

Food & Drink Wales The HELIX Programme Annual Report 2025-26



Foreword

The Welsh food and drink industry is one of the nation's greatest economic strengths – an innovative, resilient sector that not only feeds our communities but drives investment, skills and opportunity across Wales.

Against this backdrop, the Welsh Government's HELIX Programme plays a pivotal role in strengthening the nation's food and drink manufacturing sector. Grounded in the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the HELIX Programme promotes sustainability, equality and community benefit, ensuring that innovation in the food and drink sector creates meaningful value for Wales now and for generations to come.

The HELIX Programme delivers targeted expertise that helps businesses adapt, innovate and grow. Its focus on new product development, technical support, and the adoption of industry leading certifications such as SALSA and BRCGS remains essential in safeguarding food safety, boosting trade partner confidence, and opening new markets.

In response to inflationary pressures, changing consumer behaviours and legislation targeting food high in fat, sugar and salt, the HELIX Programme's work in supporting Welsh manufacturers to improve their process efficiency, reduce waste and develop healthier, sustainable and innovative products is more important than ever.

Crucially, the HELIX Programme's unique triple helix approach to collaboration ensures that knowledge flows between industry, academia and government. By connecting cutting-edge research with real-world business challenges, the HELIX Programme helps Welsh food and drink manufacturers to develop the innovative solutions that will drive productivity, create jobs, and position Wales as a dynamic food and drink nation.

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About the HELIX Programme

The Welsh Government's HELIX Programme provides funded technical and innovation support for food and drink producers across Wales. The Programme is delivered by:

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

Support from the HELIX Programme is flexible and tailored to the individual needs of businesses. Businesses can access state of the art facilities across Wales and the expertise of technical, academic and business support teams.

The HELIX Programme 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

HELIX Programme outputs

April 2025 – March 2026

Reaching every corner of the country



159

companies supported between April 2025 – March 2026

Creating a skilled workforce that's able to meet the needs of the industry

92

workshops and events delivered



Playing a key economic role in our local communities

60

jobs created

3,472



jobs safeguarded



413

unique learners

Helping the sector grow



77

start-up companies supported



302

new products supported



58

third party certifications gained



215

new markets accessed



54

collaborations between companies

Having a positive impact on our vibrant food and drink industry and helping it play a leading role in the future wellbeing of our nation and planet...

OVER **£103 million**
impact to the Welsh food and drink industry

Outputs from 01/04/2025 – 31/03/2026

Company testimonials

159

companies supported

Patrick Gee, Owner, Circular Drinks:

"I highly recommend the HELIX Programme to all food and drink companies in Wales, whatever their size, who are looking for expertise and support in developing new products or improving existing processes. The projects are delivered in a professional and easy-to-understand manner, and the staff are always helpful. It's given us assurance that we're doing things the right way."



Sam Wren-Lewis, Head of Projects, Dyfi Dairy:

"The HELIX Programme has helped us take a more strategic, evidence-led approach to developing our 'farm in a box' concept and understanding real farmer demand. Their guidance has enabled us to refine our engagement with delivery partners, shape a commercially viable route to market, and ensure our offering is both practical to deliver and impactful at scale."



413

unique learners

Rajeena Holland, Founder, Oooty:

"As a small Welsh female-founded food business, the support, backing, and networking opportunities that the HELIX Programme has provided is invaluable. It's connected me to like-minded people and brands that I can now grow alongside."



77

start-up companies supported

Haf Wyn Pritchard, Owner, Becws Islyn Rhuthun:

"As someone new to running a business, the guidance from the HELIX Programme gave me the confidence to explore new ideas and turn a challenge like bread waste into a real opportunity. I'm already thinking about what we can do next, and I really hope to return for future projects as we continue to grow and innovate."



60

new jobs created

Peter Rice, Managing Director, Prima Foods:

"The HELIX Programme has given us the confidence to invest in and grow our business, knowing that we've got the technical backup of their experts. The mentoring they offer to our technical team acts as a gateway to expertise and knowledge that we don't have in house."



215

new markets accessed

Jeanette Brew, Founder and Owner, Jinny B & Co:

"As a start-up, we were fortunate to receive funding through the HELIX Programme, which has been invaluable in ensuring access to a new market, bringing in money to the local economy and safeguarding the business. The HELIX Programme has been a tremendous support, enabling us to meet our client's deadline with confidence."



302 new food and drink products supported

**Fraser Norton and Rachel Yarrow, Owners,
Norton & Yarrow:**

"The support from the HELIX Programme has been invaluable in helping us to develop our new cheese. Without the technical guidance and use of their facilities we just wouldn't have been able to produce this new product."



Sam Carey, Owner, Milkwell:

"Working with the HELIX Programme has been instrumental in helping us to define and validate our vision for a nutrient-dense, grass-fed yoghurt that delivers a truly bioactive nutritional profile. Their support has strengthened our approach to evidencing health claims and refining processing methods, giving us greater confidence in mapping a credible and commercially viable innovation journey."

92 workshops and events delivered

Wayne Kadzirange, Founder, Bon Home Drinks:

"Every workshop I attended was so beneficial to us as a business and I'd leave each session having learnt so much new information. To other start-ups in Wales, I'd say get in touch with the HELIX Programme as early as you can, no matter what stage of business development you're at."



3,472 jobs safeguarded

Tony Parisella, Director, Parisella's Ice Cream:

"The support we have received from the HELIX Programme has been transformative. It's opened new opportunities for our business, safeguarded jobs for our team and set us up for future growth. We look forward to working with them again as we continue to innovate and expand."



58 third party certifications

**Karen Davies, Operations and Commercial Manager,
Tovali Soft Drinks:**

"We proactively engaged with the HELIX Programme for practical support to meet the stringent requirements of the BRCGS Food Safety Global Standard. The team's strong technical and practical knowledge, along with a mock audit that provided valuable insights, aided us hugely. The outcome was our first BRCGS assessment in March 2026, attaining an "A" rating."



£103.7 million financial impact to the Welsh food and drink industry

Sean Willis, Managing Director, Douglas Willis Ltd:

"Due to the help from the HELIX Programme, we have been able to attain and maintain our certifications for BRCGS Start!, PGI Welsh Beef & Lamb, and Red Tractor Assurance. This has enabled us to maintain our business share in an extremely demanding food sector."



Some of the companies we've worked with



HELIX Programme highlights

Third party certifications and retailer audits

Third-party certifications are essential for food and drink companies seeking to retain contracts or secure new business in the retail and food service sectors. Through tailored packages of internal auditing and one to one mentoring, the HELIX Programme helps businesses to secure and maintain certifications including BRCGS, SALSA, STS and retailer-led approvals, all of which are regularly updated to reflect evolving best practice. Ongoing HELIX Programme support ensures companies can navigate changing requirements and remain compliant.

Workshops – one to many training

The HELIX Programme delivers bespoke workshops shaped by industry needs, delivered both onsite and at food centres across Wales. Over the last 12 months, there has been a focus on food security for established businesses, covering areas such as incident management, food fraud, specifications and food defence. A series of introductory new product development workshops aims to help early-stage businesses to develop products that meet consumer needs, are financially viable and comply with regulations. Hands-on bespoke sessions have also been delivered on topics including butchery, pie and cheese production, charcuterie and meat science.

Proof of concept planning

The HELIX Programme's proof of concept offering provides early-stage, concept-driven support to help businesses validate new ideas, refine processes and plan innovation with confidence. This accelerator-style package is well-suited to ingredient innovation, novel foods, and technological advancements. The support package brings together academic and technical expertise, market insight, funding guidance and access to key collaborators to lay strong technical foundations for future success.

Healthier product development

In response to rising costs, shifting consumer behaviour, environmental pressures and legislative changes, healthier new product development remains a core focus of the HELIX Programme. Many of the supported products have focused on compliance with HFSS legislation as well as reformulation designed to prevent cost increases or valorise waste streams. A number of new healthier products supported through the HELIX Programme were showcased at Taste Wales 2025, including high fibre soft drinks and snack bites.

Process efficiency

The HELIX Programme provides comprehensive waste-reduction support to help improve sustainability and operational efficiency across the Welsh food and drink sector. Waste specialists undertake waste mapping to identify control points across manufacturing processes – from food to packaging and energy – before supplying tools and interventions to measure, reduce and prevent waste. This work has enabled businesses to identify significant volumes of avoidable waste and implement practical, measurable improvements across their operations.

Pilot plant use to de-risk innovation

Utilising the pilot scale processing capabilities at HELIX Programme food centres allows Welsh food businesses to simulate full scale manufacturing in a controlled environment. This enables them to validate formulations, optimise unit operations, and assess process performance with reduced risk before committing to commercial level investment.

Collaboration with key stakeholders

The HELIX Programme works alongside key stakeholders across Wales, the UK and the rest of the world on projects and committees that benefit the sector. The HELIX Programme regularly engages with stakeholders such as the Food Standards Agency, Hybu Cig Cymru, Category Insight, Cywain, AMRC Cymru, the IGD, Local Authorities, BRCGS and SALSA.

In addition, the HELIX Programme leads the coordination of the Wales Agrifood and Drink Knowledge Exchange Group, bringing together academics from universities across Wales to facilitate knowledge sharing on research, teaching and innovation activity across the agri-food supply chain. During the past year, the HELIX Programme was part of the steering group that organised Wales's first Agrifood Tech Innovation Expo. The HELIX Programme also 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, the International Association for Food Protection's Affiliate Council, and the European Hygienic Equipment Design Group.

Technical Leaders Network and Technical Hubs

The Technical Leaders Network brings senior technical managers together quarterly to encourage open discussions about the challenges faced by technical leaders. Regional technical hubs have also created a forum for shared discussion, learning and business collaboration. Hosted at manufacturing sites, these hubs enable companies to tour each other's facilities and exchange best practice on topics such as staff development, product recalls and cross-functional working, fostering collaboration throughout the sector.

Business Leaders Network

The Business Leaders Network brings senior leaders together to share ideas, exchange expertise and strengthen collaboration across the food and drink sector in Wales. The network connects CEOs and managing directors from some of the country's leading businesses. Guest speakers over the last 12 months have included the Welsh sourcing manager from a major retailer, who offered practical guidance for suppliers seeking supermarket listings. A cyber-crime specialist also addressed the group, highlighting the significant risks facing manufacturers and outlining the support available to help safeguard their operations. Recent sessions have also focused on skills and training, business grants, finance, and sustainability.

HELIX Programme Technical Conference

A major event in Wales's food safety calendar, the HELIX Programme Technical Conference brings the industry together to explore emerging issues, best practice and regulatory changes. More than 160 representatives from the sector attended the most recent conference to hear expert speakers from regulatory bodies, major retailers and academia, who shared their perspectives on the current challenges facing the industry.

Community engagement

The HELIX Programme supports community-focused initiatives that benefit local people and future generations. Activities have included running baking days for community centres, supporting Young Farmers' Clubs to help them prepare for meat judging at the Royal Welsh Show, helping local food banks and promoting HELIX Programme services to not-for-profit groups such as social enterprises and farmers' markets.

Nurturing the next generation of food industry professionals

The HELIX Programme encourages young people to consider careers in the food and drink industry by engaging with secondary schools and colleges across Wales, including supporting with the Tasty Careers Schools Challenge.

Through the HELIX Programme, a series of food industry placements for recent food science and technology students and post-graduates has offered hands on experience within companies across the Welsh food and drink manufacturing sector. During their placement, students have contributed to the successful delivery of a bespoke project within the partner company, supported by mentoring from food centre technologists. Projects have included reviewing and implementing improvement action plans following SALSA audits and assessing product recipes and costings to enhance efficiency.

In addition, over the past year, one of the food centres has hosted a student placement within their technical team, providing practical support to Welsh food and drink businesses. The placement delivered clear benefits for both the student and participating businesses, including support that helped one business achieve third party certification.



Flavour Moments

Flavour
Moments

Flavour Moments is a North Wales-based start-up food business passionate about transforming everyday cheese experiences into something truly special. Founded by entrepreneur Philippa Galway, it specialises in creating goats cheese pearls, delicately filled with flavourful inclusions prepared with honey, pear and fig.

Support from the HELIX Programme

The Food Technology Centre began supporting Flavour Moments with an initial focus on new product development to achieve the right flavours and textures for the cheese pearls. The team worked intensively to develop recipes that could deliver the desired eating experience.

Once the core recipes were established, the Food Technology Centre provided further support with machine trials, reviewing HACCP plans and production records, label information such as ingredient lists and nutritional data, and shelf-life testing to ensure the product's safety and quality over a four-week period. A factory visit was also carried out to offer guidance on set-up and effective cleaning procedures.

Benefits of the support

With funding from the HELIX Programme and expert guidance from the Food Technology Centre, Flavour Moments has not only started selling through farm shops, delis and select distributors but it has also achieved a major milestone by launching its innovative cheese pearls in Selfridges. This significant achievement demonstrates the brand's potential to compete in premium markets.

Building on the initial launch, the support from the Food Technology Centre has given Philippa the technical expertise needed for safe, high-quality food production and positioned Flavour Moments for significant growth. The business is now planning to hire additional staff and the support paves the way for achieving SALSA certification, unlocking access to wider markets and strengthen long-term sustainability.



Philippa Galway, Creator and Owner, Flavour Moments:

"The Food Technology Centre's expertise was invaluable in helping me turn my idea into a tangible product. Their support with recipe development, technical testing and compliance gave me the confidence to launch Flavour Moments and start selling to customers. I look forward to working with them again as we develop new flavours and continue to grow the business."

Clam's Cakes



Based in Ebbw Vale, Clam's Handmade Cakes produce award-winning cakes, which are supplied to coffee shops and cafes across the UK. Originally founded in 1996, the family run business was named Wales's best craft bakery in the Baking Industry Awards 2018 and they're the winners of 18 Great Taste Awards.

Over the years, ZERO2FIVE has provided Clam's with a variety of support, including help to secure and maintain SALSA certification and assistance with new product development. The company contacted ZERO2FIVE when they were looking to adopt a data driven approach to tracking production flow and monitoring waste.

Support from the HELIX Programme

ZERO2FIVE's waste experts visited Clam's to gain an understanding of their factory set up and production flow. As a result, ZERO2FIVE developed a bespoke database tool which could be used by production operatives to keep track of products as they are being produced in real time. ZERO2FIVE delivered training to the Clam's team to ensure that everyone was comfortable using the new system. Crucially, the tool was designed to require only a basic level of digital skills.

Benefits of the support

All the data logged in the database has enabled Clam's to gain a real time understanding of their production flow and sources of waste. The company now has easy access to a range of data such as the number of bakes per day, expected versus actual units, units lost in bake, and total yield. As a result, Clam's can be proactive in responding to issues, including whether production output will meet the volume required to fulfil orders and which products or ovens are more likely to generate waste.

Due to the successful implementation of the tool for monitoring the initial stage of production, Clam's plan to rollout it out to their decorating and packaging production stages. This will provide additional opportunities for tracking production flow and monitoring waste.

Lewis Phillips, Production Director, Clam's Cakes:

"The waste reduction support from ZERO2FIVE has been excellent. They have supported us in developing and implementing a production and waste data model that not only allows us to monitor production performance but highlight waste streams. The production data we are now able to generate will prove invaluable in our mission to improve efficiencies whilst driving down waste within our business."



Gate Farm – Daisy Bank Dairy & Trefaldwyn Cheese



Gate Farm, near Montgomery, is a third generation organic dairy farm run by the Lloyd family. The farm encompasses both Daisy Bank Dairy, which produces organic non homogenised milk and flavoured milkshakes, and Trefaldwyn Cheese, an artisan cheesemaking business which utilises the farm's organic milk.

The family follow regenerative and organic farming principles, focusing on soil health, rotational grazing and herbal pastures that enhance biodiversity and produce high quality milk. Seeking to strengthen their value added dairy operations and support future growth, Gate Farm began working with Food Centre Wales to access specialist technical expertise.

Support from the HELIX Programme

Through the HELIX Programme, Food Centre Wales delivered a comprehensive package of technical, compliance and certification support to both Daisy Bank Dairy and Trefaldwyn Cheese. A major focus of the work centred on SALSA certification, with Food Centre Wales completing detailed gap analysis for both businesses, standardising documentation and guiding the implementation of a full food safety management system. A key element of the support was the student food technician placement, which provided a dedicated, on-site technical resource working under the mentorship of Food Centre Wales.

Benefits of the support

The HELIX Programme support has significantly strengthened Gate Farm's technical capability across both Daisy Bank Dairy and Trefaldwyn Cheese. This support enabled Trefaldwyn Cheese to achieve full SALSA approval, while Daisy Bank Dairy is progressing rapidly towards certification - positioning the businesses to access new wholesale markets, including opportunities with larger buyers such as Castell Howell. The student food technician placement provided valuable on-site technical capacity during a period of intensive system development. Under Food Centre Wales's mentorship, the student food technician helped maintain progress on SALSA documentation, food safety

management system implementation and day to day technical tasks, allowing both businesses to advance far more quickly than would have otherwise been possible. Collectively, these support measures have created a stronger, more resilient technical foundation for Gate Farm, boosting confidence, capability and long-term growth potential.

Glenn Lloyd, Co-owner, Gate Farm:

"Working with Food Centre Wales has been invaluable for both Daisy Bank Dairy and Trefaldwyn Cheese. Their technical and compliance support gave us clear, practical guidance and the confidence that our systems met the required standards. The support around SALSA was particularly strong, helping us put robust food safety and documentation in place and ensuring we are well positioned for future growth."



SipKind

SipKind is an emerging wellness-focused brand aiming to redefine how people hydrate. Built on the belief that everyday drinks should support both personal health and environmental sustainability, SipKind has developed a system that replaces sugary, single use plastic beverages with natural, refillable alternatives. Its mission is to create a new category of “natural hydration” that fits seamlessly into modern lifestyles across homes, schools, cafés, and workplaces.

At the heart of SipKind’s innovation is a 100% natural liquid concentrate made from fruit, herbs, and plant extracts, delivered in convenient single-serve sachets. These sachets transform water into a flavourful drink with no added sugar, sweeteners, or artificial ingredients. The concept extends into a ready-to-drink range, broadening accessibility while maintaining the brand’s focus on transparency, nutrition, and sustainability. Key technical priorities include perfecting flavour balance, ensuring product stability and shelf life, and developing eco-conscious packaging aligned with reusable systems.

Support from the HELIX Programme

Through support from AberInnovation and the HELIX Programme, SipKind has developed a clear and structured product development plan and identified the key next steps required to progress towards scale-up activities. This has included guidance on recipe testing and validation, consumer insight planning, and packaging feasibility. The HELIX Programme also supported the business in strengthening its marketing collateral, refining sales and distribution strategies, and developing a clear intellectual property approach to protect its innovation.

Benefits of the support

The support has enabled SipKind to move from concept to a more structured and evidence-based innovation pathway. With clearer validation processes in place, the company is better positioned to ensure that their product aligns with market needs, meets consumer expectations, and demonstrates nutritional credibility.

Additionally, strategic input on branding and market readiness planning has strengthened SipKind’s ability to scale sustainably while maintaining its core values of health and environmental impact.



**Elizabeth McCoy,
Founder, SipKind:**

“The support received during my engagement with AberInnovation and the HELIX Programme has been instrumental in helping us translate our vision into a practical and commercial product offer. Their guidance has strengthened our development, validation, and go-to-market strategy, giving us confidence as we begin the process to bring SipKind to market.”

