

Case study summary

The StarTree case studies for Llais y Goedwig focus on small enterprises that use woodlands and specifically Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) ¹to generate an income in an innovative way. They show how, with ingenuity and dedication woodlands can provide us with much more than timber.

This case study tells the story of Wild Pickings – a small mid-wales business that sells foraged products from woodlands and the coastal areas in Ceredigion. The key themes of the case study are collaboration and sustainability.

Wild Pickings



'Wild Pickings' is a small company run by Jade Mellor. Jade picks local wild produce from the woods and hedgerows surrounding her home in Ceredigion, Mid Wales, and produces a range of high quality pickles, preserves and cordials using her own, as well as traditional recipes with a 'twist'.

The business model combines the manufacture and sale of 'wild pickings' with foraging walks and courses, cookery demonstrations and small scale catering for events.

¹ **The NWFPs of interest here are described as 'embedded', meaning that the NWFPs themselves are not the product being marketed, but are an essential part of the product or service being offered.**



Wild Pickings is typical of small NWFP companies in Wales: it provides a full time living from NWFPs by combining production and sale of goods with NWFP services.

The foraged foods include rose hips, haws, bilberries, blackberries, elderberries, wild garlic, wood sorrel, elderflower, wild rose petals, seaweed and samphire. These are made into products such as hawthorn ketchup, rose-petal salt, wild garlic pesto, bilberry syrup, seaweed salt and pickled samphire.

Products are sold via an online source, [Etsy](https://www.etsy.com/) (a marketplace where people around the world connect to buy and sell unique goods, particularly handmade products), at local markets, Welsh food festivals and also via a newly established retail outlet and workshop in Cardigan.

Wild Pickings products are varied over the seasons and the years by making changes to each seasons' batch of produce, and by introducing new recipes and flavours to keep existing customers returning to try new tastes and enticing new customers in.

In addition to the foraged products, Wild Pickings also offers courses for local people, school groups and young people who are not in employment or education, as well as tourists visiting Cardigan Bay. Each programme is tailored to the area and style of the organisation. The courses are advertised via local organisations, as well as the Wild Pickings website and social media.

A key element to Wild Pickings is the collaboration with other small businesses and organisations, whether selling the produce in the market, at food festivals or events, online or in the shop. Working alongside other grassroots level sole traders ensures new audiences are introduced to the products, and helps all the businesses involved remain sustainable. This is vital in a rural area with a low population, and a heavy reliance on a seasonal influx of tourists.



Jade out foraging

Inspiration

Jade moved from Kent to Cardigan in 2004, where she met woodsman Benjamin Grey who introduced her to foraging in the wild. She was intrigued by the taste and flavours of wild food and began gathering produce and developing products for her own use. A background in horticulture gave her a base from which to increase her knowledge of plants. Further inspiration came in books such as “Food for Free” by Richard Mabey and “Wild Food” by Roger Phillips inspiring her to try new recipes. These were shared with friends who provided useful feedback, influencing ideas and choice of ingredients.

In need of work after moving to Wales, Jade worked for a trading forager from Pembrokeshire who supplied foraged leaves to a London restaurant by post. She noted that the people eating dishes containing the leaves in the restaurant would have no understanding of where they had come from. The ‘disconnect’ between producer and consumer meant there was little or no understanding of the cycle of the product; bringing foraged products directly to consumers at her local market was a way to address this.

Developing a business

In 2009, after encouragement from the Aberystwyth Farmer’s Market manager, Jade applied for a trading licence and also sought advice from the local Environmental Health Organisation so that she could begin to trade at farmer’s markets.

Advice from Ceredigion County Council’s Food Safety Officer provided the impetus for an agreement to rent the kitchen at the local village hall in order to trial creating her own products. She contacted Trading Standards Services for more information on product labelling and weights and took out public and products liability insurance for the sole trader

name, Wild Pickings, as well as completing the required Food Safety Awareness training. In time, with an increase in demand for her products, and the ability to use alternative premises for cooking on her foraging walks, the decision was taken to save on paying rent and build a more permanent kitchen base in a small wooden shed outside her home. With this saving, she was able to meet the cost for stainless steel worktops and equipment through the profits from Wild Pickings.

Market research and collaboration

As there was little or no information about foraged food as a trade in Wales or the UK readily available, information about products and marketing was sourced online from a Canadian website: [Forbes Wild Food](#), a company who place particular emphasis on sustainability. This proved an inspiration for future work.

Wild Pickings first stall at Aberystwyth Farmers Market was in 2010. A year later, a stall sharing collaboration with a fellow forager with years of experience collecting and selling winkles and moss gave her valuable information on trading. Feedback about her products from market customers and tradespeople helped inform the creation of new recipes.

Jade usually foraged alone, yet was aware of others in the area who foraged for their personal use, as well as to support professional interests in medicine and gastronomy. It was through links with other foragers and with Cardigan's [Small World Theatre](#) and [Ymlaen Ceredigion](#) that Wild Pickings first foraging walks were run, initially for family groups.

The success of the walks led to a contract as an animateur for Aberystwyth University's Centre for Performance Research 'Out of the Box/Unfolding Feasts' project. Jade became more confident in her ability to lead foraging walks with families and decided to try new, more adult-focused walks with friends. These

proved very successful, and added to the increasing sales of her product at markets. The walks acted as a welcome break between the time-consuming periods of preserve making. They brought the aim of providing consumers a tangible link between produce and product closer.

In 2011 Wild Pickings was offered a contract through Small World Theatre to run foraging workshops that would span four seasons. The aim was to inspire artisans in the area to provide activities outside the usual tourist season and to provide a space for collaboration. It was this contract that enabled Jade to leave her part time employment and focus solely on Wild Pickings, providing seasonal workshops and offering services to other markets and small businesses involved with Small World Theatre and beyond.

Small World Theatre support and encourage collaboration between artist and workshop leaders. This meant Jade was able to secure catering work with different groups, adding to Wild Pickings' profits. In addition, marketing costs for Wild Pickings' services were reduced as each organisation advertised Wild Pickings events free of charge.

***The Theft Act (1968)** states that 'A person who picks mushrooms growing wild on any land, or who picks flowers, fruit or foliage from a plant growing wild on any land, does not (although not in possession of the land) steal what he picks, unless he does it for reward or for sale or other commercial purpose'.*

So picking for personal use is legal on any land to which you have right of access. In order to pick for commercial purposes you need to have permission from the landowner.

Online sales

Wild Pickings first online sales were through Handmade in the Hills, a website specialising in products from the Cambrian Mountains. Jade and the website manager collaborated in designing and creating wild food recipe cards to sell alongside the product range. The cards were offered for sale at the end of each workshop and on market stalls. Online or market stall customers now had the additional option of attending a workshop to discover how the products were made.

Jade also created Facebook and Twitter social media accounts to raise the profile of Wild Pickings.

Country Living magazine's Louise Elliot discovered Wild Pickings via Twitter and published an article on Jade in their November 2014 issue. Since then, sales have increased and more people are visiting the local area to attend Wild Pickings events.



Country living article featuring Wild Pickings work



A forage from the Ceredigion woodland & coast

Premises

Wild Pickings began to be a popular catering choice for 'alternative' events and led to further collaborative opportunities with like-minded people. Jade met an upcycled clothing designer and dress maker at a Quiet Earth Project open day. They became friends and they soon began supporting each other in their work.

The success of the collaboration led to them agreeing to jointly rent an abandoned shop space in one of Cardigan's alleys at the start of 2014. As the shop was in need of considerable work, the rent was low for the first year allowing both businesses time to build up stock and a client base before having to pay full business rates.

Business Support

Wild Pickings received business support from Antur Teifi, a local social enterprise that provides specialist advice and support through the Welsh Government business support scheme. Antur Teifi referred Wild Pickings to the Micro Business Investment Fund administered by Ceredigion County Council. The fund was administered as part of the Councils axis 3 element of the Rural Development Fund for Wales' 2007-2013 programme and provided support of up to £5,000 at a 40% intervention rate to enable small businesses to start up and grow. Wild Pickings was awarded £3000, most of which was spent on refurbishing the old shop, which now hosts a sales area, a kitchen and a large workshop space.

As Handmade in the Hills had closed down in 2013, Jade took advantage of the Micro Business Investment Fund free 'Web Surgery' to develop the Wild Pickings website. She made links to her existing social media sites and also to her new Etsy online trading account. Etsy, as an online marketplace where business is valued alongside social and environmental interests, has low selling fees.

Sustainability

Jade continues to develop foraging workshops and programmes throughout Ceredigion. She is sensitive to the sustainability of not just the land from which she forages, but also the people and businesses of her local area. When developing new foraging programmes for other organisations, she ensures they do not clash with the programmes she is offering a few miles away. This allows both parties to benefit from the additional business, without affecting the success of each other's trade.

Wild Pickings foraged materials come from within a 25 mile radius of her home in Ceredigion, with the majority coming from within a 3 mile radius. Agreements with landowners are in place for all sites, though the agreements tend to be informal, verbal agreements and payment is usually in Wild Pickings products. Each site is visited infrequently so as to rotate what is picked and have minimal impact on each location.

The future of Wild Pickings will continue to be based on feedback from clients, collaboration with different people and inspiration from nature. There is potential to develop Foraging Feasts in collaboration with professional chefs and to expand on the Wild Food Cafés that have been a great success at local events, while continuing to use the shop as a base for making and selling her products, and a 'window to the world

Finances

As with many sole trader businesses, having a regular income while setting up was important for Jade and Wild Pickings. It was only with the increasing turnover from products and addition of new products and services that Wild Pickings provided enough income to support a person full time. Part time employment was essential while exploring new avenues for selling products.

While basic living costs were covered through her part-time employment, any profit was used for the further development of Wild Pickings. Initially they were used to purchase equipment and additional ingredients or to pay for a stall space at markets. Later profits were used for marketing, the purchase of equipment and to provide match funding for the grant that was accessed to develop the shop and workshop premises.

The funding accessed by Wild Pickings, while not a large amount, enabled the business to expand and offer a new aspect to Wild Pickings so triggered development.

Conclusions

It is apparent that, although foraging is not new to the people of Ceredigion, or to rural areas, Wild Pickings is offering products and services that have helped to re-ignite an interest in NWFP while also providing information on the ways these can be accessed and used sustainably.

The two key themes that run through Wild Pickings' development are collaboration and sustainability.

Collaboration

Although Wild Pickings is owned and coordinated by one person, it would not exist in its current state if it were not for the collaboration with and co-operation of a range of people and organisations. The development of the business grew organically, with influences from friends, other interested people and organisations.

By working with other businesses and organisations, Wild Pickings was able to save significant amounts of money and other small local businesses were able to benefit.

Collaborative working ensures Wild Pickings provides a stable income for Jade. In turn, Jade ensures her business does not undermine other businesses or organisations in the area.

This case study was compiled by Kirsten Manley for the StarTree project, of which Llais y Goedwig is a partner for Wales.

It is based on a series of qualitative interviews with Jade Mellor and the people and organisations that were influential in the development of Wild Pickings.

Llais y Goedwig is a voluntary association of community woodland groups that formed in November 2009 to provide a voice for community woodlands. We want to share experiences, support each other and enhance local woodlands to benefit the people of Wales.

This resource is part of a growing series for association members, and others interested in community woodlands in Wales.

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