



AGORA

Grow, Graze, Make





Welcome

Rolant Tomos, Agora Project Manager

The original Agora was an open space in ancient Greece where citizens went to discuss new ideas. Some bright spark had an idea to sell food and drink to the early philosophers and the first farmers market was born.

Our Agora project is all about new ideas and getting to the market.

From goats to bees, pigs to flowers, willow and wool to Wasabi and Ginseng – we have taken enquiries, listened to ideas, signposted and given opportunities to clients from Welshpool to the Afan Valley, and from Sully to Raglan.

It's been inspiring to see the new ideas, hunger for success and the desire to do something different.

We've held 24 workshops, and worked with 220 clients, held 1-2-1 sessions with mentors, done a lot of listening and given businesses their first opportunities to sell.

It's been a great adventure, a learning experience, a challenge and extremely rewarding to see ideas turn into reality.

We'd like to thank all of the Rural Development Teams in Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen and The Vale of Glamorgan; all of the mentors and partners we've worked with, but most of all the producers who joined us along the way... here are some of their stories.

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Cegin Huw's Kitchen

Huw Rowlands

At home in the Rhymney Valley, 22-year-old Huw Rowlands spends every spare minute baking to supply a growing list of customers with Cegin Huw's Kitchen cakes, brownies and Welsh cakes – and vegan Welsh cakes.

"Baking is quite a competitive market, but I don't just want to establish a bakery, I want to develop a brand – and eventually a community cookery school where anyone can come and have a go!

I currently work 9 to 5 as a Welsh language businesses officer, and I run Cegin Huw's Kitchen around it – baking in the mornings, evenings and weekends.

I've got no formal baking training, I'm self-taught, but I'd always baked with my grandmothers and other family members and got the desire of baking from them. I spent a couple of months as a baker in a coffee shop, and I'm passionate about using good, high-quality ingredients and Welsh and local produce.

Last year, when I started my business, I thought that in six months I'd be self-employed and baking full-time, but it takes time to develop.

I was lucky, as I happened to meet Deian from Agora, and I mentioned my baking – and it went from there. The support from the Agora team has been fantastic, and the opportunities are second to none.

They convinced me to take a stand at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair. I ummed and ahed, but they said 'give it a go and see what happens'.

They organised everything, and it was one of the best days I've ever had on a stall. As a Welsh speaker, I was interviewed on the radio and television – all because of Agora.

I've done a video with them too of me baking, which I've been able to share on social media.

They have now moved me on to the next level of business help with Cywain, but I know I could still call on any of the Agora team – they are my comfort blanket!"

Agora Mentor

“A business starts with the spark of an idea which is fuelled by passion, determination and perseverance. However, the success of that business depends on having a focus on profit, margins and market potential. Find mentors who challenge you to be your best self and persist through the difficult moments and you'll flourish.”

Margaret Carter, Patchwork Foods



Hindwell Farm Quality Welsh Meats

Jess & John Goodwin

Radnorshire farmers Jess and John Goodwin are forging a new chapter for their historic farm, setting up meat box enterprise Hindwell Farm Quality Welsh Meats.

"We are a traditional mixed livestock and arable farm, and we produce beef, lamb, and pork.

There is a lot of history around Hindwell Farm, the early medieval Welsh poet Taliesin lived here, and it was a holiday spot for William Wordsworth.

We took over from John's parents who had farmed here since the 1930s and pride ourselves on producing excellent quality, superior tasting meat, to the highest welfare standards.

We believe in sustainable farming and use low input management systems and traditional livestock husbandry methods.

Our Aberdeen Angus beef cattle are grass-finished and processed at a local abattoir where they are hung for 28 days. By then the meat is quite tender, and the marbling gives it an exceptional flavour.

The flavour of our Welsh Lamb from our flock of home-bred Exlana sheep is enhanced by all-year-round grazing. While our pork, bacon, hams and sausages are from our herd of home-bred, slow-maturing White Welsh pigs which are barn-raised and fed on our cereals and fodder beet.

Currently, we deliver to customers locally, but we're hoping to widen our delivery area, and would like to have a mobile catering trailer too.

We met Agora through Farming Connect, and I think the project was quite new when we got involved. Agora has opened up a whole world of help, which we've grabbed with both hands!

Through Agora, we had a stand at the Start-Up Market at the Winter Fair, and Theresa May had one of our steaks – we had some great PR from that. She wrote to thank us, and I still refer to her when selling beef.

The challenge is finding our market as we don't have a farm shop for customers to come and see and try the meat, but I do a lot on social media, especially Facebook which is fantastic for us."

Agora Mentor

“ I started small and found success taking small steps at a time. I would definitely recommend starting at your feet, especially when finding your first clients. Look around you – who do you have locally you could contact? You don't need to travel far to develop your initial client base.

I would also recommend that you should be aware of your calendar, i.e. the seasons throughout the year when you can plan ahead and foresee busy periods. With meat boxes, the Christmas and Easter seasons are sure to attract additional customers. ”

John James, Tŷ Llwyd



Chappelle Turkeys

Natalie Chappelle

Family-run Brecon poultry enterprise, Chappelle Turkeys is now in its second generation with Natalie Chappelle and her husband Mike taking the business forward.

“When you’re rearing turkeys for Christmas, the year is a bit upside down really. Orders for chicks need to be made in March, and we start rearing them in the summer.

Mike’s mum started the business 20 years ago, but this is only our second year running it ourselves. It is a new venture for us as Mike is a tree surgeon, and I work for Farming Connect.

As a couple with a young family, we are looking to modernise the business and make it fresh while retaining the traditional techniques and quality birds people expect from Chappelle Turkeys.

Some of the chicks will go to other producers and individuals, and then we’ll rear between 400 and 700 ourselves.

They are primarily a variety which are slow growing and maturing, and they put on fat differently, which gives a full flavour double breast. When ready, they are dry plucked, and game hung for seven days to develop the flavour and tenderness of the meat.

We are lucky that we have inherited a loyal customer base, but we are looking to expand it too by utilising the internet to reach potential new – and increasingly health-conscious – clientele who enjoy turkey all year-round.

So, with Agora we’ve been re-branding our business and went with them to the Royal Welsh Winter Fair where we picked up a number of valuable new customers and contacts – which was terrific.

We entered some of the competitions at the Winter Fair too, and we were delighted to get first, second, and third prizes in the over 16kg category and second and third prize in the under 16kg competition.

We are the next generation at Chappelle Turkeys, and we are looking to attract the next generation of customers.”

Agora Mentor

“It is essential that producers move with the times – new ways of marketing and reaching customers are evolving all the time – Instagram and Twitter are all the rage now, these need to be engaged with – to develop new customer bases and to keep the product in the market place!”

Elaine Rees, Farm Diversification Consultant – Agriplan Cymru



Gelli Farm Raw Milk

Kath Granville

With her husband Robert and their three daughters, Bridgend farmer Kath Granville has turned around their dairy farm in Cefn Cribwr by establishing farm-gate business – Gelli Farm Raw Milk.

“Two years ago, everything was so different. We were a small farm, money was tight, and it was a real struggle to keep going.

We were getting peanuts for our milk, and it was costing us more to produce it than we were getting selling it. We were being pushed and couldn't see any alternative to selling our dairy herd and going out of milk.

Robert's father established the herd, and it was one of the few remaining pedigree Ayrshire herds in South East Wales, so the thought of selling was heart-breaking.

Our daughters enjoyed showing the cattle, so we entered the Royal Welsh Show for one last time. But a chance conversation there got us thinking about producing raw milk and selling it direct to the public.

The Granville family had a milk round previously, so when we got home from the Show, we got straight on the internet and immediately put our plans to sell-up on hold.

Now we have a vending machine at the farm where people fill up their bottles with our raw milk. Customers love the milk's quality, you can see the cream line, and it is nothing to have three cars waiting in the yard at the same time.

There's constant FSA testing and farming as a food producer is different; you have to go above and beyond. Agora has helped us, putting us in touch with the right people – and also helped keep my head straight!

Going into raw milk has given the farm a new lease of life. We've got plans to sell some pasteurised milk direct too and sell cream and cheese. And from being on the brink of selling our herd, we are now looking to expand it!”

“It's a pleasure knowing that I have succeeded in helping small companies to grow and develop throughout the project. Quite often, some of the producers don't have more than an initial idea, so it's great to be able to offer them some direction and resources. Arranging workshops that give them the opportunity to discuss and seek advice from food, drink and craft consultants has inspired and encouraged many of them to carry on, and I feel proud to have facilitated this.”

Gwion ap Rhisiart, Agora Business Development Officer

Organising a Farmers Market

Myfanwy Edwards

I became involved with the Vale of Glamorgan Farmers Market in 2001, and have been closely involved in not only the running of it but also as a stall holder ever since.

Over the years there have been many hundreds of stall holders attending the markets. Many come thinking they will make their fortune, but unfortunately last a very short time.

Others come with a great idea and product and quickly establish themselves in the market and then move on to bigger and better things, using the Farmers Market as a stepping stone, which is fantastic.

Then there are others who have been with us since the very beginning, week in week out.





Notes for a Market Organiser

Stall Holders – the stall holders and producers are the starting point and the most important part of the market. Without stall holders you don't have a market, and nothing for the customers to come and see and hopefully buy. Choose your stall holders carefully:

Local – make them as local as you possibly can, however if they have a unique product not available in your area and are prepared to travel to you, welcome them.

Variety – You need the widest variety of products that you can possibly have, giving the customers plenty of choice. However, remember that there is no point having 12 stalls selling meat, you need the vegetables, condiments, bread etc. to go with it. Without a full range of produce the customers won't come.

Traceability – before letting a producer join the market, meet them, talk to them and find out about them and their product. Ensure the stall holder is fully involved in the production of what they are going to sell, not just buying in and selling on. Customers can quickly spot a fake and it will damage the reputation of the whole market.

Legal – Every stall holder needs to be registered with their local authority as a food producer, they will need to have been inspected and hold a hygiene rating score. (preferably 4 or 5) and they must have product and public liability insurance. If necessary they need to hold the required licences such as alcohol, organic certification etc.

Publicity – you may have the most fantastic market with the best range of produce available but if no one knows about it, you will not sell anything. From experience, the very best publicity is word of mouth, but you do need to use social media, send out emails, put up banners etc. Make sure your dates, venues and times are consistent – if people have to guess when and where you will be they will soon tire of trying to find you!



As long as you have all of the above in place you will have the basis of a thriving Farmers' Market. The variations you then employ are up to you, as to whether you add craft stalls to your market or if you remain purely food. From experience the markets that have a clear remit seem to be more sustainable than those that just add random stalls to keep the numbers up.

I feel that my main strength as a market organiser is from the very start I have also been a stall holder. So many market organisers have never had to stand behind a stall and sell their goods to make a living. They see a successful stall with a queue of customers and sometimes customers handing over fairly large amounts of cash, and think we are making a fortune, but they do not stop to think what has gone into getting that product to the stall in the first place. I will use beef as an example as it is what we sell from our farm at the Farmers' Market every week.

After the calf has been born, it is fed and cared for, for over two years, before it is ready to go to slaughter. A beef animal is a very large animal, and the farmer makes the decision as to how they will market it. It could either be sold to one of the supermarkets when it will be put onto a lorry and a fixed price will be paid depending on its weight – process over for the farmer, money soon in the bank. Or sell it on the Farmers' Market – the animal is put on our own trailer and taken to the local slaughter house, where we pay to have it slaughtered. It is then taken to the cutting plant where it will hang for 3 weeks, before we pay for it to be cut up into recognisable joints, steaks, burgers and sausages etc, before it is packaged hopefully in the most sustainable packaging possible while still complying with the strict hygiene and food standards criteria.

We then collect the meat from the cutting plant, weighing and labelling every individual piece, before loading into our expensive insulated boxes for transport to the market where we set up our stall to sell. At the end of the day if we have had a good morning we may have sold the bulk of what we have taken, if it has been a quiet morning we may have over half of our produce still left. It is a fresh product with a very limited shelf life, we can't put it back in the field! In reality we take our profit home with us.

Many market organisers make the mistake of thinking that the more stalls you have regardless of what they are selling, will make the market more appealing. This is just not true. Too many stalls selling the same products just divide the spend, whatever your footfall the same amount of money walks through the gates each week and if you have six stalls selling the same product none of them will make enough money to make it viable and you will quickly find that you will go from six stalls selling one product to none.

Similarly, too many markets in one area will not work. Far better to spend time improving the market you have than start up another two or three markets that all end up struggling. You must remember that the stall holder has probably spent many hours the day before, if not the week before, preparing their goods, you then expect them to stand on what will probably be a cold wet and windy stall for 5 hours, and keep smiling. It is the very least you can do to ensure that they have a fair chance of attracting any customers that come to the market.

Some stalls sell a fairly high value product; others sell very low value products. Stop to consider how many boxes of eggs at £1.50 that stall holder has to sell just to cover the stall fee, without taking into consideration how many hours they have stood behind the stall. Keep your stall fees realistic and achievable for everyone. Most stall holders are enthusiastic and cheerful people but do cut them some slack and expect the odd moan if it has been a quiet morning!

Notes for Stall holders

Most of the best stall holders are dedicated to their product and have an enthusiasm for what they do that comes over when they talk about their produce and the customers love to share that and buy into it. No one is going to buy your product if you are sitting on a chair at the back of your stall reading the newspaper. You need to smile and greet your customers and make them buy into what you are doing.

Stalls need to be well presented, clean and easy to see what is being sold. All stalls must have the producer's name and preferably where they have come from clearly displayed so people can instantly see who you are, what you are selling and if you are a local. By law you must also display your hygiene rating on your stall at all times.



The main points to consider are:

Presentation – how both yourself and your stall are presented is the single most important factor. If you haven't bothered to change out of your muddy farm wellies, or wash your hands no one is going to buy fresh food from you. Make sure you are clean and tidy and wearing an apron, customers need to feel confident to buy from you. Ensure your stall is a feast for the eyes too, well-presented produce is far more likely to sell than stuff that is thrown in a jumbled heap on the table in front of you.

Consistency – your product must be consistent in quality week in and week out. If you are selling cakes and you burn a few, don't put them on the stall, all it will do will be to damage your reputation forever. No one remembers the 10 fantastic cakes they have bought in the past just the one burnt one you sold them. You can guarantee that is the one they will tell their friends about! Decide on what you are going to sell, and stick to it, selling beef one week, lamb the next, both the following week then eggs the week after, confuses the customers and takes trade from other stall holders.

Loyalty – customers like consistency. I know especially during the summer there are lots of food festivals and events to go to where you may make a bit more money than you can in a normal farmers' market, but before you rush off to these events consider your regular customers first. If a customer comes to the farmers' market every week and maybe always buys their eggs, but while they are there they will probably buy some meat, bread, veg etc. If one week they come and there are no eggs, as that is the main reason they have come, they may buy some other produce but will have to call into a supermarket on the way home to buy their eggs. The next week when they think about attending the farmers market, they will wonder if the eggs will be there, and as they need some washing powder as well, decide to go to the supermarket first and buy everything in one place, not even bothering to drop into the farmers' market.

If you have to attend another event, try and find someone else to cover your stall or warn your customers well beforehand that you will be missing that week, so they can make other arrangements and are not disappointed when they arrive to find you missing.

USP – let's face it nothing that we sell at the farmers' market is totally unique, everything will be available in some format in every supermarket. We know it won't be as delicious, individual or as lovingly produced as your product, but we need to let our customers know this. Tell them you only use local butter in your cakes. Tell them that your chickens are free range and have trashed your garden while producing the best tasting eggs in the area. Tell them the recipe you use for your chutney your great great granny used 100 years ago. You will probably find your product is competitively priced especially compared to the premier super market ranges, but let your customers know why you are charging that price and what they are getting for their money.

Enjoy it! – if you love what you do and what you sell, the customers quickly pick up on this. There is nothing customers love more than to boast to their friends when hosting a dinner party that the vegetables they are eating were all grown by a handsome young man just two miles from where they are currently sat!

Adaptability – we all need to move with the times. If customers want a different cut of meat, a new variety of vegetable, or a gluten free cake do your very best to accommodate them. In this day of food intolerances, we need to try and accommodate as many people as we can. More and more people no longer carry cash and we need to adapt to taking credit card payments, which fortunately are now cheap and easy to set up. Saying 'This is how I have done it for the last 10 years' will not increase your sales or endear you to your customers!

Finally, Farmers' Markets as either an organiser or stall holder are a huge commitment, and nothing just happens, you need to work at it. Without great stalls you will not have customers, if you don't have customers your great stalls will drop off and so it goes on. It is like the chicken and the egg, you have to have one to have the other!

Fashions and trends come and go, but everyone always need to eat and all we can do is to be there when people want us to be. Enjoy what you are doing, keep spreading our message that local is best. Low food miles, minimum packaging and traceability are all at the forefront of people's minds at the moment, and if we do have a terrible morning chances are we will have fillet steak for tea!



Cegin Kate

Kate Pinder

Former estate agent Kate Pinder's plan to spend more time with her family has led to a baking business that's caught the eye of politicians and royalty!

"When I'm baking, Myfi my 18-month-old daughter loves to sit and watch me – and she's the reason I started Cegin Kate.

For 16 years, I was an estate agent, and I returned to work after having my two boys – Rhys 12 and Iwan 9. But Myfi was an extremely premature baby. She was born at just 25 weeks, and I so didn't want to go back to working in an office.

I'd been making celebration cakes for family and friends for years, but had not gone into anything 'proper'. So, when I was looking to change my career, I thought I'd build on my baking – and use my customer service skills.

I came across Agora – or they found me – by local word of mouth, and they offered me the opportunity to have a stand in the Start-Up Market at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair. I said yes, but I needed help.

Where we live near Welshpool, our water comes from a spring source, and to have my kitchen approved by the council, I had to have the water tested. Agora helped with that and with all the application forms and everything I needed to have my kitchen approved by the council.

Agora helped with getting the labelling ready for the Winter Fair too, to make sure I had the correct information and labelling on my cakes and fudge. It's a minefield, but Agora put me in touch with a Trading Standards expert who made sure I complied with all the regulations.

At the Winter Fair, my stand was visited by Theresa May and Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex; I couldn't believe it. The publicity was unbelievable, and Agora helped me with it all."

Agora Mentor

“ My business is related to my interests – it is what I enjoy doing on a Saturday. How can you turn your interests into a real business?

Start developing your business idea whilst working elsewhere and gradually reduce your hours as your business grows.

Packaging is also important in order to get a foothold into a saturated market. E.g. adding a Mother's Day label to a regular soap bar and using the Welsh language adds another element, turning your product into an easy gift that motivates the customer to buy without a second's thought.

Business challenges change from one year to the next – it is always a learning curve! But don't forget to keep a healthy work/life balance. All work and no play...?! ”

Angharad Gwyn, Adra



Cig Mynydd Cymru

Lee Pritchard

Lee Pritchard's family is part of a group of farms in the South Wales valleys who have successfully joined forces to sell their meat direct to the public.

"Cig Mynydd Cymru is made up of five farming families who decided to do something about the poor prices we were getting for our livestock.

We all keep Welsh Black Cattle and South Wales Mountain sheep, but they are more a niche market and the trade in them was not as good as continental breeds. So, 12 years ago we decided to open a butchers shop in Treharris.

We don't just sell meat direct to the public, we try and sell our story too. We pride ourselves on the quality and flavour of our meat and the natural way it is reared.

So, we tell people where our meat comes from, the fact that the food miles are low – the meat comes from within a 12-mile radius of the shop – and that the animals are slaughtered locally too.

If there's an opportunity to sell our meat to a broader audience or serve our steak, sausages and burgers at shows and events, we do it – from local events such as Ffilifest, and farmers' markets to the Royal Welsh Show.

There are lots of regulations and hoops you have to jump through when selling food to the public. Agora has been supporting us to make sure all the paperwork is in order, as you have got to have everything spot on and go that extra mile.

They are also helping me with the process of obtaining my Level 3 hygiene certificate, which will mean I can manage the shop by myself.

We have a qualified butcher in the shop, and I've learnt a lot from him, and I would like to go on to do some butchery courses too.

In the future, I hope to see Cig Mynydd Cymru grow bigger and better, with the younger members of the families taking the business on, and I'd also like to see us increase our footfall and perhaps take on another shop."

Agora Mentor

“ Do one thing well – specialise in one thing, especially at the beginning.

Keep things simple – don't overcomplicate the menu, especially if you intend to produce large quantities.

Research the festival/event – ask how many people are expected, pitch prices, don't be afraid of offering to pay a percentage of your takings rather than paying in advance. Talk to other street food companies about numbers, and the prices you charge for your products.

Try different festivals. What works for one company doesn't necessarily work for another.

If possible, try to use the Welsh language – it is an additional, yet attractive, element.”

Ieuan Harri, Ffwrnes Pizza



Photos credited to Made by Hand

Hatton Willow

Sarah Hatton

Swapping her desk and computer for weaving and growing willow, Sarah Hatton has not only changed career but her way of life too.

"I'd never done anything like this before, but at the Royal Horticultural Show in Cardiff in 2008 I wandered over to a basket weaving stall (which was run by my now business partner), and I had a go at making a flower – and I really enjoyed it.

I was living in a flat in Penarth, and I wanted to move back to Caerphilly, where I had bought some land next to where I grew up, to keep my horse. I put up stables and planted 2,000 willow cuttings. Willow doesn't like to be in standing water, but the natural springs we have here really helped

during last year's drought and some of my willow were 7ft tall.

Now I've got 4,500 willows – which produce around 30 rods per plant – and 26 varieties, some of which are from the National Willow Collection.

Harvesting is done by hand between November and February. It is very labour intensive, but I'm looking at getting a brush cutter or a scythe mower.

Hatton Willow is now my full-time job; I run weaving courses, go to shows and festivals, undertake

commissions, and collaborate on projects with other weavers.

I've been lucky enough to work on some exciting projects. I recently restored a basket for the BBC 2 programme 'The Repair Shop'.

Agora has helped me with all the practical business-side of things and has been a great sounding board – they have given me a little push in the right direction!"

Agora Mentor

“ As a business owner involved in deigning, making, buying and selling craft and gift produce, I feel the following 4 tips are essential for the success of a craft led business.

Product – needs to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. It needs to be cost and time effective and don't be afraid to amend and adapt your product to meet the demands of your customers.

Marketing – The power of social media shouldn't be underestimated and should be a major part of your marketing strategy. After all it's a free and effective tool.

Route to market – there are several routes to market, depending on your circumstances some will be more effective than others. Start by selling at craft fairs which will give you some indication in how the consumers react to your product.

Sell online – e.g marketplaces – Etsy/Folksy.

Finance/legals – what starts as a lifestyle cottage industry can quickly turn into a full time commitment and all consuming. You decide which suits you – consider the implications of bricks & mortar, overheads, employees etc. ”

Nia Evans, Bodlon



Forest Coalpit Farm

Kyle & Lauren Smith

Kyle and Lauren Smith's rare breed pigs do what comes naturally – roaming the fields and woodlands at Forest Coalpit Farm near Abergavenny.

"We were looking to move out of London and live in the countryside, and by chance, we found Forest Coalpit Farm – it was a very fortunate move as this is a real foodie area.

"We keep rare breeds because they are suited to our environment in the Black Mountains, they make a variety of great pork products, and it's vital to keep rare breeds going.

"The pigs are fed grains and seasonal fruit and vegetables from around the farm, but we let the pigs be pigs – reared outside on grass, and free to forage for things such as hazelnuts, blackberries and acorns.

"We started with three Saddleback pigs. Initially, they were just for family and friends, but people were amazed by the taste and quality and wanted to know what 'special thing' we were doing.

Being a music sound engineer from London and not from farming stock I felt a bit on the back-foot, but I now think it's been a benefit as you question things more, and I'm in touch with similar producers in other countries.

I'd been interested in curing meat, and I knew there was potential to add value. We dry cure our bacon hand-rubbing it before smoking over

applewood and then hanging it. Our ham is brine and dry cured, and our sausages are handmade using fresh herbs and spices.

Agora has been helping us with our branding and marketing and sign-posted us to the right help, and we've done quite a lot of work with Menter Moch Cymru too.

I never used to be all that big into social media, but it is such a good way of telling our story. Now the majority of our business comes through Instagram in particular, and it's become our shop window."

Agora Mentor

The opportunity to work with Welsh food producers and work together to use social platforms to support diversification has been an extremely positive experience. The way that Agora enables a new generation of Welsh farmers to establish themselves as entrepreneurs, using innovative methods, overarches a number of Welsh Government strategies, which is rare in Wales at the moment. When using social media, I would recommend:

“It's best to use one platform well than struggle with three. If you want to use social media, decide which one is best for you and focus on that one.

Set aside an hour a week to create and schedule posts. Look back at what has worked in the past, when it was posted etc.

Use the Welsh language as part of your marketing. Remember that the Welsh language creates a good impression for non-Welsh speakers as well as Welsh speakers.”

Huw Marshall, marshall.cymru



Photos credited to Heather Birnie

How to Deal with Delis

Barrie Thompson, The High St Deli, Newtown

Your product is amazing.

You love it; your friends and family adore it... they all secretly hope a jar/packet/box of it will be in the house-warming/birthday/Christmas gift. They've told all their friends about it; you've told all your friends about it.

You love the new packaging... it is exactly what you imagined. You stand out from the crowd... **YOU** have the finest {insert name and type of product} on the market.

Right, let's go global!

OK, OK, slow down a little... let's start by going local... we can build up from there!

While you have been busy in your laboratory, cooking up your alchemy, making your magic, stirring the pot and sticking your elegantly designed labels on jars and boxes, farm shops, delicatessens and cafés have been doing just fine... {take a deep breath} without your product. What were they thinking... how could this be?

How do you break into their reverie... how do you pop your 'amazing thing' into their eyeline? What is the key that will unlock the gateway to their shelves?

Four years of life at the deli end of the telescope have shaped my thoughts into a few golden 'rules' {there are no rules, of course... each situation is unique... but here are some ideas to help guide your approaches to the places you would love to have your product}.

Each farm shop, deli, café or market is different

Your product is different, maybe unique. So are we deli owners and the places we set up. Some shop from a catalogue; some only stock local; others fill their shelves with a global celebration of tastes; plenty will include a food service... they might even serve what they stock; a whole bunch of them slavishly follow the 'retail year', with particular lines for seasonal celebrations. There is no one model for delis... your product will fit some, not others. Be what you have chosen to be but don't assume you're right for everyone. Find the places that are right for you.

Do your research

There is almost nothing worse than being told as a deli owner that "your customers will love my product" when it is clear that the producer has no idea what your place is like. Letters to 'The Purchasing Department' when a shop is owner-run are likely to be easy-to-read signals that you are doing a scattergun approach. Trends work really well with shops in the sprawling urban metropolis; but a rural enterprise is more likely to be risk-averse when it comes to the latest retail buzz.

Know your price, don't tell me mine

Your job is to understand your costs and to present potential buyers with a price that works for you. A deli owner's job is to take that price, apply it to their cost model and decide on a price that their customers will go for, whilst delivering a margin that works when set across their whole range of goods and services. It might just be me, but telling me what price I should be selling at just makes me bristle.

We have spent four years nurturing relationships with the producers of our handpicked curation of great tastes. We love the stories behind the products and we work incredibly hard to share those tales with our customers. Great tastes and food stories represent 'value' for the folk who trust us to help them with their choices. We need great products for our shelves ... but you need passionate folk to be your representatives; if you were hiring someone to do your marketing, you'd work as hard as you could to make sure they were right for you, your product and your future success.

Make that same effort to ensure delis, farm shops and cafés choose your product. Invest time and effort in bringing your product to the right shelves and you will multiply the marketing and sales effort for your brand. Build your reputation alongside the places you choose to sell to. All you have to do is to make sure they choose you too!

Let me taste it

You can have all the beautiful point of sale material, a gorgeously presented Instagram feed and a long track record of selling at local shows. But... if you're not able to let me taste your amazing/unique/delicious product, there is no way I can judge if it's for me. Factor in some % of your early production runs for tasters. In our deli, we don't spend on marketing; we do buy jars and bottles and take the lids off... how else would our customers know if they'll love the product? Food is about generosity... invest in getting folk to taste your product; if it's as good as you say, they'll become your marketing department.

Don't rush me

Be patient. I know. Your product is THE most important thing in the world to you. But, remember, until you approached our deli we were doing ok without your amazing 'thing'. We might be ok without it in the future. But I'm pretty certain we all want to make that decision when it works best for us. Give us a little space to make that investment decision, particularly if you want to build a relationship over time.

Pick your moment

Honestly, calling constantly at lunchtime when there's a food service to deliver and customers are dashing in from their desks for a flat white and a cheese toastie is not going to get you the answer you are after. Mostly, it will suggest that you're way more interested in you than us.



CaribSwede

Anna & Oliver Coipell

Anna and Oliver Coipell have combined their family's international heritage to create CaribSwede – a vegan bakery business with global appeal.

“Three years ago, we moved to Wales from London, left our previous careers in health care and engineering, as we wanted to spend more time together as a family with our six-year-old Noah.

It was Noah who sparked us into setting up CaribSwede. I'm Swedish, and Oliver has a Caribbean background, and we created our Food Fusion on the Go with our own sweet and savoury food products. My grandfather was a well-known confectioner and baker in Sweden, so many of his recipes have been adapted to fit into our Plant-Based Food Fusion.

As a vegan family, we know it can be tricky to access plant-based food on the go, so that became early on our concept. We started last year with a few markets, which took off really

well – it's a nice feeling that people like what we do. Our creations are a fusion of family baking in our kitchen, which we also sell online.

As we know London very well, we've been to events there and have had lots of useful feedback. We've had a lot of interest from countries such as Canada, Australia, and the US. From the start, our idea has been to go bigger, to ultimately have a 'mother' bakery in Wales with 'Cubes' in other areas and countries. We're looking to have our first "Cube" in Camden's new development – "Buck Street" which is being created into shops, cafes etc and built out of shipping containers.

Our products are vegan, although most of our customers are flexitarian. Our passion is to make and bake from scratch and as healthy as possible and all our food is for everyone...

Agora has helped us with lots of questions we had about manufacturing such as shelf-life of products, as well as introducing us to people and making connections. I went to a buyer event in Port Talbot, which was very good as I got the chance to present our concept and explain what we do.”

Agora Mentor

“It is essential to be prepared and do your research before you start – who are you selling to, the market, who and what is your competition. In a competitive market your product needs to stand out from the crowd with distinctive features and a clear USP (unique selling point).”

Nerys Howell, Howel Food



Amaze

Sioned Davies

Powys farmer's daughter Sioned Davies is combining her studies and experiences to create a potential new market for her family's lamb.

"The idea to set up Amaze grew from a competition with Sainsbury's for young farmers to come up with new and innovative lamb products.

Two of my friends and I were sat around the kitchen table, we'd heard about the competition from the YFC, and we thought entering it would be a bit of fun. So, we got some lamb and a few ingredients and started making different varieties of meatballs.

I'm studying agri-food marketing with business studies at Harper Adams University, and so looking at food trends we decided our target market would be millennials who want something trendy and nutritious, but also easy and flexible.

Agora has been helping us with various things we haven't done before, such as pricing and quantities.

They have advised us on things like 'what weight of lamb do we need to make a certain amount of meatballs?' What our margins need to be and how much profit can be made, and how to sell it.

Having someone to ground us and give us an outside perspective is really important, and we've had great guidance and support."

Agora Mentor

“ **Costs.** You need to set a base for your costs. Although many small businesses don't make that a priority initially as the emphasis tends to be on product development. I would definitely recommend that you do this. However, it is important to do this at once, before it becomes a stumbling block in the future.

Prices. Many have difficulty in setting prices at the beginning, but finding the optimum price is important, by looking at the market, seeing what people are prepared to pay, before going on to analyse the margin without underpricing your produce. Doing both these things is important, and researching the trends – following the trend to see where the market is going. In addition, there is no need to worry these days about completing expensive and complicated courses to keep track of your accounts. Cloud-based packages such as Quickbooks and Zero are very cheap and easy to understand.

Some of them are available for a small subscription such as £10 per month – similar to Netflix or Spotify.

And remember to record everything, from food accreditations, packaging materials, distribution – even a few miles, and remember about your own time. Don't work for free! ”

Geraint Hughes, Madryn Foods



Farmers' Welsh Lavender Ltd.

Nancy Durham

International journalist turned farmer, Nancy Durham, planted Wales' first lavender field north of the Brecon Beacons in 2003. Now, the lavender oil distilled on her farm is a crucial ingredient in her FARMERS' range of body care products.

Nancy not only brings a wealth of practical experience in establishing and growing an alternative crop, but she provides a valuable insight into creating a successful business and brand.

Just as she has transformed a rainy, windswept Welsh hillside into fields of blue – a sight more associated with Provence – so she is helping others to convert their ideas into sustainable businesses by sharing her experiences at events such as Agora's craft masterclasses.

Becoming a grower and launching a range of body care products, Nancy admits was "all a happy accident, I had no plan to turn our farm into a business." But now her enterprise is growing in more ways than one, and FARMERS' body care products are sold across the UK and beyond.

The seeds for the lavender farm were metaphorically sown one fine spring evening, when Nancy and her husband, philosopher Bill Newton-Smith, were sitting on the deck at their farm near Builth Wells. It overlooks the valley, and they wondered what else would grow there, and thought of the lavender hedge they had at their home in Oxford.

Never mind the hedge, by September that year an entire field of lavender had been planted. And this is how the philosopher and the journalist became farmers and distillers of lavender oil.

Although it wasn't all plain sailing, growing lavender in Wales has its challenges, but through belief and perseverance, their venture has blossomed.

"It has been trial and error. How we tackled the weeds was the biggest challenge because at one stage we used too much weed matting. We thought it would save on labour, but the plants were starved of oxygen, and so we had to dig up a whole field and re-plant. But one gift a hill farm has is that there is good drainage and lavender like well-drained soil. The soil is still rather rich for lavender though, so we have to add stone, sand and lime. Lavender loves a drought and last summer gave us a bumper crop."

Nancy and Bill distil their lavender oil on the farm then send it to North Wales where Helen Lowe, who designs FARMERS' products, creates the creams, balms, scrubs and lotions.



The products are then returned to the lavender farm for bottling and labelling. Chocolate made with lavender oil has been added to the range too, which is produced in Wales for FARMERS' by Forever Cacao.

The FARMERS' name sprang from an encounter Nancy had in 2012 when she was invited to address the Wye Valley Grasslands Association on the topic of growing lavender on a hill farm.

"I would be facing that species of rugged men and a few women who toil from dawn to dusk, no matter the weather tending their sheep:

The Welsh Hill Farmer. I was quite nervous, so I brought along my props: jars of body creams we were experimenting with at the time.

"It was ladies' night, and I thought they might like to try them. To my astonishment, so did the men. They plunged their hands into the pots of cream with gusto.

"Afterwards they told me about the toll work and weather took on their skin. One farmer held up his hands after slathering on our body cream and said 'look, now they don't smell like silage!'

"It was a cold, wet January night, and as I drove home along our narrow track high up into the hills, I thought of the name FARMERS' HAND CREAM. We had it in a jar by June that year."

So, what is her advice to someone thinking of setting up a brand?

“ You have got to be true to yourself, you cannot sell something you do not think is really good, you've got to know your brand. Go and get feedback from people who are not your friends, and don't think you know everything. ”



Gwion ap Rhisiart / Gwenan Ellis / Deian Thomas

Agora Business Development Officers

“ It’s a pleasure knowing that I have succeeded in helping small companies to grow and develop throughout the project. Quite often, some of the producers don’t have more than an initial idea, so it’s great to be able to offer them some direction and resources. Arranging workshops that give them the opportunity to discuss and seek advice from food, drink and craft consultants has inspired and encouraged many of them to carry on, and I feel proud to have facilitated this. ”

Gwion ap Rhisiart

“ The thing I enjoy most about the project is inspiring people to develop new produce, and through specific workshops, being able to help them see new possibilities and business opportunities that they would never have considered previously. ”

Gwenan Ellis

“ One of the highlights of working on the Agora project is being able to offer support to clients and watch how the business develops from a idea into a successful business. As we deal with a range of clients across various products it gives us a range of challenges that we can tackle hand in hand with our producers and makers. ”

Deian Thomas

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