasons for the lack of engagement with food tourism and the difficulties encountered by food businesses are poorly understood. This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study undertaken in South Wales, which sought to investigate congruence and dissonance in the development of local food economies.

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