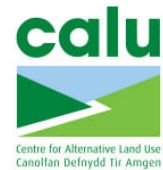


## CALU – Gwlad February 2008



### Horticulture in Wales

*By Felizitas Rupp - CALU*

There are several reasons why farmers, especially livestock farmers, consider diversifying into field scale vegetable production. However, growing demand for local food and the difficulties livestock farmers have faced due to disease problems in England, coupled with poor market returns are arguably the strongest drivers.

Whilst some livestock farmers have already embraced the idea, others are reluctant and need to be convinced of the viability of field scale vegetable production.

In 2007, several vegetable trial plots were established on the farm at Henfaes Research Centre with the support of Fenmarc. The farm is a conventional sheep farm. The aim of the trial was to test the performance of different species and assess the practicality of vegetable production on a livestock farm.

Several brassicas, pumpkins, courgettes, onions, potatoes and beans were among the species trialled. Mark Hughes, Henfaes agronomy technician, was partially responsible for the trial plots and observed the process closely from establishment to possible marketing opportunities. Mark has good news for growers: “Generally speaking, there is enough scope for producing vegetables and also soft fruits. There are no problems with the actual growing in North Wales.”

When asked, what challenges farmers face when growing vegetables, Mark points out that it is essential to obtain information about potential markets before even planting the crops. “If you are considering producing on a large scale, it is worth contacting regional buyers from the major supermarkets for contracts. Alternatively, you could consider opening your own farm shop. If you only want to produce smaller amounts, box schemes and farmers markets might be your solution.” However, to succeed in supplying the major retailers it is crucial to ensure continuous supply and an attractive range of products. How can this be done? Mark recommends staggered plantings and working together with other local growers.

It is a big step to move away from a livestock business which is well known to something new and some creative thinking is required. The good thing about vegetable production is that you can move into it gradually – it is not a long term commitment, a small area can be trialled. If you like it, you can expand, if you don't, it can be back as grass next season.

To help farmers get started with field scale vegetable production, CALU has so far published six crop production guides for swedes, parsnips, carrots, garlic, leeks and courgettes. All are available at [www.calu.bangor.ac.uk](http://www.calu.bangor.ac.uk). If you want a paper copy of the leaflets or further advice please contact CALU.