

9<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

**Submission to the House Standing Committee on Agriculture Inquiry into Food Security in Australia**

Thank you for inviting submissions to this inquiry into food security in Australia; providing a critical opportunity to create a healthier and more resilient, equitable, and sustainable Australian food system. We note the Terms of Reference requires the House Standing Committee on Agriculture to inquire into and report on food security on a number of matters, including:

1. National production, consumption and export of food;
2. Access to key inputs such as fuel, fertiliser and labour, and their impact on production costs;
3. The impact of supply chain distribution on the cost and availability of food; and
4. The potential opportunities and threats of climate change on food production in Australia.

**About Sustain: The Australian Food Network**

*Sustain: The Australian Food Network* (<https://sustain.org.au>) is a national body and registered health promotion charity, established in January 2016, representing 30 member organisations, including 14 local governments, 30 business and organisational members, and 130 individual members who work together towards building a healthy, sustainable and fair food system that benefits all Australians.

Our members support policy levers that shift individual and organisational activity towards a fair food system, and a goal prioritising the long-term health and wellbeing of the community. Sustain would like to see the Australia Government, and indeed all state/territory and local governments, realise the significant return on investment and potential of all forms of regenerative agriculture, urban agriculture and edible gardening. This would address significant community issues, especially growing individual and household food insecurity and deliver multiple beneficial outcomes through the simple acts of growing, cooking, sharing and eating nutritious food.

Sustain is a 'think and do network' whose mission is to design and build sustainable food systems. We base our work in the scientific understanding of the interconnectedness and mutual interdependence of all elements of food and agricultural systems, and their inter-relationship with other systems, including education, health, economy, culture and politics. We ground our work in a principled commitment to the human right to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, which all Australian governments are bound to uphold following **Australia's ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976.**<sup>1</sup> Similarly, we expect the Australian government to prioritise the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2: 'zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and

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<sup>1</sup> [OHCHR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'.<sup>2</sup> Australia is signatory to the United Nations and regularly reports on all SDGs. Given the increasing levels of food insecurity in Australia which disproportionately impact First Nations communities and other vulnerable community members, as well as the rapidly rising burden of dietary-related ill-health, it cannot reasonably be contended that Australian governments are fulfilling this commitment.

Thus, **we urge the Committee to consider food security in a comprehensive and integrated sense, examining the real hardship and suffering that millions of Australians currently experience through inadequate and secure access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food.** We cannot continue to make the intellectually lazy assumption that because we are a net food exporter that we are therefore food secure, or that somehow food insecurity is a marginal issue. It is not.

### **Acknowledgement of First Nations sovereignty**

We ground our work in the recognition and acknowledgement that all agricultural and other economic activity in Australia takes place on land stolen from First Nations peoples; and indeed, that the establishment and expansion of agriculture was a principal means of the dispossession and genocide of First Nations peoples.<sup>3</sup> The processes of historical truth-telling and a duly negotiated treat are essential for justice for First Nations peoples. The path to a better food system for all Australians must begin with the principles of care, respect, healing, justice and regeneration.

Uncle Ghillar Michael Anderson is chief advocate of the Indigenous Sovereignty Movement, and Leader of the Euahlayi People's Republic, an Aboriginal nation-state that he proclaimed as a republic in 2013. At the [Victorian Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogue](#), convened by Sustain (online on 27 July 2021), Uncle Ghillar shared with attendees the following story about the food cultures of First Nations peoples.<sup>4</sup> The story speaks to water, sovereignty, Country, ancient foods, and health and wellbeing. It is published with his permission.

*When the creators came and they created our society, we, the Euahlayi, the Gomerioi and the Wiradjeri, we were the same skin groups, and those four skin groups all connected to an ecosystem. Within that ecosystem – everything that lives within that single system – is family. In our case, we have the Nyungar, the Kurrajong tree – that's the mother of that ecosystem, and it grows on rocky ridges, on rocky soil. Within that system, we have all the food – not only do the humans have a relationship there, but all the different plants, and animals and birds and fish where we connect down to the rivers.*

*This is where we have all the family. In the same way that native American Indians talk about all the family. Within that system, we're generally not supposed to eat animals and birds that are related to us as part of that ecosystem. It's a conservation method as part of maintaining our population and our numbers. It's the same as the grasses, it's the same as the fish. We have the neighbouring clans – they have a different system, different animals, birds and vegetation. Within these systems, this is how we managed to live a sustainable lifestyle, so that we're not all farming one area, but we move around.*

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations (UN) 2015 *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Geneva. Website: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Mayes C 2018. *Unsettling food politics: Agriculture, dispossession and sovereignty in Australia*. Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the dialogue published here. Website: <https://sustain.org.au/articles/victorian-independent-food-systems-dialogue-report>. accessed: 6 December 2022.

*Because our food can only be harvested in a short window of 2-3 weeks, you need to make sure that you're there at that place at that time; and so over the thousands of years we've been here we understand how that works. We didn't have to till the soil, because nature provided everything that we needed. It's a wonderful system – if we could only get back to it.*

*Nowadays, my people are looking at how we can plant those species in a particular area, so that – in this modern day that we're forced to live in and we can't get around to all those places where those things are naturally – we have to germinate them in our own areas and increase the numbers so we do have access to them at certain times.*

*We have 8 cycles or seasons – sometimes you're not eating plants and fruit because they're not there, and you're living on fish or birds, or on meat, such as echidna or goannas. We have great variety in our diet, and it's all sugar-free, which is a wonderful lifestyle.*

### **Definition of food security**

Food security exists 'when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'.<sup>5</sup>

Food security is commonly considered to comprise four inter-related pillars – with an additional two dimensions proposed more recently by Clapp et al (2021).<sup>6</sup>

1. **Availability:** The supply of food to the community and the commercial systems that provide access to that food, and considers the quantity of food, and the quality and range of foods available.
2. **Access:** Having the economic and physical resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Access is influenced by more than the food system alone – it also requires factors such as adequate income to be able to afford food, and private or public transport to places where food is sold or traded.
3. **Utilisation:** Includes knowledge of basic nutrition and cooking skills, as well as access to clean water, sanitation, and physical infrastructure (e.g., refrigeration, storage, cooking facilities) for food preparation.
4. **Stability:** Stability of availability, access, and utilisation over time, and the ability to withstand climatic disasters or seasonal events, economic disruption, and conflict.
5. **Agency:** Having the agency to shape one's own relationships with food systems and to address power imbalances within those systems, including through meaningful input into governance processes.
6. **Sustainability:** Interconnection between food systems and other global systems (e.g., ecological systems). /Food system practices that contribute to long-term regeneration of natural, social, and economic systems, ensuring the food needs of the present generations are met without compromising food needs of future generations (Figure 1 and Box 1).

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<sup>5</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2012 *The State of Food and Agriculture*. No. 33. Rome: United Nations.

<sup>6</sup> Clapp J, Moseley WG, Burlingame B and Termine P 2021 Viewpoint: The case for six-dimensional food security framework. *Food Policy*. 106:102164.

**FIGURE 1**  
IDENTIFYING SIX DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY  
IN ITS CURRENT DEFINITION



**BOX 1**  
THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY

Availability	Having a quantity and quality of food sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances and acceptable within a given culture, supplied through domestic production or imports.
Access (economic, social and physical)	Having personal or household financial means to acquire food for an adequate diet at a level to ensure that satisfaction of other basic needs are not threatened or compromised; and that adequate food is accessible to everyone, including vulnerable individuals and groups.
Utilization	Having an adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met.
Stability	Having the ability to ensure food security in the event of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic, health, conflict or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity).
Agency	Individuals or groups having the capacity to act independently to make choices about what they eat, the foods they produce, how that food is produced, processed, and distributed, and to engage in policy processes that shape food systems. The protection of agency requires socio-political systems that uphold governance structures that enable the achievement of FSN for all.
Sustainability	Food system practices that contribute to long-term regeneration of natural, social and economic systems, ensuring the food needs of the present generations are met without compromising the food needs of future generations.

Figure 1 and Box 1: Definition and six dimensions of food security.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Committee on World Food Security 2020 High Level Panel of Experts Report, *Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030*. Website: <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9731en/ca9731en.pdf> accessed: 5 December 2022.

## High-level recommendations for governance and monitoring of food security in Australia

1. **That the Australian Government**, in collaboration with key stakeholders (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, civil society, health, environment, research, non-industrial food producers, social and community services), drawing on international examples and informed by a scientific evidence base, **develops a comprehensive Food Systems and Food Security Plan with clear objectives and measurable targets, indicating the responsibilities of the different levels of government.**
2. **That the Australian Government establishes a Food Systems and Food Security Council responsible for implementing and reporting on the Australian Food System and Food Security Plan/Strategy**, and acting as a single coordinating body to address issues in the Australian Food System. This Council should include representation from across all government departments as well as the stakeholder groups listed above. To facilitate communication and coordination of efforts
3. **That the Australian Government creates an ongoing dedicated Food Security and Food Systems Fund to support activities across diverse sectors conducted by all levels of government, non-government organisations and civil society.**
4. **That the Australian Government urgently increases current levels of welfare benefit payments to ensure adequate income and food security** for the millions of Australians who are presently food insecure.
5. There is no standard or consistent way to measure food insecurity in Australia. The government should include a more comprehensive set of questions to be asked in national surveys. **To understand the true prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Australia, by using the 18-item Household Food Security Survey (HFSS) module.** This survey could be conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on a regular basis.

## Recommendation about public sector and business procurement to enhance values-driven supply chains

[The following recommendation draws on the results of Churchill Fellow Leah Galvin's report, [To explore business and government approaches that have increased local food procurement](#) – see infographic in Appendix A.]

**That the Australian Government invest in the development of a farm to institution program to facilitate sustainable food procurement by institutions through partnerships and engagement with industry, governments at all levels, community, and philanthropy.**

The initial priorities are as follows:

- Map the initial opportunity and existing food and social procurement systems by state and territory across Australia
- With cross sectoral governance lead, coordinate and facilitate long term action with stakeholders from the farm to institution (growers, producers, wholesalers, distributors, food service; inclusive of small and medium scale enterprises) and allies who are already acting and making a valued contribution in the sustainable food and food security space

- Deliver regional demonstration projects which target economic, social, environmental and health outcomes that support our ongoing food security.

The Australian Government encouraging and/or requiring sustainable food procurement by institutions and facilitating its implementation is consistent with the Department of Agriculture Sustainable Procurement Policy<sup>8</sup> and strongly aligns with Commonwealth Procurement Rules<sup>9</sup> creating community value, addressing climate change and including small and medium enterprises in the procurement systems.

## The extent of food insecurity in Australia

A comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of food insecurity is lacking in Australia due to the absence of a systematic monitoring framework (McKay et al. 2019).<sup>10</sup> However, the growth of the food bank sector since the 1990s confirms a steady increase in food insecurity since the 1980s. Recent estimates suggest that between 4-13% of the Australian population experiences food insecurity, increasing disproportionately to 22-32% of Indigenous people (Bowden 2020).<sup>11</sup> Women also face greater risk of food insecurity for a myriad of reasons, including domestic violence and gender inequality in income and superannuation. A survey of 1,005 women (18-50 years) across Australia found that almost one-third experienced some degree of food insecurity: marginal food security (13.7%), low food security (11.8%) and very low food security (7.8%).<sup>12</sup> Prevalence of food insecurity is highest among ethnic minorities, single-parent families and other vulnerable populations (Ramsey et al. 2012; McKay et al. 2019; Booth and Pollard 2020).<sup>13</sup> A 2015 study of asylum-seeking members of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) in Footscray (Melbourne) revealed that almost all of them had experienced food insecurity, **demonstrating how government policies restricting welfare support and access to employment produces vulnerabilities for individuals and households directly contributing to food insecurity and dependency on food relief (McKay and Dunn 2015).**<sup>14</sup>

**Foodbank Australia's annual *Hunger Reports*** offer some measure of the endemic nature of food insecurity in Australia even before the impacts of the pandemic (**Figure 2**).<sup>15</sup> The **2016 *Hunger Report* indicated 1 in 6 people** had experienced food insecurity over the last 12 months, with an

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/sustainable-procurement-guide.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/government/procurement/commonwealth-procurement-rules>

<sup>10</sup> McKay, F. H., Haines, B. C., & Dunn, M. (2019). Measuring and understanding food insecurity in Australia: A systematic review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(3), 476.

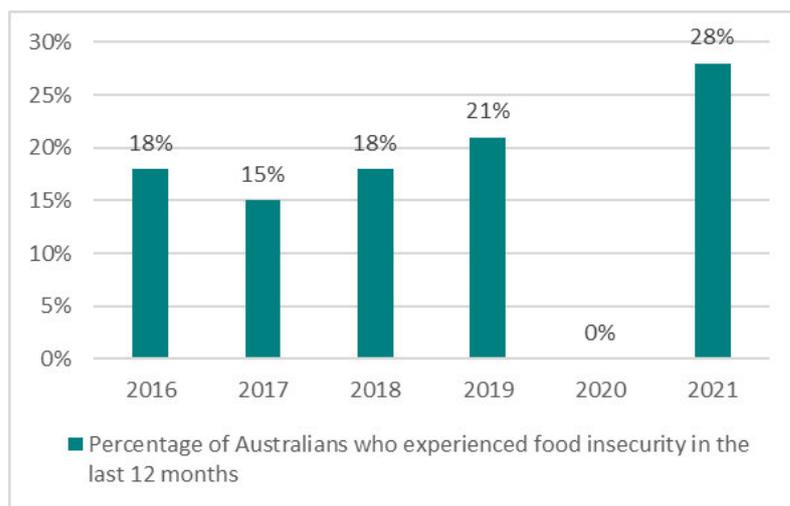
<sup>11</sup> Bowden, M. (2020). *Understanding food insecurity in Australia*. Southbank, VIC, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>12</sup> Kleve, S., Bennett, C.J., Davidson, Z.E., Kellow, N.J., McCaffrey, T.A., O'Reilly, S., Enticott, J., Moran, L.J., Harrison, C.L., Teede, H. and Lim, S. (2021). Food insecurity prevalence, severity and determinants in Australian households during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of women. *Nutrients*. 13 (12):4262.

<sup>13</sup> Ramsey, R., Giskes, K., Turrell, G., & Gallegos, D. (2012). Food insecurity among adults residing in disadvantaged urban areas: potential health and dietary consequences. *Public health nutrition*, 15(2), 227-237; McKay, F. H., Haines, B. C., & Dunn, M. (2019). Measuring and understanding food insecurity in Australia: A systematic review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(3), 476; Booth, S., & Pollard, C. M. (2020). Food insecurity, food crimes and structural violence: an Australian perspective. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 44(2), 87-88.

<sup>14</sup> McKay, F. H., & Dunn, M. (2015). Food security among asylum seekers in Melbourne. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 39(4), 344-349.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.foodbank.org.au/research-reports/?state=vic>



**Figure 2:** Australian food insecurity rates 2016-2017

**Source:** Foodbank 2016 - 2021 Hunger reports.

8% rise in people seeking food relief in 2015.<sup>16</sup> In 2019, single-parent families, parents, renters and women were among the key demographic groups experiencing higher prevalence of food insecurity, **with 47% of single-parent households being food insecure.**<sup>17</sup> The 2019 report found 1 in 5 Australians experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months; and food charities were unable to meet the 22% increase

in demand for services. These figures are prior to the unprecedented demand for food relief witnessed during the pandemic: 2020 saw 31% of Australians experiencing food insecurity.<sup>18</sup> In 2021 Foodbank reported 1 in 6 Australians as ‘severely food insecure’, 1.2 mn children going hungry and a large rise in the newly food insecure.<sup>19</sup> Most recently, in 2022, Foodbank reported that over 2 mn Australians (21%) were experiencing severe food insecurity, and 55% of households reporting that they were unable to afford food more often than in the previous 12 months.<sup>20</sup> Cost of living increases combined with reductions in welfare benefit levels were the primary causes. Very clearly, the current, charity-led approach to dealing with this distressing social issue is at best alleviating the problem, a classic band-aid approach. Australia – and above all, the rising numbers of food insecure households – are crying out for a proper, comprehensive and integrated approach, with strong national leadership based on a commitment to uphold Australia’s international legal obligations as well as its claims to moral leadership grounded in the values of universal human rights.

## The extent of food insecurity in Victoria

The Victorian Agency for Health Information (2017)<sup>21</sup> published *Challenges to Healthy Eating: Food Insecurity in Victoria*, an in-depth analysis of food insecurity in Victoria using expanded data from the *Victorian Population Health Survey* (2014).<sup>22</sup> From 2005, this annual survey had included a single question about food insecurity: *In the last 12 months, did you run out of food and not have enough money to buy more?* The 2014 survey utilised seven measures of food insecurity to capture the full spectrum of experience, from anxiety about and difficulties in accessing food to the experience of hunger (**Figure 3**). This was the first (and to our knowledge, the only) comprehensive analysis of food insecurity in Victoria using population-level data. The 2014

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Foodbank-Hunger-Report-2016.pdf?state=vic>

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Foodbank-Hunger-Report-2019.pdf?state=vic>

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FB-HR20.pdf?state=vic>

<sup>19</sup> See <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2021/?state=vic>

<sup>20</sup> See <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2022/?state=vic>.

<sup>21</sup> The VAHI was merged into the Department of Health (Victoria) in 2021.

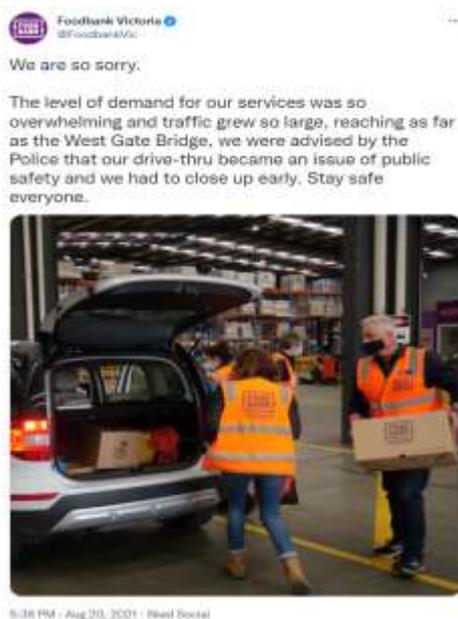
<sup>22</sup> See *Victorian Population Health Survey 2014*: <https://discover.data.vic.gov.au/dataset/victorian-population-health-survey-2014-vhiss>; also <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/population-health-systems/earlier-reports> accessed: 6 December 2022.

findings revealed **41% of Victorians experienced food insecurity by at least one of the seven measures used to assess food insecurity**. The correlation with obesity was very strong, with 1:3 obese adults also reporting they were food-insecure. **Food-insecure Victorians were also 2.5 times more likely to suffer from poor physical health, and four times more likely to experience poor mental health**. The report highlighted ‘the need for long-term solutions in addition to short-term solutions that relieve food insecurity but do not necessarily address its root causes’.



**Figure 3:** The food insecurity continuum: Seven measures of food insecurity (Victorian Agency of Health Information 2017:12).

## Food insecurity during the pandemic



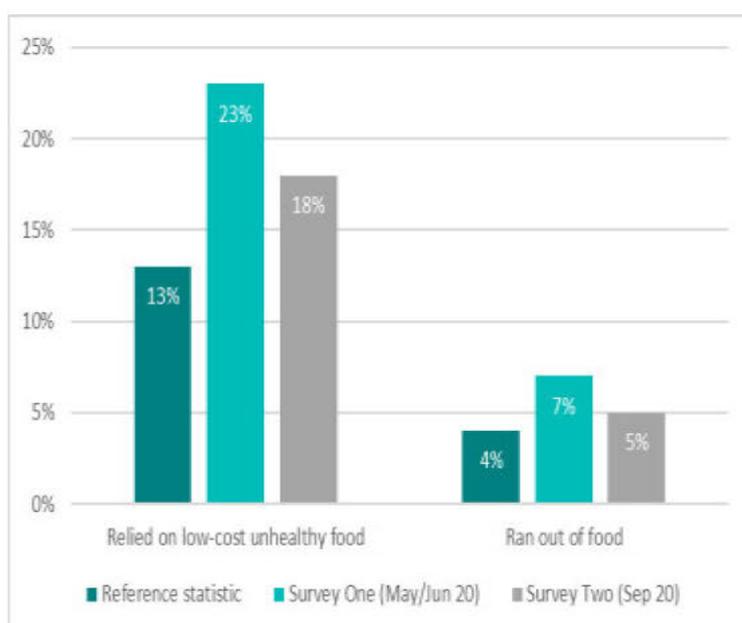
**Figure 4** – Foodbank Victoria drive-thru traffic meltdown (20 August 2021).

The pandemic starkly revealed - and deepened - the inequities contributing to food insecurity and hunger in Australia. **Foodbank Australia’s (2020) Hunger Report<sup>23</sup>** documented a 47% increase in demand for emergency food relief during the first year of COVID-19. The demand for food relief was so great during Melbourne’s second major lockdown (August 2021) that Foodbank Victoria’s drive-thru food relief service in Yarraville was overwhelmed, creating a line of traffic that disrupted the flow of traffic on the West Gate Bridge (**Figure 4**).

This was despite **Commonwealth income support measures that tangibly improved the economic circumstances of millions of people, including >1 million receiving the Youth Allowance and NewStart** (replaced by *JobSeeker* in March 2020). Those excluded from government support accessed food relief for the first time, particularly temporary visa holders, casual workers and international students.

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FB-HR20.pdf?state=vic>.

VicHealth's (2020)<sup>24</sup> *Coronavirus Wellbeing Impact surveys* (May/June 2020 and September 2020) illustrate the acute impact lockdowns had on food insecurity in Victoria (Figure 5). The sub-populations with highest prevalence were the unemployed, *JobSeeker* recipients, those earning <\$40K/year, students, those living with a self-reported disability and young people (18-24 years). The comparatively favourable results in the September 2020 survey likely masks the true extent of food insecurity in metropolitan Melbourne which was subject to longer and more intense restrictions than the rest of the state. Some local governments experienced intermittent lockdowns imposed by the Victoria state government according to the number of hospitalisations and community of COVID-19 infections (e.g. City of Greater Geelong experienced 6.3 intermittent episodes of lockdowns, on one occasion with a 2hr notice on a weekend. This compared to 6 extended lockdowns in Greater Melbourne, including the Mornington Peninsula). It may also reflect improved economic conditions during 2020 for those receiving *JobKeeper* or the *JobSeeker* pandemic uplift.



**Figure 5:** Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on food insecurity  
**Source:** VicHealth Coronavirus Victorian Wellbeing Impact Study and Follow-up Survey 2020.

The food security surveys conducted in the City of Melbourne and Cardinia Shire Council in 2021, after the pandemic income support had been removed, present a different picture. In the City of Melbourne - a municipality with a high proportion of international students – 1 in 3 residents reported some level of food insecurity in 2020 and 2021, compared to 26% in the previous year (City of Melbourne 2022).<sup>25</sup> In 2021, 19.3% of residents reported running out of food, up from 17.5% in 2020 and 12.5% in 2018 (Figure 6).

<sup>24</sup> See VicHealth 2020 *Coronavirus Wellbeing Impact surveys* (May/June 2020 and September 2020): <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/coronavirus-victorian-wellbeing-impact-study>.

<sup>25</sup> See City of Melbourne (2021). *Community Food Relief 2021-2025: Planning for a food secure city*. Available at <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/health-services/Pages/community-food-relief-planning-for-a-food-secure-city.aspx>

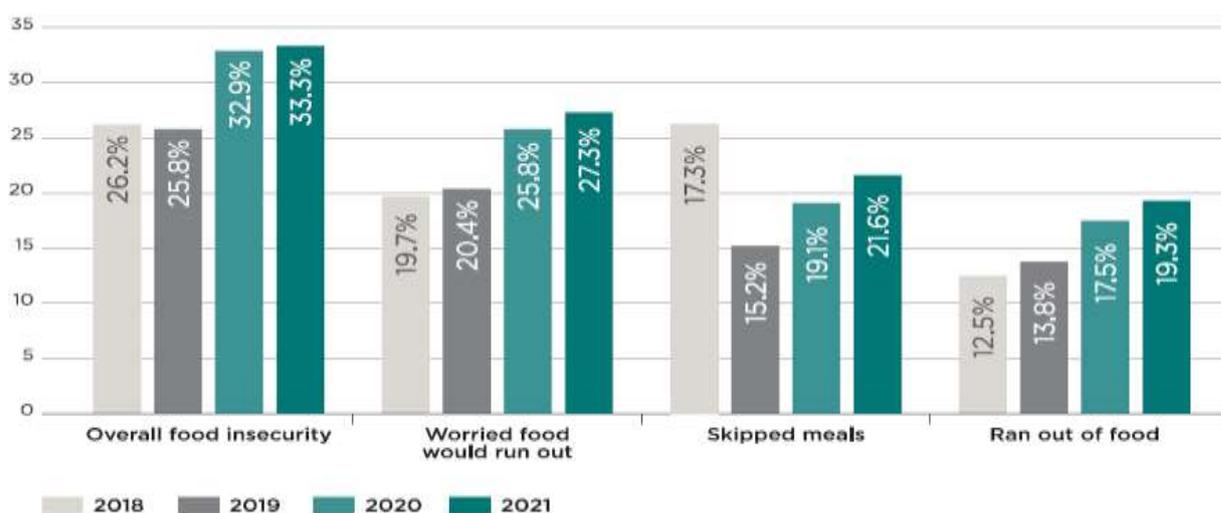


Figure 2: Food Security (2018-2021) City of Melbourne Community Indicator Survey (COMSIS)

**Figure 6:** Food insecurity in the City of Melbourne. **Source:** City of Melbourne *Community Food Relief 2021-2025*.

In **Cardinia Shire Council** (2021)<sup>26</sup> - a municipality with high levels of housing stress - the findings from a Community Food survey of 558 residents in June/July 2021 are also very concerning. In households without children, 14% reported some degree of food insecurity. In households with children (<18 years), they reported food shortages or anxiety about food sufficiency (marginal food security) (16%); reduced dietary quality or variety (low food security) (14%); and reduced food intake or other disrupted eating patterns (very low food security) (10%) (**Figure 7**). It is important to note that this survey utilised the 18-question household food security tool of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA),<sup>27</sup> thereby providing a more complete picture of the extent and experience of food insecurity amongst residents of Cardinia Shire during the pandemic.

<sup>26</sup> Cardinia Shire Council 2021, unpublished, provided to the authors.

<sup>27</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2022 *Tackling food and nutrition security*. Website: [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) accessed: 6 December 2022.

# 2021 Food Survey



Sampling	Method	Field dates	Responses
Random selection from rates address list	Mail-out and email (paper and online)	10 June – 26 July	n=558

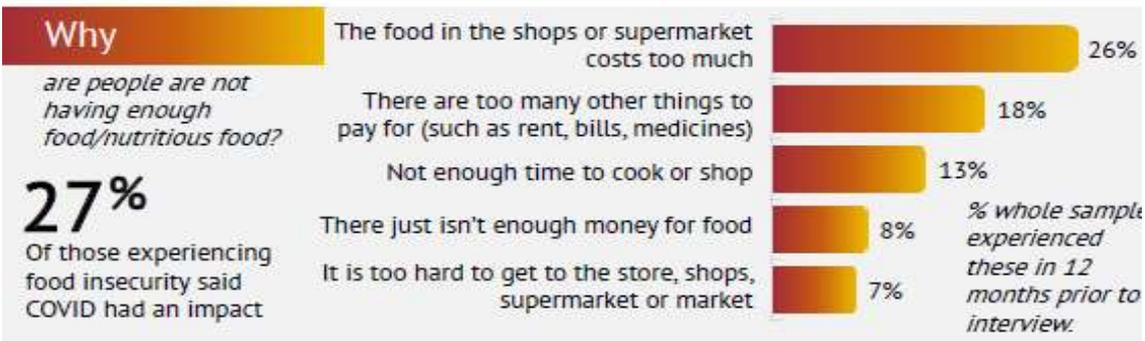
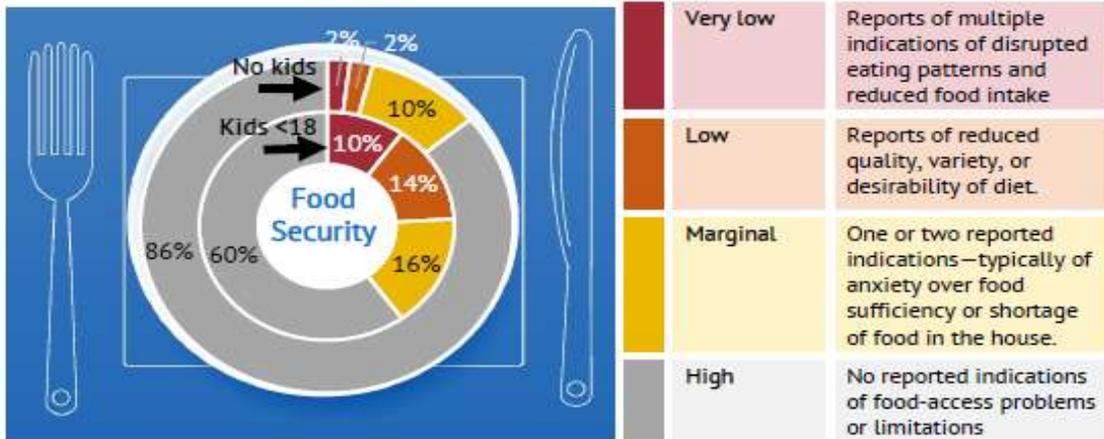


Figure 7: 2021 Community Food Survey, Cardinia Shire Council.

## The lived experience of food insecurity

The abstract language used to define food insecurity and associated statistics to measure it belie the actual experience of it. **Hunger is the spectre of food insecurity, and the circumstances that lead to food insecurity forces people to develop a relationship with hunger.** In the continuum of food insecurity, hunger is a possibility before a reality (Figure 3, above).<sup>28</sup> Food choices become more limited. Groceries become too expensive, or food may decline in quality. Meals may be skipped or reduced so that others in the family can have their fill. People are faced with the choice of buying food or paying rent or mortgage, utilities, school fees or medical expenses.

When money to buy food runs out, food insecurity is experienced as hunger, with myriad physical and emotional impacts. Food insecurity increases risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes and impedes the successful management of these chronic illnesses (Gucciardi et al. 2009; Silverman et al. 2015).<sup>29</sup> It also severely compromises mental wellbeing, with strong links to suicidal ideation and food-insecure adolescents at particular risk of suicide (Davison et al. 2015, Koyanagi et al. 2019).<sup>30</sup> Children going to school hungry lose learning time, with ongoing impacts on life chances (Foodbank Australia 2015).<sup>31</sup> A study of low-to-middle income Melburnians reveals how food insecurity can produce deep feelings of shame or guilt about not being able to feed children, with significant time and emotional resources dedicated to trying to make ends meet at a **most basic level**.<sup>32</sup> Women bear the brunt of the mental strain of food security as they carry disproportionate responsibility for food provisioning. An Anglicare (2012) report: *When There's Not Enough to Eat: a National Study of Food Insecurity among Emergency Relief Clients*<sup>33</sup> found that food insecurity severely impacts family relationships and increases social isolation and makes school holidays or food-significant cultural festivals periods of intense stress rather than an opportunity for relaxation or celebration. The consequences of food insecurity are layered, profound, far-reaching and potentially long-lived with broad social and economic impacts.

Food insecurity therefore comes at a high human and economic cost. Pollard and Booth (2019) cite a 2011 study (United States)<sup>34</sup> estimating costs of approximately '\$A167.5 billion' relating to **'lost productivity, public educational expenses, avoidable healthcare costs and the cost of charity to keep families fed'**. This extraordinary figure can only have increased in the subsequent decade, and particularly during the last two years. We do not have an equivalent figure for

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Agency for Health Information 2017 *Challenges to healthy eating - food insecurity in Victoria: Findings from the 2014 Victorian Population Health Survey*. Melbourne: State of Victoria.

<sup>29</sup> Gucciardi, E., Vogt, JA., DeMelo, M., Stewart, DE. (2009). Exploration of the relationship between household food insecurity and diabetes in Canada. *Diabetes Care*. Vol. 32:2218–24; Silverman, J., Krieger, J., Kiefer, M., Hebert, P., Robinson, J., & Nelson, K. (2015). The relationship between food insecurity and depression, diabetes distress and medication adherence among low-income patients with poorly-controlled diabetes. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 30(10), 1476-1480.

<sup>30</sup> Davison, K. M., Marshall-Fabien, G. L., & Tecson, A. (2015). Association of moderate and severe food insecurity with suicidal ideation in adults: national survey data from three Canadian provinces. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 50(6), 963-972; Koyanagi, A., Stubbs, B., Oh, H., Veronese, N., Smith, L., Haro, J. M., & Vancampfort, D. (2019). Food insecurity (hunger) and suicide attempts among 179,771 adolescents attending school from 9 high-income, 31 middle-income, and 4 low-income countries: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of affective disorders*, 248, 91-98.

<sup>31</sup> Foodbank Australia 2015 *Hunger in the classroom*. Report. North Ryde (Sydney).

<sup>32</sup> Kleve A, Booth S, Davidson ZE and Palermo C 2018 Walking the food security tightrope – Exploring the experiences of low-to-middle income Melbourne households. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 5(10):2206.

<sup>33</sup> Anglicare 2012 *State of the family report: When there's not enough to eat*. Canberra.

<sup>34</sup> Shepard DS, Setren E and Cooper D 2011 *Hunger in America: Suffering we all pay for*. Center for American Progress.

Australia, but it could reasonably be assumed to cost tens, even hundreds, of billions of dollars, if the consequences of food insecurity on mental and physical health, as well as all its other impacts, are accounted for. The Productivity Commission estimated the direct and indirect costs of mental health to be \$180bn per year in a ground-breaking report published in 2019.<sup>35</sup>

## Food insecurity and homelessness

For people without a home, food insecurity creates a daily logistical challenge. Sustain has engaged recently with Robert and Lucy (names changed) from the Council to Homeless Persons (Victoria) whose *Peer Education and Support Program (PESP)*<sup>36</sup> educates policymakers and others about the lived experience of homelessness. Robert lost his family and his home after a severe mental health episode. He was discharged from the hospital without access to permanent accommodation, resulting in a radical change in his diet:

*Anything I bought had to be prepared because I had no cooking facilities. No meat or veg as these had to be cooked so it was all processed foods. [What I ate] was governed by how much money I had, which was very limited. I had an esky for packaged goods but no cooking facilities. My diet really took a turn for the worse. I put on a lot of weight and didn't feel healthy.*

Lucy suffered from work-related injuries, illnesses and mental health issues and was left inadequately supported by government support services. A former government employee, she found herself and her child living out of her car:

*I got quite a few parking tickets. The cheapest fine was \$170. My housing worker was very supportive in getting documentation to apply for a waiver, but with each council I had to go through a very time-consuming process to get the waiver through.*

The daily struggle of securing enough food to survive involves moving between meal providers across a municipality to access food that does not require storage or preparation, with implications for food safety. This often-monumental effort has to be achieved while also hanging on to one's possessions, juggling appointments to support services, avoiding infringement notices for 'camping' or illegal parking and constantly assessing the threat of violence. As Lucy explains:

*My experience of councils was that I didn't belong anywhere and wasn't accepted anywhere. If they had half a chance to refuse me services they would. It was supply and demand with long wait lists everywhere. I spent a long time being nowhere and being cast out until my daughter and I could get transitional housing.*

## Drivers of food insecurity

### Poverty

**Poverty - not lack of food - is the leading cause of food insecurity** (Bowden 2020; Pollard and Booth 2019).<sup>37</sup> As a multi-dimensional phenomenon that occurs at the individual, household, community or national level, food insecurity today is shaped by histories of colonisation, class stratification, racial and gender disparities, and labour and social welfare policy. Despite being a

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<sup>35</sup> Mental Health: Productivity Commission Draft Report, October 2019:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/draft/mental-health-draft-overview.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Council to Homeless Persons (Melbourne, Victoria) - *Peer Education and Support Program (PESP)*. Website: [www.chp.org.au](http://www.chp.org.au) accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Bowden, M. (2020). *Understanding food insecurity in Australia*. Southbank, VIC, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies; Pollard, C. M., & Booth, S. (2019). Food insecurity and hunger in rich countries— it is time for action against inequality. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(10), 1804.

prosperous nation, Australia is characterised by deepening inequality, with nearly half of all wealth held by the richest 10% of households and the lowest wealth households holding 60% of debt such as credit cards and personal loans (excluding home loans) (Davidson et al. 2020).<sup>38</sup> This gap between rich and poor has been exacerbated by the economic fallout of the pandemic (Davidson 2022).<sup>39</sup> Stagnant or declining household income for poorer segments of society contribute to less security of housing tenure, greater vulnerability to financial shocks and diminished capacity to fully participate in social and economic life. These social conditions directly impact food security and overall health and wellbeing for individuals and households.

If you're a single person, and you're only getting \$640, a fortnight, and your rent's \$350, you can't even pay your rent. We have a lot of people like that that are renting. They're on unemployment benefits or a disability pension. They haven't gotten enough for anything else. Once they pay their rent, there's nothing there, so they rely totally on us for food, or they go without. One of the ladies says she only has one meal a day. Well, yeah, so we make sure we give her enough to last quite a few. We do what we can for her.

– Maribyrnong food relief provider

**The impact of welfare benefit levels on food insecurity cannot be ignored.** The Melbourne Institute's quarterly report *Poverty Lines* compares maximum weekly welfare payments for various household types to the cost of supporting the basic needs of a household.<sup>40</sup> Even with rental assistance, current levels of unemployment benefits condemn recipients to a standard of living as a state of poverty and deprivation. **Families with children are the worst off, with a family of five sitting \$302/week below the poverty line (Figure 8).**<sup>41</sup>

From a human rights perspective, and given Australia is one of the world's wealthiest nations, **the gross inadequacy of welfare benefits is a shameful situation.** Booth and Pollard (2020)<sup>42</sup> describe the policy frameworks enabling food insecurity as nothing less than a food crime derived from 'structural violence':

*Australian food insecurity crimes include inadequate social protection causing vulnerability, excess food production, processing and advertising fostering overconsumption, and related poor health and excessive use of scarce health system resources. The economic policy failure and relentless redistribution of surplus, unsaleable, inferior food and the formation of a [parallel and inferior] food system is a crime against the most vulnerable. Australia has failed to implement appropriate legal measures to protect the human right to food.*

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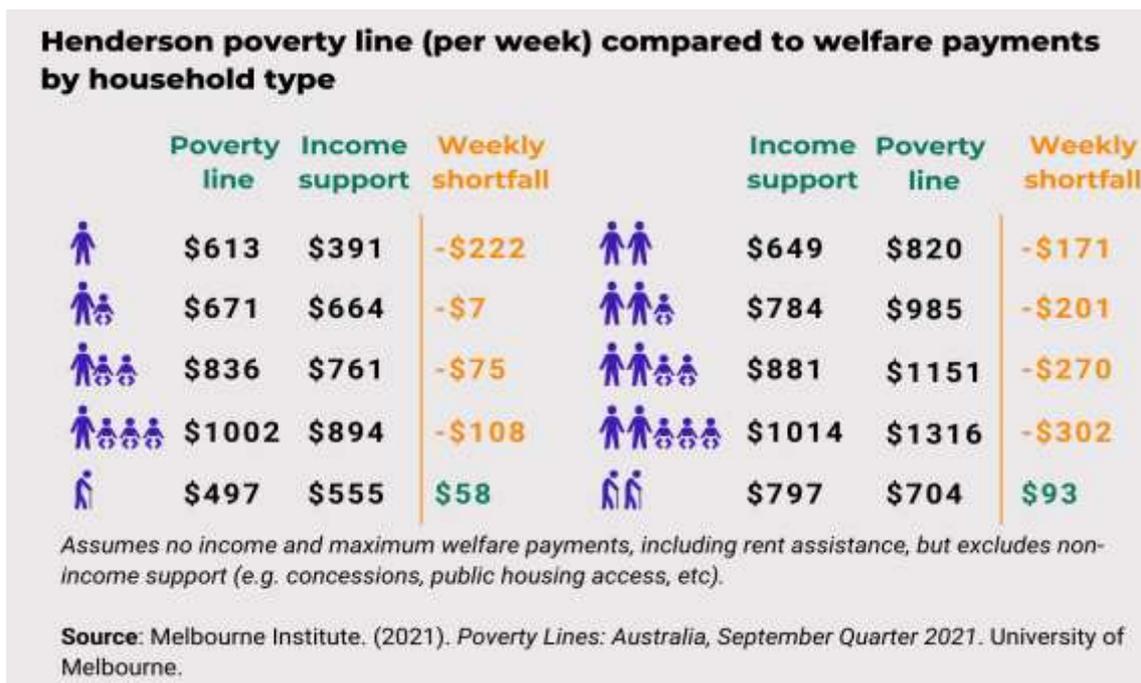
<sup>38</sup> Davidson, P., Bradbury, B., Wong, M. & Hill, T. (2020) *Inequality in Australia, 2020 Part 2: Who is affected and why*. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW (Sydney).

<sup>39</sup> Davidson, P., (2022) *A tale of two pandemics: COVID, inequality and poverty in 2020 and 2021*. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership, Build Back Fairer Series, Report No. 3.

<sup>40</sup> The Henderson poverty line, updated quarterly by the Melbourne Institute, was developed by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty chaired by Ronald Henderson, which delivered a major report *Poverty in Australia* in August 1975. It set a line for an 'austere' standard of living, accounting for a range of basic household needs, beneath which a household was deemed to be living in poverty. The Henderson poverty line is between 25%-33% higher than the Relative Poverty Line (calculated as a percentage of the population earning less compared to the median wage of the working population).

<sup>41</sup> Melbourne Institute 2021 *Poverty lines: Australia*. September Quarter 2021. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

<sup>42</sup> Booth, S., & Pollard, C. M. (2020). Food insecurity, food crimes and structural violence: an Australian perspective. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 44(2), 87-88.



**Figure 8** - Henderson poverty line (per week) compared to government benefits by household types.

However, as the economic response to the pandemic revealed, when people on income support are not forced to live below the poverty line, they can afford to buy food. A survey by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) (August 2020) makes this point starkly: 80.8% of people receiving *JobKeeper* or the *JobSeeker* uplift said they were eating better and more regularly. Demonstrating the direct link between greater income support, reduced food insecurity and improved health and wellbeing. As a recent report by ACOSS and UNSW notes:

In 2020, income inequality and poverty declined during the ‘Alpha’ wave of the pandemic despite the deepest recession in a century and an ‘effective unemployment rate’ reaching 17%, due to robust public income supports - *JobKeeper* and the *Coronavirus Supplement* (Davidson 2022:8).<sup>43</sup>

The Foodbank *Hunger Report* (2021)<sup>44</sup> also reveals the difference the rollback of government support made to food insecurity. Of those accessing *JobSeeker* and *JobKeeper* payments from March 2020-2021, 48% reported they were not coping well at all with the rollback of support payments. Those accessing food relief are doing so with disturbing regularity: daily for 8%, a few times a week for 13%, weekly for 11% and a few times a month for another 12%. In other words, nearly half of all those accessing food relief rely on it regularly or very regularly in order to eat.

The difference economic policy - particularly the *Coronavirus JobSeeker* supplement - makes to food relief users was highlighted by one of our interviewees:

[The *JobSeeker* uplift] made a big difference to people's lives. You could see it in them. **They were living a little bit better; they were able to eat a little bit more, buy a few more nourishing meals instead of living on the damn noodles and the really poor food products that you just throw in a microwave ...** That little bit of a rise [meant] they were able to pay the

<sup>43</sup> Davidson, P., (2022) *A tale of two pandemics: COVID, inequality and poverty in 2020 and 2021*. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership, Build Back Fairer Series, Report No. 3.

<sup>44</sup> See <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2021/?state=vic>

rent and pay their bills on time. Instead of coming to me with their final notice letters ... They were paying the bills and everything, and they were a lot happier.

Conversely, the same interviewee commented that the rollback of the supplement had an equally negative impact:

Yeah, that was [bad] - I don't know what they're gonna do, because it means that they're gonna have to cut back on food to pay the rent, and all those that had children didn't know what they were gonna do.

This gives a very real expression to what the Henderson poverty line means by 'an austere standard of living'. **Poverty-level welfare benefit levels have a direct impact on the food security and overall wellbeing of low income and vulnerable Australians.**

*Prices are going up like nothing I've ever seen in my lifetime. There are too many things happening at once. Yeah, fuel is going up. But when you've got fuel and labour shortages across the board – not only at the farm but in wholesale and in the store – that's a multiplier effect. The price of importing is now three to four times more for a sea freight container to come into Australia.... The fuel levy, labour shortages, the price of chemical inputs for growers has gone up significantly. It's huge. You've got all these different factors.*

– Fresh produce wholesaler

### Cost of living pressures

The impacts of welfare benefits below the poverty line and the reduction or loss of pandemic government support in April 2021 have been exacerbated by an increase in food prices in 2021 caused by labour shortages across the food supply chain, higher fuel prices and increased costs for agricultural inputs. A 2022 survey of large packaged grocery, frozen and fresh food suppliers estimate price increases of 6.8% (Elmas 2022).<sup>45</sup> That level of food price inflation may be optimistic, given the effects of climate change, the NSW/Queensland floods and skyrocketing commodity prices triggered by the Ukraine-Russia war (Bartos 2022).<sup>46</sup> More recent floods in Victoria and Tasmania (2022) have contributed to escalating food prices, agricultural inputs (eg. fuel, utilities) and people's experiences of food insecurity. Indeed, the fresh produce wholesaler interviewed for this research, whose business involves accurately forecasting food prices, anticipates prices in many fresh produce lines may rise by 23% by December 2022. Households on low incomes or reliant on government benefits are disproportionately impacted by rising food prices. The *Healthy Food Basket* mapping discussed in the following section confirms many such households in the City of Maribyrnong (Victoria) may already be experiencing food stress.

## Food relief is not food security

As Pollard and Booth (2019)<sup>47</sup> note, the FAO definition does not address food provisioning through non-emergency means and omits other components of 'social justice, democratic decision-making, community self-reliance [and the provision of] diets rather than just food'

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<sup>45</sup> Elmas, M. (2022, January 24). 'Increases are coming': Supermarket suppliers push for higher prices amid soaring costs. *The New Daily*.

<sup>46</sup> Bartos, S. (2022). *Fork in the Road: Impacts of Climate Change on Our Food Supply*. Farmers for Climate Action.

<sup>47</sup> Pollard C and Booth S 2019 Food insecurity and hunger in rich countries – It is time for action against inequality. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 16:1804. doi:10.3390/ijerph16101804.

(Pollard and Booth 2019:2). They **define food insecurity** as: ‘the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate or safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire foods in socially acceptable ways’ (2019), including its cultural appropriateness. These cultural/social dimensions of food security are difficult to achieve with emergency food relief. Food may be available but not nutritionally adequate. If a person has cultural requirements (e.g. halal, kosher, vegan), available food may not be appropriate. For a person with food intolerances, allergies or nutritional requirements (e.g. diabetes, heart conditions, renal disease, thyroid function), available food may cause them to become unwell and is therefore unsafe. Frontline food relief providers typically have limited choice in food donated to them and/or lack the staffing resources to source a diversity of foods, and enabling hungry people to experience a dignity of choice.

Understanding food insecurity from a **rights-based approach** - foregrounding dignity in accessing food and emphasising non-emergency food access - means that **by definition emergency food relief cannot bring about community food security**, on a short- or long-term basis. Rather, it is a lifeline that relieves some of the deleterious impacts of food insecurity. Food relief recipients remain food insecure, even when the other components of food security are met.

## General observations and the urgent need for transformative changes: climate change and food security

*For the true measure of agriculture is not the sophistication of its equipment, the size of its income or even the statistics of its productivity, but the good health of the land (Wendell Berry 1977).<sup>48</sup>*

**Food and agricultural systems are the biggest global drivers of climate change, species loss, hunger and ill-health.** Our food system is not merely unsustainable but unfair and destructive. Below we summarise the key issues informing the context for this Committee's inquiry.

### Environmental crisis

Large-scale industrialised monocultures, deforestation and land-use change are major drivers of anthropogenic climate change, with the food system accounting for 37% of all greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>49</sup> Such practices are also major drivers of the 'unprecedented' rapid decline in ecosystems and accelerating rate of species extinction, leading to humanity 'eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide'.<sup>50</sup>

Summarising these and other major datasets, 16 leading biophysical scientists, in a paper published in January 2021,<sup>51</sup> stated: **'the scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is so great that is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts.'** The **current political and policy responses were woefully inadequate to the extent and severity of the crisis.** The authors concluded:

*The gravity of the situation requires fundamental changes to global capitalism, education, and equality, which include inter alia the abolition of perpetual economic growth, properly pricing externalities, a rapid exit from fossil-fuel use, strict regulation of markets and property acquisition, reigning in corporate lobbying, and the empowerment of women.*

**Without the necessary important structural changes, they warned, the future in the coming decades would be 'ghastly.'** They concluded with an exhortation to 'experts in any discipline that deals with the future of the biosphere and human well-being to eschew reticence, avoid sugar-coating the overwhelming challenges and 'tell it like it is'. Anything else is misleading at best, or negligent and potentially lethal for the human enterprise at worst.

Sustain approaches our work in the spirit of this intellectual and philosophical call to arms, and we urge the Committee members to do the same. As Amy McMahon argues, the **food system itself has become unsafe, destructive and unfair.**<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Berry, W. (2015). *The unsettling of America: Culture and agriculture*. Penguin Books. Originally published in 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>. Updated 2018. accessed: 10 February 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Brondizio, E.S., Settele, J., Díaz, S., Ngo, H.T. (2019). Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science- Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Bonn, German: IPBES secretariat; <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>. Updated 2019. Accessed June 10, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Bradshaw CJ, Ehrlich PR, Beattie A, Ceballos G, Crist E, Diamond J, Dirzo R, Ehrlich AH, Harte J, Harte ME, Pyke G, Raven PH, Ripple WJ, Saltré F, Turnbull C, Wackernagel M and Blumstein DT 2021 Underestimating the challenges of avoiding a ghastly future. *Frontiers in Conservation Science*. 1:615419. <https://doi:10.3389/fcosc.2020.615419>

<sup>52</sup> McMahon, M. 2013 What food is to be kept safe and for whom? Food-safety governance in an unsafe food system. *Laws*. 2(4):401-27.

### Land and agriculture crisis

Since the advent of the ‘Green Revolution’,<sup>53</sup> capitalist agriculture has turned increasingly in the direction of monoculture cropping, often on a large scale; dependent on irrigation and added agri-chemicals to the soil. As noted by the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019),<sup>54</sup> such practices frequently entail major changes in landscapes and waterways (eg. de-forestation, increasing soil salinity), thus compromising the integrity of eco-systems.

Scientists and agricultural producers now realise that the worldview leading to the current level of development can no longer be able to underpin the needs of the future.<sup>55</sup> Those seeking a new worldview search for holistic approaches and frameworks to inform and guide decision-making and practice,<sup>56</sup> moving from a ‘mechanical mindset’, where the earth is seen as a resource from which to extract profit, to an ‘ecological mindset’, where humans are part of nature, and can contribute to its thriving.<sup>57</sup> The principles of First Nations sovereignty can powerfully inform this process.

A key issue in the Australian context is urban sprawl and loss of farmland, related to land use planning and practices. Agricultural land is increasingly at risk from development as land is valued at its highest monetary use - rather than highest productivity. As real estate development encroaches on farmland, it increases the costs and risks of production and drives up land values beyond the reach of producers in surrounding areas. Primary producers have less access to affordable land for farming activities, even on a small-scale (local, regional and city region supply chains). This cycle inevitably pushes productive farmland away from communities and increases the speed of urbanisation. Within farming, functioning of the land market can favour large farmers and leads to land concentration. In parallel, more non-agricultural people and businesses are investing in farmland, which they view as a highly profitable investment. This phenomenon fuels land speculation and, in extreme cases, land grabbing.

Finally, there is a succession crisis in Australian agriculture, with the average age of farmers (60 years), and a severe lack of support mechanisms and pathways for young people to enter

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<sup>53</sup> Borlaug, N. (2009). Foreword. *Food Security*. 1(1):1; Shiva, V. (1991). *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics: Ecological Degradation and Political Conflict*. London: Zed Books.

<sup>54</sup> IPBES 2019 Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673>

<sup>55</sup> Massy, C. (2017). *Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture, A New Earth*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press; Newell, P. (2019). *Who’s minding the farm? In this climate emergency*. Sydney: Viking Penguin; Pollock, D. (2019). *The Wooleen way: Renewing an Australian resource*. Melbourne: Scribe. Harvey, N. (2022). *Farm: The making of a climate scientist*. Melbourne: Scribe.

<sup>56</sup> Various philosophies and methodologies have emerged that seek to reverse the destructive impacts of industrial agriculture, including holistic agriculture (Widdowson, R. W. (1987). *Towards holistic agriculture: A scientific approach*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.), permaculture Mollison, B., & Holmgren, D. (1978). *Permaculture one. A perennial agriculture for human settlements*. Tyalgum: Tagari), regenerative agriculture (Giller, K. E., Hijbeek, R., Andersson, J. A., & Sumberg, J. (2021). Regenerative agriculture: An agronomic perspective. *Outlook on Agriculture*, 50(1), 13-25.), organic agriculture (Northbourne, Lord. (1940). *Look to the Land*. London: Dent.; Jones R 2010 *Green harvest: A history of organic gardening in Australia*. Collingwood (Melbourne): CSIRO Publishing; Paull, J. (2021) *Organic Agriculture-Invented in Kent*.) and biodynamic farming (Pfeiffer, E. (1938). *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening: Soil Fertility Renewal and Preservation*. New York: Anthroposophic Press.). These are all informed by First Nations cultures that were based in an integrated and symbiotic relationship with the land.

<sup>57</sup> Massy, C. (2017). *Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture, A New Earth*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

agriculture. This is compounded by a decrease in family farm succession and thus a lack of new/first generation farmers. The question must be asked: where is the next generation of Australian farmers going to come from? All these issues impact food security for our country in profound ways.

### Food systems crisis

While mega-scale food and agricultural systems generate large profits for agri-food corporations and generous dividends for their shareholders, they also produce poor human health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as highly destructive environmental impacts. By some estimates, as many as 2 billion people globally are malnourished and/or undernourished, while a further 750 million are obese, with more than 1 billion at risk of obesity.<sup>58</sup> **The total human health costs of food systems have recently been calculated at \$US13 trillion, a stunning one-sixth of global GDP in 2017.**<sup>59</sup> Levels of hunger and malnutrition have substantially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the FAO estimating that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 2: ‘zero hunger’ will be missed by at least 660 million people.<sup>60</sup>

Further, COVID-19 has exposed vulnerabilities and gross inequalities within the Australian food system, resulting in unprecedented demand for food relief, as well as a shocking increase in the destruction of good food (as food loss and waste) due to supply chain disruptions. Nick Rose distils the intersecting challenges of the contemporary global food system as follows:

*Whether we examine the factory farming of livestock [or] the proliferation of ultra-processed and unhealthy foods and sugary beverages ... the underlying theme is clear: the contemporary global food system has generated a pandemic of non-communicable diseases and produced environmental devastation on a barely comprehensible scale. This sombre picture becomes bleaker still when we examine the multiple intersecting and reinforcing policy, regulatory and institutional mechanisms and dynamics by which this food system further entrenches, consolidates and expands itself, and is being expanded ... [The COVID-19 pandemic and its handling] has brought into the sharpest possible relief the opposing interests of national and global public health, on the one hand; and the relentless ... drive for capital accumulation and profit, on the other - regardless of the consequences.<sup>61</sup>*

Some of the drivers of industrial agriculture (brown), together with solutions to drive a more holistic approach (grey) (**Figure 9**). In this infographic, the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) synthesise the elements that constitute what they term the ‘lock-ins’ of the industrialised food system, based on large-scale food and agricultural systems that are producing the destructive impacts outlined above. Each of these ‘lock-ins’ reinforce the other and further embed systemic inertia.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Hickel, J. (2016). The true extent of global poverty and hunger: Questioning the good news narrative of the Millennium Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*. 37:1-19; Hickel, J. (2017). *Addressing the structural causes of world suffering*. In R. Anderson (Ed.) *Alleviating world suffering: The challenge of negative quality of life*. vol. 67:2-10. Springer Cham.

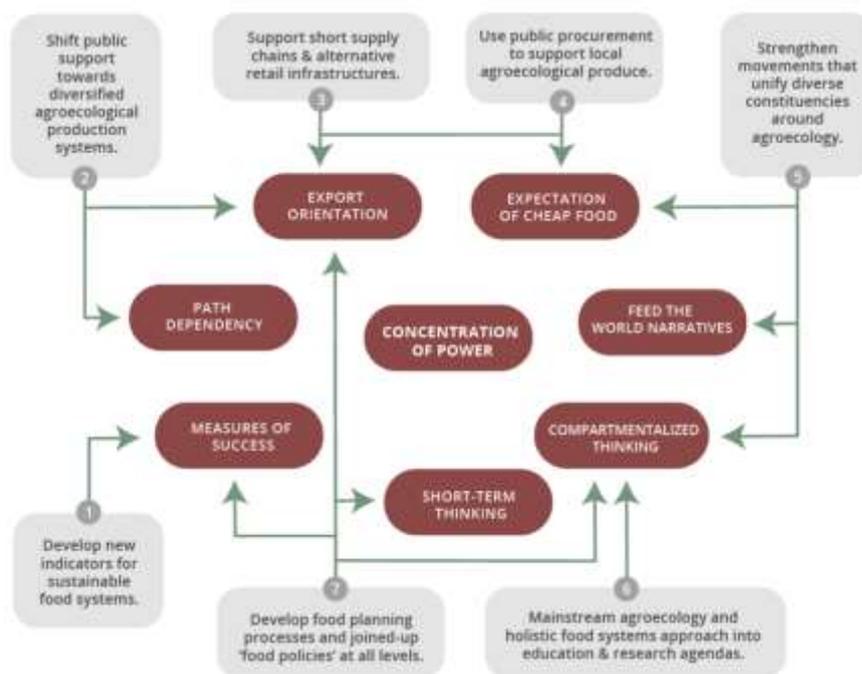
<sup>59</sup> IPES-Food 2017 *Unravelling the food–health nexus: Addressing practices, political economy, and power relations to build healthier food systems*. The Global Alliance for the Future of Food and IPES-Food. Website: [www.ipes-food.org](http://www.ipes-food.org) accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>60</sup> FAO 2021 *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*. Rome: United Nations.

<sup>61</sup> Rose, N. (2021). From the cancer stage of capitalism to the political principle of the common: The Social immune response of ‘food as commons’. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. 10:946-56.

<sup>62</sup> For example, the ‘feed the world narrative’ frames the problem of global food security almost entirely in terms of production (e.g. the world’s population is growing and will need double the amount of food by 2050); the ‘path dependency’ of industrialised agriculture claims that the world can only be fed through

The grey boxes present an integrated and holistic approach to ‘cut through’ the lock-ins, charting a feasible pathway to truly sustainable and regenerative food and farming systems, united by the diverse practices around the world of agroecology.<sup>63</sup> This infographic thus in many ways captures the **key problems this Australian Inquiry** seeks to address (eg. **unsustainable farming practices**, loss of **farmland**, **limited support** for new farmers, jeopardising medium and long-term food security) as well as the solutions proposed (eg. the establishment of mechanisms and pathways towards an integrated and sustainable food systems).



**Figure 9:** Mooney P. (2017). Too big to feed: exploring the impacts of mega-mergers, consolidation and concentration of power in the agri-food sector<sup>64</sup>

**The costs of a dysfunctional food system are unsustainable: climate change, diet-related ill-health and mental illness cost Australia around \$200 billion every year. Climate change costs are anticipated to grow, with extreme weather events alone costing the Australian economy \$35 billion over the past decade,** according to the Climate Council (2021).<sup>65</sup> While Australia ranks as one of the most food secure countries in the world at a macro level, at the local level, vulnerable communities disproportionately experience barriers to access nutritionally

large-scale mega farms; the ‘**export orientation**’ insists that as much food as possible should be traded in the interests of global food security; and all of this is driven by powerful commercial interests observable in the ‘**concentration of power**’ that characterises the global food system, with a handful of mega agrifood corporations dominating all commodity sectors.

<sup>63</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2018 *FAO’s work on agroecology: A pathway to achieving the SDGs*. Rome, Italy. Website: [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org) accessed: 4 October 2019.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2018 *The 10 elements of agroecology: Guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems*. Rome, Italy. Website: [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org) accessed: 13 May 2020.

Kerr RB, Madsen S, Stüber M, Liebert J, Enloe S, Borghino N, Parros P, Mutyambai DM, Prudhon M and Wezel A 2021 Can agroecology improve food security and nutrition? A review. *Global Food Security*. 29:100540. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2021.100540>

<sup>64</sup> International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food). [http://www.ipes-food.org/\\_img/upload/files/Concentration\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Concentration_FullReport.pdf). Reproduced with permission from IPES-Food.

<sup>65</sup> [NEW REPORT: Australia Takes Massive Financial Hit From Climate Change | Climate Council](https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/news/new-report-australia-takes-massive-financial-hit-from-climate-change)

adequate, safe, and affordable food. Food insecurity is associated with poor mental and physical health with ~800,000 adults/year experiencing food insecurity. These figures have increased sharply in the wake of the substantial economic disruption experienced as a result of the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, as we have documented above.

### **Sustain's call for a national Edible Gardening Fund**

Our members are seeking a **\$500 million investment over three years** in an edible gardening fund to support a mass expansion of urban agriculture activities across Australia, co-financed by state/territory and federal governments as well as developers and philanthropy. The budget priority areas identified below will assist this sector to contribute to the important inter-related goals of supporting preventative health, climate resilience, food security and employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups, including:

- **\$137.25 million - create 2,875 jobs nationwide** to expand the network of community gardens and local government facilitated urban agriculture activity across Australia
- **\$35.460 million in grant funding** - support all public schools receive a \$5000 grant to establish and maintain edible gardens, directly benefiting 2.59 million students' nationwide
- **\$12 million grant funding** - enable urban food networks, urban agriculture organisations and cooperatives to expand edible gardening across the country
- **\$41.615 million infrastructure funding** - establish or expand community gardens, school gardens, allotment gardens, low-income housing edible gardens
- **\$42.75 million** - subsidise local councils that provide rate discounts to incentivise urban agriculture
- **\$225 million** - provide urban agriculture subsidies for social prescribing referrals made by GPs
- **\$12.5 million** - support research collaborations on impact and benefits of urban agriculture and edible gardening.

**There is a growing body of evidence indicating the simple act of gardening provides substantial human health benefits, such as reductions in depression, anxiety, and body mass index, as well as increases in life satisfaction, quality of life, and sense of community.** Donati and Rose (2020) validated these findings in the Australian context, with a national *Pandemic Gardening Survey* (n=9,140 responses). An overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) reported edible gardening either greatly or substantially improved their mental health.<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, the urban agriculture sector is poised as a significant policy lever to drive a growth in household consumption of vegetables. In 2018, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) estimated few adults (7%) and children (5%) ate sufficient serves of vegetables each day (contrary to recommendations of the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*),<sup>67</sup> and the overall proportion of people with adequate vegetable consumption has decreased since 2004–05. A modest 5% growth in vegetable production through the above investment in urban agriculture activities across Australia would offer an additional \$4.1 billion gross value in the economy.

**If vegetable consumption also rises by 5%, a further \$50 million/year savings to the national budget is estimated as a result of reduced medical treatment and procedures.** Other benefits evident in international examples of urban agriculture include:

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<sup>66</sup> Donati K and Rose N 2020 [The Pandemic Gardening Survey Report | Sustain](#)

<sup>67</sup> Department of Health and Ageing 2013 *The Australian dietary guidelines*. Canberra: Australian Government. Updated 17 July 2019. Website: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/the-australian-dietary-guidelines> accessed: 6 December 2022.

- agricultural practices **supporting** national soil strategy activity on soil rejuvenation and climate action on carbon sequestration
- improved land, fire and water management of agricultural systems, by including the knowledge and practices of First Nations people
- innovation in agriculture through circular economic recycling of organic waste streams
- greater access to fresh and affordable food in communities disproportionately experiencing food insecurity
- training and employment pathways as well as small business creation, as recently validated in a survey mapping the urban agriculture sector in Victoria that we have conducted for Agriculture Victoria (2021).<sup>68</sup>

### **Sustain's recommendations regarding other measures to support urban agriculture**

We make the following recommendations for integrated, coordinated and comprehensive action to expand urban agriculture:

- **Planning:** amend local and state planning frameworks to include urban agriculture; develop and implement professional education resources for planners to raise awareness of the benefits of urban agriculture, and demonstrate why/how it should be supported
- **Sector coordination:** establish a Strategy and Advisory group to build capacity and programming across local and state government, enterprises and the sector more broadly - to enable an intersectoral approach and avoid silos, supported by an evidence base to inform policy development and implementation - recognise and value the role and contribution of households and communities to the food system (including food security) - and ensure their voices and representations are part of any strategic discussions, design and planning
- **Access to land:** work with public and private stakeholders (including public utilities) to audit and identify suitable land; create pathways to facilitate access to it through fiscal incentives (e.g. rates discounts, land tax rebates) - facilitate an intersectoral approach to land use planning, so that other sectors are included in design, planning and implementation (e.g. health, agriculture, environment, biodiversity and conservation)
- **Grants:** develop dedicated grant streams for community and commercial operators that are flexible, simplified and tailored to organisational size and capacity (given the limited window of opportunity for a grant application, complexity of bureaucratic processes, and need for specialist skills of volunteers in community groups)
- **Information, advice, training:** establish an Urban Agriculture Hub or Centre of Excellence to function as a central repository of key information and advice for the sector as well as conduct training and research to capture the sector's impact and multifunctional nature, and support community education and discussion about food system issues
- **Research:** invest in a research agenda identifying the world's best practice in urban agriculture, scientific evidence base to inform practice and policy, trials and pilots of new approaches and captures the sector's impact and multifunctional nature. Citizen science projects present an opportunity for engagement of the wider community in research, valuing their lived experience.

See also the Infographics on the national *Pandemic Gardening Survey* (2020) attached to this submission.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Donati, K. and Rose, N. (2022). *Growing Edible Cities and Towns: A survey of Victoria's urban agriculture sector*: available at <https://sustain.org.au/projects/growing-edible-cities-and-towns/>

<sup>69</sup> Donati, K. and Rose, N. (2020). [The Pandemic Gardening Survey Report | Sustain](#)

## Role of local governments in supporting the transition to a healthy, sustainable, resilient and food secure system<sup>70</sup>

Australian local governments have an important role to play in addressing the crises discussed above. **We call on the Federal government to work with all state and territory governments to resource and empower local governments in addressing food security challenges across Australia.**

Sustain (through Executive Director, Dr Nick Rose) was involved in an ARC research project, *Strengthening Food Systems Governance at the Local Level*. As part of our research, we gathered and assessed >2,000 policy and strategic documents (current at 30 June 2020) from all local governments in NSW (128) and Victoria (79).<sup>71</sup> These documents were analysed against a framework of 34 recommendations for local government action to address: food system issues, encompassing the domains of health and wellbeing, sustainability and environment, economic development, food waste, food quality and safety, social policy, and planning. A database containing relevant extracts from these documents was created by the research team, and is a useful resource for information on local government food system initiatives: <https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/policy-database/>

The policy mapping study found only 13 local governments (<10% of the total) - and only two in NSW (<2% of all NSW councils) - had a dedicated food system policy. However, local governments addressed food system issues in a wide range of non-food specific policies and strategies. These included the documents created by NSW local governments under the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework*, such as *Community Strategic Plans*, as well as policies on topics such as health, sustainability, and the environment. In particular, there was widespread support in local government policies for local food production, reducing food waste, and education campaigns and events on food system issues (>85% of all councils had >1 policy initiatives on these areas). Conversely, there was very little policy action to: i) restrict unhealthy food advertising or vending machines under local government control (<4%); or, ii) incentivise the affordability and consumption of healthy foods (e.g. through vouchers or discounts for vulnerable population groups) (<2%).

Each of these areas are potential opportunities for further action. We recommend that the Australian government consider recent work undertaken by the Victorian Department of Health on 'local and social procurement', for the provision of food and food outlets in publicly funded hospitals, other health services and residential aged care facilities.<sup>72</sup>

The ARC research policy mapping study found Victorian local governments were more likely than those in NSW to be acting on food systems, with the greatest differences for topics such as

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<sup>70</sup> This part of the submission draws on and in part reproduces the related submission by Dr Belinda Reeve, on behalf of the Australian Research Council project team: *Strengthening Local Food Systems Governance*. Sustain's Executive Director, Dr Nick Rose, is a partner investigator in this project in his role with William Angliss Institute. This research involved a 3-year project on how Australian local governments and communities contribute to creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system.

<sup>71</sup> Project reports - website: <https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/>

<sup>72</sup> Victoria State Government 2018 *Victoria's social procurement framework: Building a fair, inclusive and sustainable Victoria through procurement*. Melbourne.

Department of Health (Vic) 2021 *Review of food standards in Victorian public hospitals and residential aged care services*. Summary report. Melbourne, Victoria.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 2019 *Healthy and high-quality food in public hospitals and aged care facilities: Audit overview*. Melbourne. April.

promoting/supporting breastfeeding, supporting sustainable water management in food production, and partnering with sports clubs to provide healthy options. Good examples of integrated, comprehensive and long-term food systems policies include the City of Greater Bendigo's (2020) *Food Systems Strategy 2020-2030*,<sup>73</sup> Cardinia Shire Council's (2018) *Community Food Strategy 2018-26*,<sup>74</sup> and the City of Merri-Bek's (Moreland) (2017) *Food Systems Strategy 2017-20*.<sup>75</sup> Note that in each case council has resourced the implementation of the strategy with a dedicated officer role and associated funding to support community actions.

For 22 out of 34 recommendations, metropolitan local governments (in both NSW and Victoria) were more likely than non-metropolitan local governments (in rural and regional areas) to have a relevant food system policy, with the biggest differences being for recommendations to: ensure healthy food retail is easily accessible; support affordable housing; allow food production on local government-owned land; and support home and community gardening. While the research did not investigate this disparity in action on food systems between communities in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, it is reasonable to assume that capacity and resourcing has a part to play, given the much lower population and rate bases of regional and rural councils. It is important for the NSW and Victoria governments to prioritise capacity-building in food systems across the whole state, given the asymmetrical physical and mental health challenges experienced between different regions as well as differential access to primary and allied health care services.<sup>76</sup>

## Specific policy actions by the Australian government that can help to create a healthier, more sustainable, food secure and more equitable food system

It should be noted that the ARC policy mapping research examined only the existence of policies, not their implementation or effectiveness. This is an area requiring further investigation. We recommend the Australian government invests in building food systems monitoring and evaluation capacity at all levels in order to assess and determine the effectiveness and impact of particular policy interventions, at the Federal, state/territory and local levels.

**Food security and equitable access to food:** Local governments contribute to food security and equitable access to food by seeking to increase local food production, distribution, and consumption. The creation of local (regional and city region) food systems can help to minimise food supply disruptions created by crises (eg. Covid-19), as food producers and small businesses endeavour to be nimble and proximate to food supply chain partners. This means they can innovate more quickly and pivot to new market channels and buyers.<sup>77</sup> Local governments (e.g. the ACT government has various 'community pantries' available throughout the suburbs for people to access - as part of *Communities@Work*, a social program)<sup>78</sup> also provide or support a range of programs aimed at increasing food security, such as school breakfast programs, and the Dhungung (Food) Share program. This program provides food for local Aboriginal families and is facilitated by Wingecarribee Council in conjunction with Australian Red Cross and OzHarvest.

<sup>73</sup> [Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030 | City of Greater Bendigo](#)

<sup>74</sup> [Community Food Strategy 2018-26 - Cardinia Shire Council](#)

<sup>75</sup> [food-systems-strategy--20172020.pdf \(moreland.vic.gov.au\)](#).

<sup>76</sup> [Regional and Rural Health Outcomes | Conrad Curry Law](#)

<sup>77</sup> Thilmany, D., Canales, E., Low, S.A., and Boys, K. (2020). Local Food Supply Dynamics and Resilience During Covid-19. *Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy*. 43(1):86-104.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.commsatwork.org/?s=community+pantry>

Local governments and regional entities (e.g. the G21 group of 5 councils in the Greater Geelong region, Victoria)<sup>79</sup> need to consider the food system more broadly within their catchment areas to resolve food security issues, not in a fragmented and siloed way. This means looking ‘upstream’ at the bigger picture (the various determinants of food insecurity), not just the immediate ‘downstream’ impacts on individuals, households and communities. It also requires a participatory approach based on the principles of deliberative democracy, including citizens (as community members) - especially youth, women, indigenous people, migrants and refugees - as key stakeholders, their voices and representation, are evident in discussions, critical analysis, shared learning, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, action and evaluation<sup>80</sup>

### Examples of local innovations and opportunities to enhanced food security

- **Community supported agriculture (CSA)** - is a form of solidarity marketing that supports both producers and community members, especially in locations where a farmers’ market is not available.<sup>81</sup> CSA marketing boosts the local economy, assists farmers with their forward planning of crops and livestock management, and helps to build more secure localised and/or regionalised short supply chains. We note in many instances, improved land access and local/regional infrastructure are needed (e.g. coolroom storage, warehouse and packing facilities, road/rail transport), as well as logistical processes, marketing and communications assistance to support this form of solidarity marketing
- **Community food hubs** - described in detail by Open Food Network<sup>82</sup> and Sustain.<sup>83</sup> The benefits of food hubs include strengthening local and regional economies, educating consumers about the value of local food, returning more value to participating producers, providing business advice and mentoring services for producers, and contributing to local and regional food security (Rose 2017)<sup>84</sup>
- **Local food boxes** - some producers, chefs and social enterprises are already sourcing and marketing local fresh food boxes as a consequence of ‘pivoting’ their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. These local marketing innovations encourage community members to

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<sup>79</sup> G21. Website: <https://g21.com.au/> accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Australian Parliament 2020 *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*. Canberra: House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia. November; Béné C, Prager SD, Achicanoy HAE, Toro PA, Lamotte L, Cedrez CB and Mapes BR 2019 Understanding food system drivers: A critical review of the literature. *Global Food Security*. <https://doi.org/10.106/j.gfs.2019.04.009>; Bowden M 2020 *Identifying and responding to food security in Australia*. CFA practice guide. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; Brouwer ID, McDermott J and Ruben R 2020 Food systems everywhere: Improving relevance in practice. *Global Food Security*. 26:100398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2020.100398>; Godrich SL, Stoneham M, Edmunds M and Devine A 2020 South west Food Community: How government and community initiatives are supporting systemic change towards enhanced food security. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 44(2):41:129-36. <https://doi:10.111/1753-6405.12975>; Londberg R, Barbour L and Godrich S 2019 A rights-based approach to food security in Australia. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 00:1-7. <https://doi:10.1002/hpja.324>;

<sup>81</sup> See [Home \(csanetworkausnz.org\)](http://csanetworkausnz.org) and [Urgenci – The International Network for Community Supported Agriculture](http://urgenci.org); Bronwyn Wilkes (2022) - Research Fellow, NCEPH, ANU, Canberra - has recently submitted her PhD thesis addressing: community supported agriculture (Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU); Wilkes B 20189 *A snapshot of community supported agriculture (CSA) in Australia and Aotearoa 2018: Preliminary descriptive results*. Technical report. June. DOI:[10.25911/5d0377f389ce6](https://doi.org/10.25911/5d0377f389ce6)

<sup>82</sup> Open Food Network 2022 Website: <https://about.openfoodnetwork.org.au/> accessed: 6 December 2022. Open Food Network 2022 *Community food enterprise pulse check 2022*.

<sup>83</sup> See <https://melbournefoodhub.org.au>

<sup>84</sup> Rose, N. (2017). Community food hubs: an economic and social justice model for regional Australia?. *Rural Society*, 26(3), 225-237.

extend their food literacy, nutrition, cooking and other skills - also enhancing personal and household food security

- **Community kitchens and community gardens** - these community-led initiatives increase cooking and gardening skills, as well as lead to greater recognition and respect for the efforts and contributions of households and community members to food security.<sup>85</sup> For example, the Health Promotion Unit at Barwon Health (Geelong, Victoria)<sup>86</sup> manages a community kitchens program, enabling the development of various literacies/skills, including nutrition, financial (budgeting), food purchasing, preparation, consumption and storage. These venues are also an opportunity for shared learning in the company of others, weaving social connections in the wake of the challenges of the past two years. Community Gardens Australia (CGA)<sup>87</sup> - a national network of community gardens around the country, with representatives in every state and territory, is an important stakeholder in expanding the existing network of community gardens in NSW
- **Farmers markets** - a standout example that benefits local NSW producers close to the ACT is the weekly *Capital Region Farmers Market* (held at the Canberra showgrounds).<sup>88</sup> This is a much-loved venue for Canberrans, visitors and tourists to access fresh locally and regionally sourced seasonal produce and value-added products, all produced by farmers/artisans within a 1-5hr distance by car or truck from Canberra (on a weekly, 2-weekly or monthly basis). The exchanges (both commercial and social) at the market enables engagement between producers and consumers/citizens about food production, with story-telling and conversations that increase food and nutrition literacy, as well as contributing to farmers' incomes and the local/regional economy.

**Reducing food waste and destruction:** Local governments play a central role in preventing food waste. Many NSW local governments have a kerbside food organics and garden organics (FOGO) or food-only collection service for household food waste, which is then commercially processed into compost. Some also operate organics processing services for commercial businesses. Others undertake educational activities and campaigns for residents that aim to prevent food waste, such as workshops on fermenting and pickling, menu planning, or cooking with leftovers (sometimes in partnership with the *Love Food Hate Waste* initiative or *Halve Waste*), as well as offer rebates enabling residents to purchase compost bins or worm farms. One 'quick win' for reducing food packaging waste would be for the NSW Government to support all local governments to implement the Return and Earn container deposit scheme.

### **Local examples and innovations**

The adoption of the philosophy and principles of the Circular Economy is now underway in Victoria and elsewhere (eg. ACT Government is developing a circular economy strategy in 2022). Resourcing, grants and incentives are important to support households, communities and businesses to embrace what is a major cultural shift in dealing with food and packaging waste.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Gennari C and Tornaghi C 2020 *The transformative potential of community kitchens for an agroecological urbanism: Preliminary insights and a research agenda*. Conference proceedings: *Agroecological transitions confronting climate breakdown - food planning for the post-carbon city*. 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the AESOP Sustainable Food Systems. Madrid, Spain. 7-8 November 2019. Iacovou M, Pattieson DC, Truby H and Palermo C 2012 Social health and nutrition impacts of community kitchens: A systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*. <https://doi:10.1017/S1368980012002753>.

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/services-departments/community-health-services/healthy-communities/community-kitchens>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.communitygarden.org.au/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://capitalregionfarmersmarket.com.au/>

<sup>89</sup> KPMG 2020 *Fighting food waste: Using the circular economy*. Report. Website: [www.kpmg.com.au](http://www.kpmg.com.au) accessed: 29 June 2020; C40 2018 *Municipality-led circular economy case studies*. In partnership with

In Melbourne's laneways, various cafes and venues are collectively disposing of food waste via 'food dehydrators' (e.g. [Closed Loop](#)). The resulting product is taken away and used by farmers to improve their soil (for growing produce and enabling food supply to these venues: a good example of a circular economy).

**Composting:** more support, guidance and incentives could be provided for households and communities to engage in this age-old practice that is essential for enhancing soil fertility as well as dealing effectively with food waste. For 'composting', ABC *Gardening Australia* (TV program) provides evidence-based information on composting. Particular consideration for adequate support mechanisms is required for high-density urban developments, especially for people residing in city apartments with little or no access to residential or neighbourhood composting system. Resulting in the majority of household food waste going to landfill and release of greenhouse gas emissions. Community gardens and school gardens are an excellent source of community education and awareness-raising about the benefits of composting, as well as running workshops to provide 'how to' practical guidance.

**Developing technologies to bring food production into cities:** Local governments support initiatives that enable local food production, including forms of urban agriculture such as rooftop and vertical farms, shipping container mushrooms, microgreens production in polytunnels and other types of climate-smart urban agriculture. We have detailed above in our general remarks the suite of actions required to expand urban agriculture (see also Infographics attached).

While not a 'technology', local governments use regulatory instruments (eg. planning schemes to dedicate areas of public space to community gardens and other forms of food growing). North Sydney's Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability is home to the largest publicly-accessible [green rooftop](#) in Sydney. It features a community garden and leased allotment plots, raised wicking beds that are irrigated by recycled stormwater, and an aquaponics system.

**Beekeeping** (including on rooftops and backyards) has become popular in several urban areas and is a source of livelihood for experience operations. As well as commercial and educational benefits, beekeeping serves a vital ecological function for protecting and supporting pollinators whose wellbeing is essential for the horticultural industry, household and community gardens, and city farms. State and territory governments could support the establishment of beekeeping groups in rural and regional areas with appropriate grants and incentives programs, creating educational opportunities for all ages and building food system and gardening literacies in the process. For example, ensuring water is accessible for bees as well as other insects and pollinators; growing flowering plants in public and private gardens; and selecting appropriate trees for town and city streets (such as drought tolerant crepe myrtles).

Making land available in urban contexts to urban farmers and community gardeners is a critically important issue. Local governments are understandably risk averse in this area, and hence there is a critical need for leadership from state and territory governments. A key reform is to amend

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Climate-KIC Circular Cities Project. Copenhagen, Denmark. Website: [www.c40.org](http://www.c40.org) accessed: 11 March 2020; Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2019 *Cities and circular economy for food*. London. Website: [www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org) accessed: 11 March 2020; Esposito B, Sessa MR, Sica D and Malandrino 2020 Towards circular economy in the agri-food sector: A systematic literature review. *Sustainability*. 12(7401). doi:10.3390/su12187401. [www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability); Fassio F and Tecco N 2019 Circular economy for food: A systemic interpretation of 40 case histories in the food system in their relationships with SDGs. *Systems*. 7(43). doi:10.3390/systems7030043. [www.mdpi.com/journal/systems](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/systems)

state and territory land use planning frameworks ensuring recognition of urban agriculture and urban farming as necessary, and encouraging diverse land uses across a range of zoning classifications. A further reform is to enable local governments to allow appropriately capable operators and groups to access land on a temporary basis, if its intended long-term (permanent) use for housing and/or commercial businesses may be some years away. This will help to address the ‘land-banking’ phenomenon that sees many parcels of vacant land across towns and cities,<sup>90</sup> growing weeds behind cyclone fencing for years and even decades in some cases. Unlocking this land with appropriate planning controls and supports would create business opportunities, training and employment pathways, venues for social connection, and enhance the local production of fresh and healthy food.

To reduce the onerous burden of grant applications to a local government LGA, state/territory government and/or philanthropic funding for projects, the applications process could and should be simplified and made less bureaucratic. This is especially important for volunteer-based community gardens and other similar grassroots groups, with grants processes matching their time, expertise, capacity and resources, whilst at the same time having reasonable financial controls in place (for reporting and accountability purposes). This would enable more community groups to apply for resources to aid their community-based activities around food production, climate change and other concerns; thus, contributing to beneficial community and environmental outcomes.

*Verge gardens*<sup>91</sup> enable greening of urban streets and landscapes on the ‘nature strip’, ‘road easement’s and ‘urban footpath’. Urban agriculture, even in small rural/coastal communities and in the peri-urban fringe. They also offer land access for neighbourhood gardeners to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs (‘urban food forests’), as well as demonstrate conservation and biodiversity to provide wildlife habitat and ‘corridors’, and reduce urban island heat by provide cooling and shade (as mitigation strategies to address food security and climate change).

Local government support for verge gardening is critical for practices. Some LGAs across Australia (e.g. City of Brisbane, City of Bayswater)<sup>92</sup> provide support, guidance and incentives for community members to undertake verge gardening. Verge gardens can contribute to cooling and shade cover, thereby reducing the urban island heat effect.<sup>93</sup> They can also support the localisation of food production, help with carbon sequestration and water retention over time, contribute to improved air quality, beautify neighbourhoods, increase liveability (especially in socially disadvantaged communities) and create more ‘urban green spaces’.

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<sup>90</sup> 3000 Acres 2022 Website: <https://www.3000acres.org/> accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>91</sup> Marshall AJ 2019 *Renaturing the nature strip: Spatial, environmental and social drivers of road verge extent, composition and resident gardening behaviour*. PhD thesis. School of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne, Australia; Marshall AJ, Grose MJ and Williams NSG 2019 From little things: More than a third of public green space is road verge. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. 44:126423. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2019.126423>; Marshall AJ, Grose MJ and Williams NSG 2020 Of mowers and growers: Perceived social norms strongly influence verge gardening, a distinctive civic greening practice. *Landscape and Urban Planning*. 198:103795. <https://doi.org/j.landurbplan.2020.103795>

<sup>92</sup> City of Bayswater 2019 *Street verges policy*. Perth, WA. April. Website: [www.bayswater.wa.gov.au](http://www.bayswater.wa.gov.au) accessed: 11 June 2020; City of Brisbane 2017 *Verge garden guidelines*. Brisbane. March. Website: [www.brisbane.qld.gov.au](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au) accessed: 12 March 2021.

<sup>93</sup> Sutherland K 2021 On the verge. *Green: sustainable architecture and landscape design*. 77:72-78. Kingsley J, Egerer M, Nuttman S, Keniger L, Pettitt P, Frantzeskaki N, Gray T, Ossola A, Lin B, Bailey A, Tracey D, Barron S and Marsh P 2021 Urban agriculture as a nature-based solution to address socio-ecological challenges in Australian cities. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*. 60:127059. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2021.127059>.

Local and state/territory governments could support the establishment and maintenance of *community orchards* by providing support, incentives and guidance, assisting with resources, and enabling community education on orchard care/practices (e.g. soil fertility, watering options, pruning, harvesting, cooking/storage of produce).<sup>94</sup>

*Personal reflection from Dr Anita Peerson:* As I wander around the ANU campus, Canberra, ACT, I note how many mature and new trees and plants yield incredible shade and coolness, even during >30°C days and a high altitude (578m), with clean air. This helps the personal and collective wellbeing of students, staff and visitors on-campus. When travelling around the countryside in Wodonga (Vic), Albury, Wagga Wagga (NSW), and Canberra (ACT), there is high use of crepe myrtle trees used as street trees by local government, as well as a mix of natives and exotics (even in industrial areas). These species and the canopy they provide increases the comfort of local residents, workers and visitors, improves soil health, and expands the potential range of food production options in urban areas.

**Preserving productive land and water resources:** Local governments, particularly those on the urban-rural fringe (such as Penrith City Council and Hawkesbury Council) and those in rural areas with significant agricultural industries (e.g. Cabonne and Singleton), are concerned with protecting and preserving arable land for food production. Local governments include objectives on protecting food producing land in documents such as Settlement Strategies and Rural Land Use Strategies. For example, Tweed Shire Council’s *Sustainable Agriculture Strategy* (2016), one of the first local government documents of its kind in Australia, includes as an outcome that prime agricultural land is preserved for sustainable primary production and land-use conflicts are avoided or managed.<sup>95</sup> Local governments in regional areas also have policies and initiatives on using wastewater and effluent for irrigated agriculture, and on managing water assets, as with the *Edward River Agribusiness Masterplan (2019-2024)*.<sup>96</sup>

Preserving agricultural heritage can be connected with culinary traditions and local hospitality industries. This has been done by the City of Greater Bendigo, Victoria with its *Food Systems Strategy 2020-2030* aligned with its designation as Australia’s first UNESCO Creative Cities Network:<sup>97</sup> *City of Gastronomy* (2019), prompting regional benefits for surrounding communities.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Mornington Peninsula is developing a unique ‘agroecology and food economy’ strategy;<sup>99</sup> and Launceston, Tasmania also achieved UNESCO City of Gastronomy (November 2021).<sup>100</sup> The Australian government should work with Regional Development Australia-ACT<sup>101</sup> and the NSW state government to explore this opportunity with one or more city regions (e.g. Northern Rivers, City of Orange) in the state.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Salbitano F, Fini A, Borelli S and Konijnendijk CC 2019 Editorial - Urban food forestry: Current state and future perspectives. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. 45:126482.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2019.126482>

<sup>95</sup> [Agriculture and farming | Tweed Shire Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.tweedshire.nsw.gov.au/~/media/Assets/Publications/2016/Agriculture_and_farming_in_Tweed_Shire_Council.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Website: <https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/agribusiness.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Creative fields: gastronomy, literature, design, music, film, media arts, crafts and folk art. Website: <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home> accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>98</sup> See [Bendigo City and region of Gastronomy \(bendigogastronomy.com.au\)](https://www.bendigogastronomy.com.au/)

<sup>99</sup> Mornington Peninsula Shire 2021 *Agroecology and food economy strategy*. Rosebud, Victoria. (in progress) Website: [www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au) accessed: 2 September 2021.

<sup>100</sup> [Launceston Gastronomy-Connecting Northern Tasmania](https://www.launcestongastronomy.com.au/)

<sup>101</sup> Regional Development Australia-ACT. *Food in the capital and city region food system* initiatives. Website: [www.radaact.org.au](http://www.radaact.org.au) accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>102</sup> [Northern Rivers Food - Northern Rivers Food](https://www.northernriversfood.com.au/)

The National Heart Foundation has been working with architects and other experts for some time, to address land use planning issues, and encourage greater ‘healthiness’ and ‘liveability’ for residents.<sup>103</sup> There are opportunities for the Australian government to work with state and local governments to indicate the multiple benefits of including urban green spaces and areas for food production. These areas can also be multifunctional in terms of also providing open green space for recreational purposes, particularly if new and existing houses/properties have small/no gardens for children’s play and household recreation.

In many rural, coastal and remote communities (and on the peri-urban fringe of large cities) there are ongoing concerns about the pressures on farmers to sell their prime agricultural land to real estate developers – and impacts on affordable land access and resulting capacity to feed people. For example, see City of Melbourne policies<sup>104</sup> and DELWP<sup>105</sup> (Vic state government) consultations on Melbourne and 100km city fringe for food growing (not only affecting food supply to Melbourne but also particular communities). The *Foodprint Melbourne* research team has worked on these issues for several years, making representations to the Victorian government for long-term planning to provide permanent protection.<sup>106</sup> In Canada, the province of British Columbia has an excellent proven model in the Agricultural Land Reserve, as does the City of Toronto, Ontario, with the Greenbelt which together preserves >6 million acres and thousands of family farms.<sup>107</sup>

**Managing the impact of climate change:** Local governments are heavily involved in managing or mitigating the local impacts of climate change, including in relation to the food system, with support for local food systems used as one strategy. For example, Ballina Shire Council’s *Northern Rivers Food* project<sup>108</sup> (ongoing) seeks to mitigate climate change impacts associated with food production, distribution, and consumption by reducing reliance on food sourced from outside the region. Regional local governments also aim to support agricultural industries facing climate change impacts, with Temora Shire housing an agricultural research station that performs research trials related to ‘future-proofing’ crops against the effects of climate change.

Increasing numbers of local governments have adopted *Climate Emergency Plans*, at times incorporating previous food system goals and strategies into these plans (e.g. Surf Coast Shire, City of Darebin, Borough of Queenscliffe) However, there is a risk in such an approach in subsuming specific and critical issues (e.g. regarding regenerative and sustainable agriculture)

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<sup>103</sup> National Heart Foundation of Australia 2013 *Making the case for investment in street trees and landscaping in urban environments: Position snapshot*. Website: [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au) accessed: 8 February 2021; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2019 *Blueprint for an active Australia: Government and community actions to increase population levels of physical activity and behaviours in Australia*. Website: [www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 29 May 2020; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2020 *Sense of place*. Healthy Active by Design Program. Melbourne. Website: [www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 29 May 2020; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2020/21 *What Australia wants: Living locally in walkable neighbourhoods*. Website: [www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 8 February 2021.

<sup>104</sup> City of Melbourne 2012 *Food city: City of Melbourne food policy*. Melbourne; City of Melbourne 20(17) *Nature in the city: Thriving biodiversity and healthy ecosystems*. Melbourne. Website: [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au) accessed: 25 October 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) 2020 *Planning for Melbourne’s green wedges and agricultural land*. Consultation paper. May. Melbourne: Victoria State Government. Website: [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au) accessed: 21 April 2021.

<sup>106</sup> Foodprint Melbourne. Website: <https://fvas.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/foodprint-melbourne> accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>107</sup> [Agricultural Land Reserve - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://www.agriculturalreserve.ca) and [Greenbelt Foundation](http://www.greenbeltfoundation.ca)

<sup>108</sup> See <https://www.northernriversfood.org/>

under the overall umbrella of climate change. On balance, we believe a better approach – at the Federal, state/territory and local government levels - is to have a dedicated food systems and food security strategy, with clear actions (e.g. regenerative agriculture) to reinforce simultaneous, intersectoral and coordinated actions on climate change.

**Limiting the impact food production has on the environment, including overfishing:** Local governments in regional areas of NSW undertake a range of activities that aim to support more environmentally sustainable forms of agriculture, hospitality, agritourism, artisanal and related industries. They provide landholders, food growers, and farmers with information and education on topics such as weed and biosecurity management, sustainable agriculture practices and forms of food production (including those drawing on regenerative, permaculture, and organic principles/practices), responsible land management, and protecting native habitat and biodiversity. They also undertake programs to protect sensitive lands and ecological communities from agricultural activities, manage agricultural run-off into waterways, prevent livestock from entering riparian areas through fencing and stock control, and provide waste collection services for agricultural products. The *Maitland Greening Plan* (2002-ongoing)<sup>109</sup> encourages care of native plant areas, wetlands, and biodiversity through education, environmental awards, the provision of equipment, environmental levies, and salinity credits.

**Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development:** Many local governments work in partnership with education and training providers (e.g., high schools, TAFE) to provide pathways into agricultural careers. Gwydir Shire is home to a unique project, The Living Classroom (TLC - ongoing). TLC has repurposed 150 hectares of town common to create a unique learning centre, combining education, tourism, regenerative agriculture, and research using a food systems lens.<sup>110</sup> One component of TLC is a primary industries trade training centre. It also works with local high schools to promote agriculture career pathways and provide work experience for students. The *Edward River Agribusiness Masterplan* contains multiple programs aimed at developing the agribusiness sector, including those on upskilling agricultural workers, promoting career opportunities to school students, and facilitating pathways for younger farmers into farm ownership. These are the sort of stand-out initiatives that the Federal government can learn from and support as part of a broader shift to more regenerative and sustainable forms of agriculture to meet the national (and global) challenges of climate change, as well as prepare the next generation of Australian farmers.

Partnerships with the TAFE sector can include various programs leading to numerous qualifications (e.g. horticulture, agriculture, land management, hospitality, tourism, commercial cookery/baking/butchery/patisserie). Opportunities to offer sustainability and related design innovations integrated across all courses is becoming of more interest and relevance for teachers and students. However, they also need better informed and evidence-based resources/materials for teaching and learning,<sup>111</sup> depending on literacy levels and English as a first language or not. There may be other student concerns with applied/practical learning opportunities (e.g. work-integrated learning). These concerns should be well- coordinated and resourced by the educational institutions, rather than dependent on students' limited or non-existent support networks. This is especially important for international students, and others with reduced

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<sup>109</sup> <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/our-services/environment/maitland-greening-plan>

<sup>110</sup> The Living Classroom (TLC). Websites: <https://www.bingara.com.au/the-living-classroom/> and <https://www.gwydir.nsw.gov.au/Venues/The-Living-Classroom> accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Anita Peerson: conversations with Will Dagliesh - [Bendigo TAFE: sustainability and design course \(late 2021\)](#).

regional or local opportunities/resources for equipment, travel timetables.<sup>112</sup> TAFE pathways should be better linked to universities, by exposing students (as well as community members and youth) to role models, mentoring and other options. This type of coordinated and integrated approach to vocational education, mentoring and pathways will boost workforce development and opportunities for regions and communities. In 2022, the Australian government has announced funding to support more TAFE places and improve education pathways between TAFE and universities. This follows an earlier initiative by the Victoria government to subsidise the cost of student fees for some 'priority' courses at TAFE, and fulfill workforce gaps in some trades.

Collaborations or partnerships of Federal, state/territory and/or local government with universities, scientists and postgraduate students could also foster innovation and application in practice. Even initially implementing small scale studies, trials and/or demonstration sites involving a cohort of farmers and other stakeholders in a community or region can yield significant results and benefits, enabling replication. This would also enable exploring potential intellectual property (IP) and commercialisation opportunities at this time, leading to scaling-up, resulting in more evidence to improve practice and inform policy development and implementation.

*Citizen science* projects, with community engagement and respect for community-based knowledge and 'lived experience' (also known as 'experiential knowledge'), is another excellent opportunity for state/territory governments to support and resource. Such projects can lead to increased science/other literacy in community, development of new skills (e.g. understanding research process, data collection, translation of knowledge into action). Citizen science also contributes to the evidence base. For example, *DustSafe* and *VegeSafe* by 360 Analysis is a global citizen science project involving Macquarie University, NSW<sup>113</sup> - enabling farmers/community members to submit soil samples for testing at a cost of donating \$20/sample, with analysis and recommendations for action. This is far cheaper than a private laboratory for the same service.

Many local organisations deeply embedded in communities could be involved in citizen science projects (eg. neighbourhood houses (Vic), community centres, CWA groups, Men's Sheds, community gardens, Land Care groups, Coast Care groups, Caring for Country programs). These opportunities supported by local governments also aid skills development and inform career and study aspirations, raising awareness and enabling discussions about local community issues.

***Development and growth of the food industry (raw or processed) as an export:*** As well as ensuring food security for residents, councils collaborate with federal and state/territory government departments (or agencies), industry associations and businesses to increase opportunities for developing export pathways and relationships. Eurobodalla Shire Council has developed a *Rural Lands Strategy*<sup>114</sup> to enhance the potential of local agriculture and aquaculture industries, including through identifying export markets. It has also held discussions with potential export businesses aimed at improving capacity for growth into Asian markets. Similarly the Mornington Peninsula Draft *Food Economy and Agroecology Strategy* sets out a "six-year action plan to support the local agricultural economy and build business resilience through sustainable farming practices, biodiversity and minimising waste."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Anita Peerson: reflections on chef training experience Cert III and IV commercial cookery - The Gordon, Geelong

<sup>113</sup> 360 Dust Analysis program, Macquarie University, Sydney. Website: [www.360dustanalysis.com](http://www.360dustanalysis.com) accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>114</sup> See [https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/210683/Rural-Lands-Strategy.pdf](https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/210683/Rural-Lands-Strategy.pdf).

<sup>115</sup> See <https://shape.mornpen.vic.gov.au/food-economy-and-agroecology-strategy>.

Partnerships with universities, scientists and postgraduate students could foster innovation and application in practice, and identify ‘value-added’ product and / or service opportunities with IP and commercialisation benefits (e.g. Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology (CEAT) at Australian National University, Canberra).<sup>116</sup> Local and state/territory governments could provide incentives and/or resources to assist with start-ups and mentoring programs. And ensure regular monitoring and evaluation to address sustainability and any impacts of processes, plus fine-tuning of any implemented programs and projects.

***Consideration of Indigenous land, fire and water management practices to support agriculture:***

Many councils across NSW have established bush tucker gardens that facilitate learning about Aboriginal culture and food, and a continuous connection to Country, sometimes established in consultation or partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents or groups. These include in: Hawkesbury, Canada Bay, Bellingen, Georges River, Gwydir (within *The Living Classroom*) and Tamworth.

Councils also facilitate the use of native species and Indigenous knowledge in land management. For example, Cootamundra-Gundagai’s *Rural Lands Strategy*<sup>117</sup> encourages exploration of endemic flora and fauna as a source of native food, wood, and fibre, as well as using native plants as drought fodder and windbreaks to increase tree canopy, improve water retention, and drought resilience. Tweed Shire Council’s *Sustainable Agriculture Team*<sup>118</sup> aims to recognise and promote Aboriginal culture and farming practices, and provide opportunities for Indigenous partnerships in sustainable agriculture, including Indigenous farm programs. Councils also support the economic opportunities offered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food knowledge and practices. The Brewarrina Fish Traps are a significant feature of Brewarrina Shire,<sup>119</sup> and Council aims to enhance their tourism benefits (see their [Destination Management Plan](#)). Gwydir Shire<sup>120</sup> is exploring options for scaling-up production of native foods to support a local industry, while Lachlan Shire Council<sup>121</sup> is investigating a bush tucker/bush medicine shop and Aboriginal culture tours.

Engagement, collaboration and partnerships with indigenous people is vital, regarding bushfoods and medicines, ensuring recognition of indigenous knowledge (land and water management), intellectual property and shared commercialisation opportunities. This will result in various cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits of value-add products, creating important employment opportunities for First Nations communities as well as the recovery and practice of cultural knowledge.

In small rural and remote communities of Australia, many indigenous people rely on bushfoods and medicines to supplement their diets and improve their wellbeing, including by using traditional food gathering and hunting practices of hunting and gathering (see statement by Uncle

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<sup>116</sup> Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology (CEAT) is an ANU-CSIRO partnership. Website: <https://ceat.org.au/> accessed: 5 December 2022. See other examples of food innovation/entrepreneurial ventures: Monash University; Central Coast NSW (Food Innovation Initiative); University of Queensland; University of Adelaide (Waite Institute).

<sup>117</sup> See <https://www.cgrc.nsw.gov.au/building-development-and-planning/plans-policies-and-controls/rural-lands-strategy/>

<sup>118</sup> See <https://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/environment/agriculture-farming#:~:text=Our%20Sustainable%20Agriculture%20team%20collaborates,values%20of%20the%20Tweed's%20farmland.>

<sup>119</sup> See <https://www.mpra.com.au/brewarrina-fish-traps.>

<sup>120</sup> See [https://www.bingara.com.au/indigenous-foods-research-park-narrabri/.](https://www.bingara.com.au/indigenous-foods-research-park-narrabri/)

<sup>121</sup> See [https://www.lachlan.nsw.gov.au/community/aboriginal-cultural-heritage-study.aspx.](https://www.lachlan.nsw.gov.au/community/aboriginal-cultural-heritage-study.aspx)

Michael Ghillar).<sup>122</sup> Some community gardens include space for indigenous/native plants which are also bushfoods (e.g. lemon myrtle, yam daisy).<sup>123</sup>

Intellectual property and commercialisation of indigenous knowledge applicable to land and water management needs to be recognised/respected. This is an increasing concern for IP Australia<sup>124</sup> and other entities. Other strategies can include: protection of grasslands and remnant vegetation, especially where flora and fauna species are endangered or becoming extinct; recognition and valuing local neighbourhoods for their local knowledge and of heritage/history that can inform initiatives; acknowledgement of the contribution of migrants and refugees, and in particular their cultural knowledge and practices regarding food production, water and land management.<sup>125</sup> All of the above can create positive opportunities for cross-cultural learning within communities about food production, growing and cooking different types of food.

Various universities in Australia (eg. Australian National University, University of Melbourne, University of Adelaide) have programs to support indigenous students (undergraduate and postgraduate), and scholars. These students and scholars could lead and/or be involved in projects addressing food production as well as land, fire and water management knowledge and practices. Their project findings would contribute to and extend the evidence base, and inform leadership, practices and policy development - addressing food systems, climate change and other food production concerns.

## Need for integrated governance and leadership from the Federal government

The examples above demonstrate that NSW and Victorian local governments provide a wide range of local programs, services, and supports to help create a healthier, and more resilient and sustainable food system, using policies and initiatives that are tailored to the specific issues facing each area. However, our project also demonstrates that **local governments face significant practical and legislative challenges in undertaking food systems work.**

Currently unpublished results from a survey of NSW and Victorian local governments, and case studies of six innovative local governments (three in each state), report on these barriers to action.<sup>126</sup> In this part of the *Strengthening Food Systems Governance at the Local Level* project,<sup>127</sup> NSW local governments have described how the lack of legislative and financial support from state government limits their work on food systems. **There is an absence of an explicit legislative and/or policy mandate on food systems at the state and federal levels**, and a lack of cooperation between state and federal government departments and agencies with responsibilities in relation to food. This is accompanied by an absence of dedicated, ongoing

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<sup>122</sup> Report of the dialogue published here. Website: <https://sustain.org.au/articles/victorian-independent-food-systems-dialogue-report>. accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>123</sup> Examples of community gardens - Community Gardens Australia (CGA). Website: [www.communitygarden.org.au](http://www.communitygarden.org.au) accessed: 5 December 2022.

<sup>124</sup> IP Australia 2022 Website: <https://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/> accessed: 6 December 2022.

<sup>125</sup> Barnett R, Normyle A, Doran B and Vardon M 2022 *Baseline study - Agricultural capacity of the indigenous estate*. Report. Canberra: Cooperative Centre for Developing Northern Australia. McArthur L, Barnett R, Qureshi ME and Stacey B 2022 *Case studies: Baseline study - Agricultural capacity of the indigenous estate*. Report. Canberra: Cooperative Centre for Developing Northern Australia.

<sup>126</sup> See Carrad, A., Turner, L., Rose, N., Charlton, K.E., Reeve, B. (2022). *Food System Innovation and Policy at the Local Level: A report on six local governments in New South Wales and Victoria*. Sydney, NSW: University of Sydney.

<sup>127</sup> Strengthening Food Systems Governance at the Local Level: <https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/>.

funding for food system work at the local level. Resulting in local government initiatives on food systems are often short-term, limited to available state government funding criteria (eg. food waste, climate change, water quality), and are not evaluated systematically or scaled-up. Nor in relation to other sectors, concerns or community-identified needs (requiring ‘systems thinking’).<sup>128</sup> NSW local governments find it difficult to fund dedicated food systems positions within councils, or to maintain comprehensive, ongoing programs of work.

C40,<sup>129</sup> the *Milan Food Policy Pact*,<sup>130</sup> *Vermont Farm to Plate*<sup>131</sup> initiatives (amongst others), as well as outcomes of the recent UN *Food System Summit* (UN FSS, 23 September 2021)<sup>132</sup> are evidence of the growing international attention to the importance of strengthening food systems and achieving an integrated, cohesive governance approach. Australian governments at all levels can and should learn from these examples, as well as draw on existing community-based initiatives to inform and enable integrated and comprehensive food system policy and legislation development, and as well as resource this work adequately.

A people-centred, place-based and intersectoral approach is required; avoiding the ‘silo’ effects that unfortunately plague much institutional work.<sup>133</sup> It is also important to consider the valuable contribution of households, communities and small businesses to the food system in regions and communities (eg. food security, short supply chains, supporting local farmers/business – especially during the pandemic).<sup>134</sup> Developing food policies and strategies needs to be a participatory process respectful of ‘lived experience’, as well as being evidence-based (see Centre for Food Policy, London).<sup>135</sup> In such processes, it is necessary to ensure representation and voices of different population groups is heard (e.g. youth, women, migrants and refugees, indigenous people, small-scale food producers).<sup>136</sup>

Food system issues are not integrated into other relevant legislative schemes in NSW. For example, the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*<sup>137</sup> (and similar public health legislation in SA and WA)<sup>138</sup> requires local governments to create municipal public health and wellbeing plans. Some are used to address food security and diet-related health. The Victorian

<sup>128</sup> Meadows DH 2008 *Thinking in systems: A primer*. D Wright (ed). White River Junction, Vermont, US: Chelsea Green Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-60358-055-7

Senge P 2006 *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation*. London: Random House. ISBN: 9781905211203. (Originally published 1990).

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.c40.org/>.

<sup>130</sup> <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/>

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/>

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

<sup>133</sup> Tett G 2015 *The silo effect: Why putting everything in its place isn't such a bright idea*. London: Little Brown.

<sup>134</sup> Niles MT, Wirkkala KB, Belarmino EH and Bertmann F 2021 Home food procurement impacts food security and diet quality during COVID-19. *BMC Public Health*. 21:945. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10960-0>; Sellberg MM, Norström AV, Peterson GD and Gordon LJ 2020 Using local initiatives to envision sustainable and resilient food systems in Stockholm city-region. *Global Food Security*. 24:100334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2019.100334>; Tribaldos T and Kortetmäki T 2021 Developing principles and criteria for just transition in food systems: a transdisciplinary endeavour. In *Justice and Food Security in a Changing Climate*. H Schübello and I Wallimann-Helmer (eds). Fribourg: EurSafe. Pp. 158-163.

<sup>135</sup> Centre for Food Policy 2018 *How can evidence of lived experience make food policy more effective and equitable in addressing major food system challenges?* Report of the City Food Symposium 2018. London: University of London.

<sup>136</sup> UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS) 2021 *Synthesis of independent dialogues*. Report 3. September 2021. New York. September 2021. Website: [www.summitdialogues.org](http://www.summitdialogues.org) accessed: 10 November 2021.

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/public-health-and-wellbeing-act-2008/053>.

<sup>138</sup> [https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main\\_mrtile\\_13791\\_homepage.html](https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtile_13791_homepage.html)

*Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023*<sup>139</sup> and *Climate Change Act 2017*<sup>140</sup> also highlight the need to recognise climate change as a threat to health, creating an opportunity for Victorian local governments to address issues such as agriculture- and food transport-related greenhouse gas emissions in their *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans*.<sup>141</sup> However, the *NSW Public Health Act 2010*<sup>142</sup> does not place a similar obligation on NSW local governments, limiting their ability to implement policies and programs on diet-related health.

There are also calls for ‘food in all policies’ or ‘integrated’ ‘coherent’ or ‘joined-up’ policy, reflecting a ‘food systems’ approach, rather than addressing a single issue<sup>143</sup> (in a similar way to the ‘health in all policies’ approach pioneered by South Australia and Finland).<sup>144</sup>

Similarly, the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*<sup>145</sup> does not include food systems or health promotion as an objective, limiting the extent to which local governments can consider issues such as nutrition or food security in their own planning activities.<sup>146</sup> For example, local governments cannot refuse development consent to new fast-food restaurants seeking to open in an appropriately zoned area, and are limited in the extent to which they can diversify the mix of food retail outlets based on food access or nutrition concerns.<sup>147</sup> This means they are unable to address the issue of ‘food swamps’: geographical areas characterised by a high density of fast-food restaurants and other unhealthy food retail outlets, and a relatively low density of

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<sup>139</sup> <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2019-2023>

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/legislation/climate-change-act-2017>

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/population-health-systems/municipal-public-health-and-wellbeing-planning>

<sup>142</sup> <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2010-127>

<sup>143</sup> Candel, J.L., and Pereira, L. (2017). Towards integrated food policy: Main challenges and steps ahead. *Environmental Science and Policy*. 73:89-92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.04.010>;

Parsons K 2019 *Brief 3: Integrated food policy: What is it, and how can it help transform food systems?* In: *Rethinking food policy: A fresh approach to policy and practice*. London: Centre for Food Policy.

Macrae R and Winfield M 2016 A little regulatory pluralism with your counter-hegemonic advocacy?

Blending analytical frames to construct joined-up food policy in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies*. 3(1):140-94;

Parsons K and Hawkes C 2018 *Connecting food systems for co-benefits: How can food systems combine diet-related health with environmental and economic policy goals?* Policy brief 31. Copenhagen: WHO

Regional Office for Europe; Parsons K and Hawkes C 2019 *Brief 4: Embedding food in all policies*. In:

*Rethinking food policy: A fresh approach to policy and practice*. London: Centre for Food Policy.

<sup>144</sup> de Leeuw E and Peters D 2014 Nine questions to guide development and implementation of *Health in All Policies*. *Health Promotion International*. Published 10 June. doi:10.1093/heaprodau034

Browne GR and Rutherford I 2017 The case for ‘Environment in All Policies’: Lessons from the ‘Health in All Policies’ approach in public health. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 125(2):149-54.

<http://doi.org/10.1289/EHP294>; Government of South Australia 2018 *Global status report on health in all policies*. Adelaide; Government of South Australia and World Health Organization 2017 *Progressing the Sustainable Development Goals through Health in All Policies: Case studies from around the world*.

Adelaide: Government of South Australia; McQueen DV, Wismar M, Lin V, Jones CM and Davies M (ed)

2012 *Intersectoral governance for Health in All Policies: Structures, actions and experiences*. Geneva: World

Health Organization; World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2014

*Health in all policies. Helsinki statement: Framework for country action*. Geneva: WHO.

<sup>145</sup> <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1979-203>

<sup>146</sup> Slade, C., Baldwin, C. and Budge, T. (2016). Urban Planning Roles in Responding to Food Security Needs.

*Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 7(1):33–48; Murphy, M., Badland, H.,

Jordan, H., Javad Koohsari, M., and Giles-Corti, B. (2018). Local Food Environments, Suburban

Development, and BMI: A Mixed Methods Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and*

*Public Health*. 15(7):1392. Available from: doi:10.3390/ijerph15071392.

<sup>147</sup> Slade, Baldwin and Budge, *op cit*.

healthy food retail outlets (e.g. supermarkets), most often located in areas of low socioeconomic advantage.<sup>148</sup>

Examples from Victoria demonstrate what local governments can achieve when they are more fully resourced to undertake food systems work. VicHealth,<sup>149</sup> an independent health promotion agency, has a long history of facilitating local government action on diet-related health, including providing \$5 million to eight councils to address food security as part of its 2005-2010 *Food for All* program. In 2021, VicHealth<sup>150</sup> launched a *Local Government Partnership* program with a specific focus on building LG capacity in relation to food systems policy making. Along with a more supportive legislative environment, this kind of dedicated funding and resourcing may explain why we found greater engagement with food systems policy making by local governments in Victoria as compared to NSW.

The health, sustainability, and equity challenges created by global food systems have been extensively researched and documented. The adoption of healthy and sustainable diets by the world's population has been identified as 'potentially the greatest synergy between human and planetary health'.<sup>151</sup> COVID-19 disruption of food supply chains has heightened the importance of re-framing policy and regulation to create more diversified and resilient food systems, including at the local and regional level.<sup>152</sup> Action by all levels of government and all sectors of society will be required to achieve this goal, but we argue that **local governments can – and do – play a critical role in addressing food production and supply issues across Australia, and achieving real and lasting food security for all**. However, **comprehensive reform at state/territory level and federal/national level is needed to activate the potential of local governments**, and to empower them for enabling wide-ranging, lasting improvements to Australia's food system.

We support the recommendations proposed in the Consensus Statement on ***Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria*** (2022 - Appendix).<sup>153</sup> Drawing on that document, and our own research, we propose the following reforms to state-level law, policy, and funding in NSW:

- The Australian government should follow the examples of Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia in establishing a Public Health legislative framework that sets goals and targets at the Federal level and requires all states, territory and local governments to develop a *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* that is consistent with the Federal and state/territory-level plans, explicit measurable targets, and requiring action, monitoring and evaluation of key food system priorities
- As part of the Australia government's commitments on climate change, there should be a clear link between climate change, regenerative agriculture and human and ecosystem health and wellbeing. The Australian government's climate change agenda should require all state,

<sup>148</sup> Needham, C., Sacks, G., Orellana, L., Robinson, E., Allender, S., and Strugnell, C. (2020). A Systematic Review of the Australian Food Retail Environment: Characteristics, Variation by Geographic Area, Socioeconomic Position and Associations with Diet and Obesity. *Obesity Reviews*. 21(2):e12941. Available from: doi.org/10.1111/obr.12941.

<sup>149</sup> <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/local-government-partnership>.

<sup>151</sup> Gralak, S., Spajic, L., Blom, I., El Omrani, O., Bredhauer, J., Uakkas, S., Mattijssen, J., Ali, A.O., Sanchez Iturregui, R., Ezzine, T., Alqodmani, L. and Singh, S. (2020). COVID-19 and the Future of Food Systems at the UNFCCC. *The Lancet Planetary Health*. 4(8):e309-11. Available from: doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30163-7.

<sup>152</sup> Thilmany, D., Canales, E., Low, S.A., and Boys, K. (2020). Local Food Supply Dynamics and Resilience During Covid-19. *Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy*. 43(1):86-104.

<sup>153</sup> See <https://vicfoodsystem.org.au>

territory and local governments to act on both climate change and health, with an explicit focus on food systems.

- All Australian states and territories need to urgently amend their land use planning frameworks, including planning legislation, to address local governments' lack of power to approve or refuse food outlet types based on the healthiness of the food sold, and thus stem the phenomenon of 'food swamps'
- The Australian government and all state/territory governments need to develop a state-wide, integrated, and comprehensive Food System and Food Security plan that sets objectives and monitors targets at the Federal and state/territory levels (and evaluates progress). Empowering local governments and communities to determine local objectives and targets on priority food system issues, and work toward their achievement. This plan (and other Federal and state government activities on food systems) should be implemented and overseen by a new, whole-of-government Food Systems Committee, and be accompanied by dedicated, significant funding for local government food system policies and programs.

We urge you to consider these actions so Australian communities enjoy lasting food security in a more sustainable, equitable, resilient, innovative and healthier food system.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is any further information I can provide in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nick Rose - Executive Director, [SUSTAIN: Australian Food Network](#); Senior Lecturer, [William Angliss Institute](#)

Dr Kelly Donati; Senior Lecturer, [William Angliss Institute](#); Chair, [SUSTAIN: the Australian Food Network](#);

Dr Anita Peerson - Knowledge Broker, Institute for Water Future, Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU College of Science, The Australian National University

Contact: [nick@sustainaustralia.org](mailto:nick@sustainaustralia.org)



“  
Every seed I plant is  
a wish for tomorrow  
”

## Main Findings & Key Messages

- Reduces food budget
- Increases peace of mind about food
- Food with dignity
- Culturally appropriate, nutritious and delicious
- Accessibility (in remote areas)

### 01 Edible gardening was a source of good food for those who need it most

Households growing more than 30% of their own food by income (n=924)



“  
Single income, family of four with one being an adult with a disability and not working. No choice but to grow food but to make the budget work and eat well. We never eat out. We are self-sufficient in all vegetables and most fruit.”  
”

Low-income experienced female gardener, Anglo-Australian, 55-64, Warragul Vic

### 02 Edible gardening is very important to mental health

To what extent have your gardening activities resulted in improved mental health and wellbeing? (n=8642)

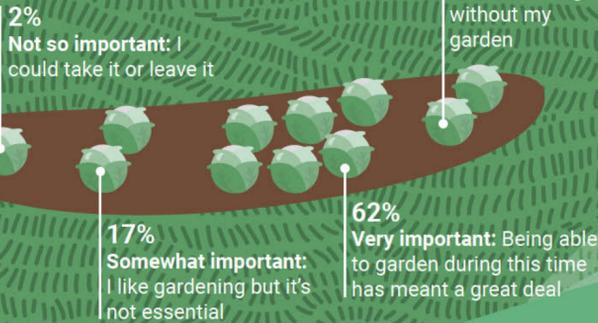


“  
My garden is my church. For a woman with a history of mental health challenges and supporting a family and husband with terminal cancer in his early 50s, my garden has been my way back to a happy, healthy state of mind. I'm back!”  
”

Female gardener, European Australian, 45-54, Melbourne

### 03 Gardening contributed a sense of focus and reduced anxiety for many

How important was edible gardening during COVID-19? (n=8597)

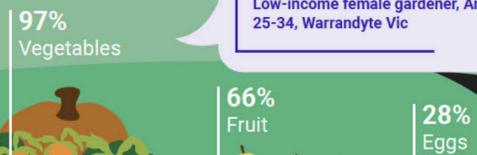


“  
Gardening gave me a focus. It provided hope and reinforced my personal resilience. Putting my hands in the soil each day redirected my fear and anxiety about our future - I was able to transfer it to action.”  
”

Experienced female gardener, Anglo-Australian, 55-64, South coast NSW

### 04 Edible gardening contributes to diverse and healthy diets

What kinds of food have you grown during the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=8925)



“  
It's very satisfying being able to supply pretty much all of the vegetables we consume in the house. [...] I've realised we've actually saved a lot of money on food....[W]hat has shifted throughout the pandemic is that growing my own food was once something I had to put a lot of thought and effort into. It is now second nature and the new normal.”  
”

Low-income female gardener, Anglo-Australian, 25-34, Warrandyte Vic

### 05 The abundance of the garden is a source of sharing and connection

What have you done with the food you've grown in 2020? (n=8662)



“  
It has meant we didn't need to shop as frequently reducing our risk of virus. We have eaten a more vegetable-based diet. We have plenty to share and swap locally which has increased feeling of community even when we had to socially distance.”  
”

Low-income experienced female gardener, 55-64, peri-urban Adelaide

“  
I'm so glad someone is recording this awakening. I feel that it keeps me in touch with the basis of our existence. It reminds me that the complexities of life can sometimes just require observation and interaction. It reminds me that the graciousness of life is abundant. These are qualities learnt in a garden.”  
”



## An Action Agenda to Make Australia's Towns & Cities Edible

### \$500M National Edible Gardening Fund

“Dietary-related ill-health and mental illness costs Australia around \$200B every year. For a tiny fraction of this, the return on investment on an Edible Gardening Fund could be enormous.

*Dr. Nick Rose, Sustain*

“As part of the COVID-19 recovery process, we are calling for the establishment of a national, co-financed Edible Gardening Fund as a long-term investment in the public health of all Australians.

*Dr. Kelly Donati, Sustain*



#### Urban Planning/Land Use

- › **Work towards land justice for First Nations** by acknowledging Indigenous land governance, support recovery of history and culture, and enable First Nations communities to access their own land in towns and cities
- › **Prioritise urban food production** as part of vital city and town infrastructure
- › **Embed urban agriculture** in local and state planning schemes
- › Map and **audit available land**
- › **Facilitate access** to public land through specific initiatives



#### Finance, Subsidies & Incentives

- › A **\$500M national Edible Gardening fund** as an urgent investment in public health and wellbeing
- › This will support nearly **3000 new jobs** in local government, community gardens and social enterprises
- › A **\$40M national gardening infrastructure** and materials fund, co-managed by community and local government
- › A **\$50M annual grants program**, with \$35M for schools benefiting 2.6M students nationally
- › **\$45M in rates rebates** to support local government to incentivise private landowners to unlock land
- › **\$225M in social prescribing** supporting vulnerable community members to access subsidised local and healthy food as well as gardening and cooking classes



#### Capacity Building

- › **Make food literacy a key goal** and embed it through curriculum
- › **Create and distribute resources**, fact-sheets and how-to-guides
- › Host **workshops** and hold courses
- › Provide mentoring, advice and **guidance**
- › **Facilitate supported exchanges** between older and experienced gardeners with younger and new gardeners



#### Governance & Coordination

- › Resource and support **urban agriculture cooperatives**
- › Resource and support **local food networks**
- › Resource and support **Youth Food Security councils**
- › Resource and support **national and state sector coordination**
- › **Joint governance and coordination** at local level between councils and community groups



#### Infrastructure & Materials

- › Councils and communities to **make essential gardening infrastructure available** to groups and low-income individuals
- › **Free water connections** as of right for approved community gardens / urban farms
- › Mass expansion of **community composting**
- › National network of **community seedling nurseries**



#### Policies & Plans

- › National **commitment to eradication of food poverty** and food insecurity
- › Participatory **development of local, state and national food security** & food system strategies and plans
- › Implementation resourced through **dedicated food security and food system officer roles**
- › Participatory **monitoring and review**

“

"I think [COVID-19] has made many people realize how dependent and vulnerable we really are and the importance of taking back some of the control over our food supply. It has also shown we are capable of making significant change to the environment with our actions if we all work together."



# Sustainable Institutional Food Procurement

## CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

- Leah Galvin

“Governments have few sources of leverage over increasingly globalized food systems – but public procurement is one of them. When sourcing food for schools, hospitals and public administrations, Governments have a rare opportunity to support more nutritious diets and more sustainable food systems in one fell swoop.” *Olivier De Schutter United Nations Special Rapporteur On The Right To Food*

Public food can create public good – economically, environmentally, socially and for our health. Public (government funded) food procurement by institutions can be driven by a range of values: the kind of food purchased, from whom it is purchased and the production method. Institutions include – hospitals, universities, aged care, preschools, schools, prisons, workplace canteens/catering and community meal programs such as meals on wheels.

In May and June of 2022, I attended meetings and site visits in the USA, Canada, England, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland where I was researching models and approaches that increase the procurement by public institutions of local, healthy and/ or sustainable food. This infographic provides a high-level summary of the Churchill Fellowship trip. Additional detail is provided in the summary report, case studies, video, and bibliography, which complement this document.



## WHO DID I MEET WITH?

Procurement practitioners and sustainable food and/or procurement program managers

Governments – National, state, and municipal policy makers food procurement, sustainable food/diets, agriculture, economic and regional development

Change facilitators supporting networks and/or delivering services and capacity building for institutions (not for profits & universities)

Sustainable food systems advocates and campaigners

Commercial and social enterprises

Corporate food service provider

Applied and academic researchers

Food service staff, and

Food Industry bodies.



## THE HIGH LEVEL LESSONS.

### Outcomes and impacts of investment in values-based food procurement

#### Economic and institutional benefits:

- Increased supplier confidence, planning, and investment
- Bespoke e-commerce platforms supporting procurement from SME's and monitoring
- Increased food system and procurement transparency
- Enhanced *soft infrastructure* through collaborative networks/alliances building connections, skills, workforce and system relationships
- Cost neutral or cost saving from shifting to value based procurement
- Improved food service workforce job satisfaction

#### Community wellbeing benefits:

- Reduced food systems climate emissions through improved production methods and shorter supply chains, for example.
- Improved local/regional level food system 'self sufficiency' and resilience.
- Enhanced food system knowledge

#### Health and nutrition benefits:

- Improvements in food access, quality and the nutrition value of menus
- New product development



### Challenges

#### Operational

- Perceptions about budget impacts
- Improving food service in institutions is low in organisational priorities
- Food supply (for e.g., availability and seasonality) knowledge gaps
- Lack of transparency in the food procurement systems
- Procurement practices exclude or are challenging for SMEs

#### Policy design and engagement

- Siloed approach by government departments and different levels of government
- Procurement practices not inclusive of all scales of producers and processors

#### Perspectives

- Tensions between sustainable/ climate friendly food ambitions and agricultural sector goals
- Opinion based rather than evidence based policy making



### Enablers for values-based food procurement

#### Leadership and commitment includes:

- Active political, government, industry, and community support
- Institutional leadership
- Supportive legislation, regulation, charter and /or policy across key government departments
- Data driven approaches to policy making
- Ongoing investment from governments, industry, and philanthropy

#### Effective program and policy design and transition support includes:

- Time to plan/scope, design, facilitate and support change and improve system transparency
- Expert program teams
- Detailed mapping of current practice, constraints, and needs.
- Effective early dialogue, engagement, analysis and planning with food systems stakeholders
- Targets for economic, environmental, and social outcomes concurrently
- Technical assistance (research, connecting stakeholders, data bases) and capacity building
- Grants that encourage system innovation and build networks
- Investment in the 'middle' of the sector – distribution and connecting the supply chain.
- Networks that connect from the farm to the foodservice and enhance skills and relationships.

### DRIVERS FOR SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

“During the pandemic I think our lesson learned was that local food systems are very resilient and in terms of crisis can provide an alternative to really help support the food system. So, I think the more we support regional food systems, the stronger our economy will be in general.” Board member Greenbelt Foundation, Canada

“We want our regional food system to be strong. We want everyone including people who eat in institutions to eat healthy food. We want people to have a better understanding of where their food comes from. Because it makes them more informed eaters and more informed advocates. And they'll be more likely to support healthy food production, equitable food production over time.” Farm to Institution Network, New England, USA

“Maybe you've heard it so many times. But why public procurement because it is a lot of taxpayer's money that is distributed through that system and when we talk about public money, the public money should lead to public good”. Ministerial Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland

## SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT DESIGN PROCESS OVERVIEW\*



\*Adapted from the National Procurement Agency of Sweden. There are various well used, detail rich, models and tools that can be adapted to the Australian context. (See the Executive Summary for more detail)



## NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dissemination of the Churchill Fellowship trip findings to government, industry, and sustainable food procurement allies.

Work with key allies to engage with government, industry, and philanthropy to seek funding for:

initial opportunity and food procurement system mapping by state and territory across Australia,

establishing a not-for-profit organisation with cross sectoral governance to lead and coordinate long term action with food system stakeholders and allies, and

state or regional based demonstration projects which target social, economic, health and environmental food system outcomes simultaneously.

# Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria

A Consensus Statement



# Acknowledgments

This Consensus Statement was prepared and approved by VicHealth and the Food Systems and Food Security Working Group in December 2021.

Editing was led by Vanessa A. Clarkson (independent consultant) with financial support provided by VicHealth. The Working Group would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that provided insights and materials to support the development of the Consensus Statement. The views expressed in this Consensus Statement do not reflect an official policy position of VicHealth or the Government of Victoria.

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Working Group acknowledges the Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, their enduring connections to land, sea, sky and community and pays its respects to Elders past and present. In the spirit of reconciliation, the Working Group affirms that the Traditional Custodians never ceded these lands, and severe and enduring harm has ensued. The Working Group recognises the food sovereignty of Victoria's First Nations peoples and their rights to self-determine their food systems and extends that recognition to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Citation: *Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group, 2022. Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement.*

Design by Andrei Sarusi / Bangarang Creative

# Supporters of the Consensus Statement



# Foreword by Prof. Mark Lawrence

A healthy, regenerative and equitable food system is a fundamental prerequisite for personal, population and planetary health and well-being. For millennia First Nations peoples thrived as they enjoyed such a food system(s) in the land we now know as Victoria. A little over 200 years after colonisation, that food system has transitioned to one that is unhealthy, ecologically disruptive, and inequitable. Although it is unrealistic to transition 'back' to Victoria's pre-colonisation food system, transitioning towards a future food system that reinstates health, environmental and social qualities into its structure and operation is vital for the population's survival.

Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement is a timely and powerful call to action for the State and Local Governments and others to bring about the urgently needed transition to the Victorian food system. The Consensus Statement continues Victoria's global leadership in tackling food system challenges. In 1987 the state government launched a comprehensive Food and nutrition policy – the first of its type anywhere in the world. However, the Consensus Statement is more than just another food policy document. It provides a critical analysis of the Victorian food system's underlying social, political and ecological determinants. It articulates a shared vision of what a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system in Victoria would look like. And crucially, it outlines actions to challenge the current determinants and achieve the shared vision.

Recognition of the need to transition food systems now dominates the thinking behind activities ranging from global food systems summits to local food production, processing, distribution and retail innovations. What this transition might look like is contested. Some stakeholders believe the solution to a broken food system involves a 'productionist' agenda characterised by increasing investment in technological innovations to create larger food production yields and more efficient food processing. Such developments can make an important contribution, though of themselves will not be sufficient to bring about the necessary transition to avert current threats of wide-scale ecological breakdown and endemic food insecurity. Increasingly, practitioners and researchers are identifying that the scale of the transition needs to extend beyond simple adjustments and nudges to different components of the food system. Instead, a fundamental transformation of the whole food system is required.

The Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Working Group, established under the auspices of VicHealth, is to be congratulated for producing this Consensus Statement and incorporating guidance on how a food system transformation can be accomplished. Grounded in a rights-based approach, the Working Group has proposed ten 'leverage points' which collectively will create the conditions necessary to drive a transition towards a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system. Each of these leverage points is underpinned by research and so informed by supporting evidence. The leverage points' description is also accompanied by insightful case studies to illustrate global best practices and demonstrate that transitions are already underway. Helping translate the Consensus Statement's valuable recommendations into urgent and meaningful activities now requires all of us to support its call on State and Local Governments and others to act.

**Mark Lawrence**  
**Professor of Public Health Nutrition**

*Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition  
Deakin University*

# Executive Summary

Life on Earth is imminently facing its biggest ever threats with multiple converging crises, including rapid global warming and abrupt climate change, the degradation of our planetary life-support systems and growing public health disparities. Our food system – the way we feed ourselves – is a major engine powering these crises.

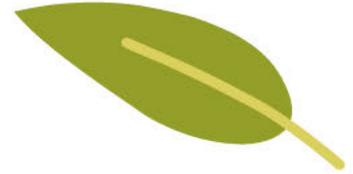
Yet, while we have known of these crises for decades, the events of the past two years, including bushfire devastation, unprecedented floods and COVID-19, have shone a bright light on the extreme shortcomings of our food system. Not least, the extensive disruption and economic impact of COVID-19, including multiple lockdowns, business closures and cutbacks of social welfare (after JobSeeker supplements ended) has meant that food insecurity is a more prevalent and growing issue – with almost 1 in 4 Victorians (23%) reportedly relying on a restricted range of low-cost unhealthy foods due to running out of money.<sup>1</sup>

Though more apparent, food insecurity is not a new phenomenon in Victoria nor is it an inevitable outcome of crisis, COVID-19 or otherwise. Rather, food insecurity is the consequence of our systems, which in turn are shaped by political choices, failing to ensure that people live in circumstances in which they can provide adequate food for themselves.<sup>1,2</sup> We can and must do better to create the right conditions for a prosperous society and a healthy and sustainable food future for all.

In the context of rising food insecurity, the Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Working Group was established in April 2020 under the auspices of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to help coordinate the food relief response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Working Group membership was drawn from across the food system and included farmers, food relief organisations, social enterprises, academia, peak nutrition organisations and statutory bodies. After initially developing a plan to safeguard acute food security, the Working Group shifted attention to prioritising action towards ensuring long-term food security. This Consensus Statement is the outcome of that work.

Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria articulates a shared vision to guide the necessary transition of Victoria's food system. In line with evidence and global best practice, the Consensus Statement adopts a rights-based food systems approach to ensure that the path of transition is fair and inclusive and that decision making processes are underpinned by the human rights principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Transparency, Human Dignity, Empowerment and Rule of Law following the PANTHER framework.<sup>3</sup> The Consensus Statement proposes ten mutually reinforcing policy priorities, which call for action on key leverage points that, if implemented, would have the best chance of transition towards the healthy, regenerative and equitable food system needed.





### **Leverage Point 1: Right to Food Law**

*Create an enabling policy environment to transform Victoria's food system by legislating the right to food in Victoria and embedding it into all relevant State and Local Government policies, budgeting processes and activities.*

### **Leverage Point 2: Food Systems Governance**

*Strengthen food systems governance capacity by establishing a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.*

### **Leverage Point 3: Food Systems Monitoring**

*Advance better food systems strategy and policy design by establishing a comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring framework in Victoria's State of the Environment Report.*

### **Leverage Point 4: Agroecological Food Production**

*Support the transition to regenerative farming practices to enhance ecological function and build resilience by proactively supporting and resourcing agroecological solutions.*

### **Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure**

*Strengthen local and regional food systems by creating a Local Food Investment Fund to grow capacity, improve coordination and drive efficiencies in local food infrastructure.*

### **Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail**

*Transition all public sector food procurement and retail to preference healthy and sustainably produced food sourced locally or regionally by developing compulsory social and ethical food procurement and retail standards and implementation assistance.*

### **Leverage Point 7: School Food Systems**

*Transform Victorian school food systems and enhance food systems literacy by working with our educational community and allocating appropriate resourcing and investment.*

### **Leverage Point 8: Community Food Systems Strategies**

*Require, empower and resource local councils to lead the participatory development of community food system strategies by amending the Public Health and Well-being Act 2008.*

### **Leverage Point 9: Community Food Systems Planning**

*Prioritise and promote healthy community food systems by reforming Victorian Planning Provisions legislation to explicitly state the promotion of health, alongside economic, environmental and social well-being considerations.*

### **Leverage Point 10: Food Relief Models**

*Improve dignified access to fresh and healthy food by developing a new, coordinated and collaborative approach with the food relief sector.*

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# Our Food System at a Crossroads

Life on Earth is imminently facing its biggest ever threats with multiple converging crises, including rapid global warming and abrupt climate change, the degradation of our planetary life-support systems and growing public health disparities. Our food system – the way we feed ourselves – is a major engine powering these crises.

Food and fibre production in Victoria use over half of the state's landmass, and the agricultural sector contributes 14% of the state's net greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) – the fourth largest share of total emissions behind electricity generation, transport and direct combustion.<sup>4,5</sup> While we have known of these crises for decades, the events of the past two years, including bushfire devastation, unprecedented floods and COVID-19, have shone a bright light on the extreme shortcomings of our food system. Not least, the extensive disruption and economic impact of COVID-19, including multiple lockdowns, business closures and cutbacks of social welfare (after JobSeeker supplements ended) has meant that food insecurity is a more prevalent and growing issue – almost 1 in 4 Victorians (23%) reportedly relying on a restricted range of low-cost unhealthy foods due to running out of money.<sup>1</sup>

The cost of food insecurity is substantial now, and it will burden generations well into the future.<sup>6,7</sup> Yet while more apparent, food insecurity is not a new phenomenon in Victoria nor is it an inevitable outcome of crisis, COVID-19 or otherwise. Rather, food insecurity is the consequence of our systems, which in turn are shaped by political choices, failing to ensure that people live in circumstances in which they can provide adequate food for themselves.<sup>1,2</sup>

Despite these challenges, it is in the midst of crises and uncertainty that communities and organisations have come together and found creative ways of adapting to their emerging circumstances. All around us, we can see new possibilities for (re)organising ourselves around food and perhaps like never before, we have an opportunity to be open-minded to where these possibilities may lead.<sup>8</sup>

In recognition that we stand at a pivotal crossroads, this Consensus Statement results from people coming together and asking the questions that may lead to new possibilities for our food system – to reshape our food system and build a healthy and food-secure future for everyone, everywhere, at all times – a food system to nourish all.

## What is wrong with business as usual?

While there are many different ways of configuring our food system, today, the dominant model organises around an unsustainable growth imperative; the need to produce the highest output at the lowest cost and generate as much profit as possible in the shortest amount of time. This fundamental (yet often hidden) rule is what drives and shapes the industrial food system – it is its organizing principle and logic and how we measure its contribution to society in our accounting systems. Like the rules of a game, it is this output and profit maximisation orientation that structures the food system's behaviour in ways that form the particular patterns of production and consumption which are everywhere we look, including industrial farming, extensive processing to create ultra-processed foods, concentrated, retail-led systems, diets laden with the outputs of these profitable (for some) endeavours and atrocious volumes of packaging and food waste. These patterns are interconnected, predictable and doggedly persist despite perpetuating substantial social, health and environmental burdens.

In terms of environmental health, each connection in the food system requires varying amounts of energy (from renewable and non-renewable sources) and generates or stores warming GHGs. Australia's food system is organised in a way that makes it energy and emissions-intensive – amounting to 30-40% of Australia's total GHGs and accounting for the most food-related emissions per capita globally, and not by a small margin.<sup>9</sup> A large proportion of emissions comes from industrial agriculture, which is heavily dependent on synthetic fertilizers and other fossil fuel derived agrochemicals.

The reliance on fertilizers to maintain or improve soil fertility is costly for farmers and disrupts the functioning of soils ecosystems. Our soil is a non-renewable resource, judged by the average human lifespan. On average, it takes about a thousand years to form 10 cm of soil, but current rates of soil loss at 1 cm a year is vastly outpacing the Earth's regenerative capacity.<sup>10</sup> Given average topsoil depths around much of Australia's arable landscapes are around 20 cm, the loss of 1 cm of soil a year is a critical issue that threatens food security in the short term. Soil degradation has also been exacerbated by the widespread removal of deep-rooted native vegetation and replacement with (non-native) annual crops and perennial pastures, which in turn has promulgated habitat destruction, biodiversity loss and water scarcity.<sup>11-13</sup>

There are further significant challenges to the resilience of our food system. While we produce significantly more food than we can eat and export almost two-thirds by volume, we remain vulnerable to shortfalls in the domestic supply of fruit and vegetables – the very foundation of nutritious diets. Modelling suggests that even at current levels of vegetable consumption, which are far below recommendations for good health, Australia's vegetable production will only meet 62% of domestic demand in 2050.<sup>14,15</sup> The significant concentration of power in the food system also compromises its resilience. Concentration is especially notable at the retail stage, where two companies dominate the market. This imbalance of bargaining power can lead to unfair trading practices, which disadvantages producers, particularly small and medium-size, and generate financial stress among farmers.<sup>16,17</sup>

In terms of people's health, the food system also generates crises at every point. According to numerous leading health organisations, the health impacts of pesticides and the hormone-disrupting chemicals that leach from food packaging into our bodies pose a serious and urgent threat to public health.<sup>18</sup> Much of the food we now eat has changed beyond recognition from what our species evolved to thrive on over 200,000 years and our ancient ancestors before then. A large part of these changes is due to ultra-processing, which may include adding fats, sugar and salt, which our bodies are ill-equipped to deal with. Australians are the sixth-highest purchaser of ultra-processed foods globally, and these supply around a third of energy intakes.<sup>19,20</sup> As our bodies deal with the strain of improper nourishment, nutritionally poor dietary patterns lead to long-term ill-health, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes. In 2018, dietary risks contributed to 50% of coronary heart disease and 26% of stroke burden, 26% of bowel cancer burden and 26% of type 2 diabetes burden.<sup>21-23</sup>

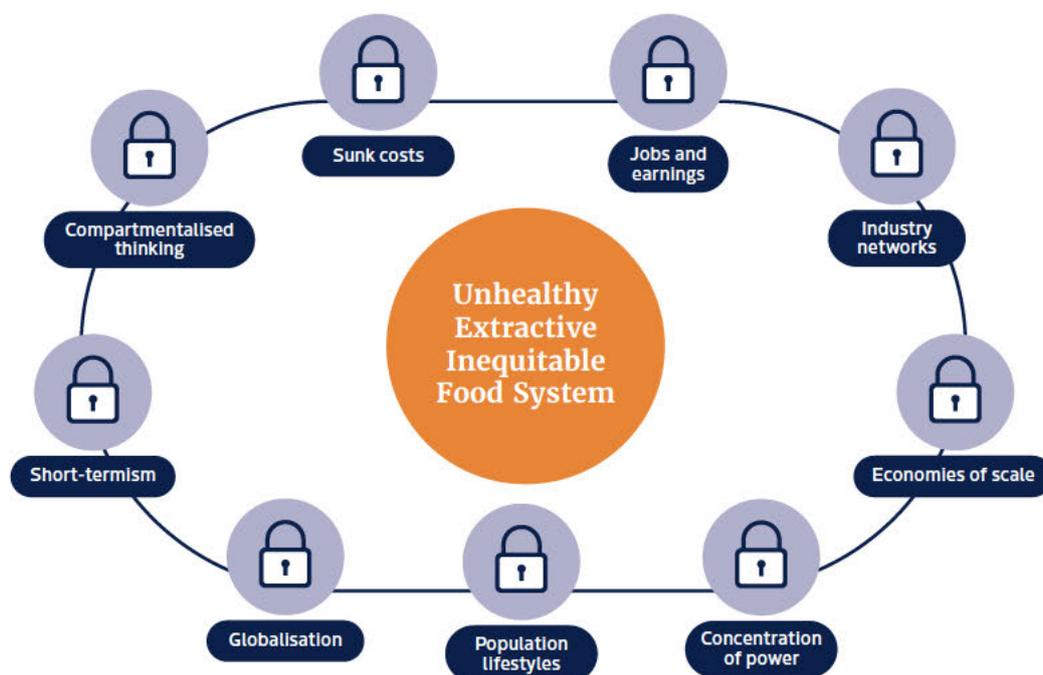
Laid bare, these stark figures are a sobering assessment of just some of the myriad true costs of our food system. Costs that are often not only invisible and consequently overlooked but are not included in the price we pay at the till and so give an illusion that food is cheap. But cheap food is a fallacy.<sup>24</sup> In reality, it is clear that the actual costs of our food system are borne beyond the supermarket receipt or share price – usually in our communities through compromised health and well-being and in our natural systems, which are depleted and degraded, even though we ultimately depend on them for survival.

It is a remarkable feat that our food system comes at such a high cost for us all, without even fulfilling the goal of nourishing our communities. Yet, there is enormous potential to derive collective benefits by dispensing these costs. But what is holding us back?



## What keeps our current food system in place?

Socio-ecological systems like food systems, do not materialise in a vacuum - their structures, processes and properties are shaped by the cumulation of political choices (or political inertia) over time about how society should be organised and what should be prioritised. Moreover, despite mounting evidence of the spiralling costs, perverse incentives throughout our current food system and between the food system and other systems now lock us into this particular way of meeting our needs (Figure 1). Some examples of lock-ins include sunk costs (e.g., public and private investment in knowledge-based and material assets), jobs and earnings, interdependent food industry networks, economies of scale, the corporate concentration of power, population lifestyles (e.g., increasing reliance on ultra-processed foods), globalisation (in that it can constrain the efficacy of national, state and local policies), short-termism and linear or compartmentalised thinking.<sup>25,26</sup>



**Figure 1.** Food System Lock-ins

Adapted from Geels, F., et al., *Sustainability Transitions: Policy and Practice*. 2019 and iPES-Food, *From Uniformity to Diversity: A Paradigm Shift From Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems*. 2016, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

Failure to appreciate the political context of systems and the existence of lock-ins and identify and address them using a systems approach leads to prosaic and reactive policies directed at 'solving' problems as they emerge. Though sometimes unavoidable, this approach will not transform the system structures and processes (i.e., root causes) that generate the issues in the first place. Instead, by focusing all attention on optimising our current system, we will remain locked onto the same path but dealing with a new set of problems - inequalities will not be resolved; rather, they will become even more entrenched and pronounced.

As a pertinent example, the current approach to addressing the problem of food insecurity centres on expanding the capacity of food relief programs that provide food to people in times of need. Food relief is undoubtedly invaluable for recipients; however, in a country that meets 89% of its food needs domestically as Australia does, food insecurity is not caused by a lack of food. Food insecurity is the outcome of our systems failing to ensure that people live in circumstances in which they can provide adequate food for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Examples of system failures include precarious livelihoods - stagnant and low wages, unemployment and under-employment, inadequate social security payments and support, insecure/unaffordable housing, unequal distribution of productive resources including land, cost of living pressures including increasing prices of healthy foods, particularly vegetables and fruit, and conversely, the proliferation of low-cost, ultra-processed unhealthy foods.

Addressing food insecurity is not, therefore, achieved by providing food for free or more cheaply, but by reorganising our systems, to enable for instance, increased incomes (including within the food system itself) so that everyone can purchase food at its real cost - rather than cheapening food to the detriment of human health and social and environmental systems. This is why the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and other independent bodies concerned with the sustainability of our food system are calling for a *radical transformation* of our food system by boldly reshaping the *underlying principles* that organise it from production to consumption.<sup>27</sup>

## Where to from here?

To transform our food system so that, as a matter of course, it generates healthy, regenerative and equitable patterns of production and provision will entail reorientating it around different principles that prioritise life - human and ecological health (as indivisible) - rather than short-term profits. If this seems like a lofty goal, that's because it is. Metaphorically speaking, we are tasking ourselves with redesigning the plane we are in mid-flight.<sup>28</sup> But the scale of change involved in reaching this goal does not make it unachievable. It just means that firstly, it is more important than ever that we work together towards it, especially by elevating the voices of people that are most disadvantaged by current arrangements, including those that speak for nature. And secondly, that we are open to the idea that the way we feed ourselves can be otherwise - that the undesirable properties of our food system are not accidental or inevitable but are a consequence of the decisions we take about how to organise society. Re-design is not only necessary; it is possible and well within reach.

Systems are reshaped by acting on leverage points - the places where relatively small changes can permeate outwards to produce significant changes in the system at large.<sup>29</sup> Leverage points hold the possibility of unlocking path-breaking models of production and provisioning. In our food system, leverage points include laws and governance models, how we choose to judge its performance, redirecting public spending on food, empowering communities to strengthen their local food systems together with their local councils and make use of strengthened planning laws that support the changes they would like to see. For food producers, it is about creating an enabling space for them to explore, with each other, practices that work with the environment (as opposed to doing less damage to it) - using the health of ecological systems as a basis for design. For our schoolchildren, it is about cultivating ecologically-orientated mindsets to enrich the worldview of the next generation of farmers, food producers and food citizens.<sup>30</sup>

Working with leverage points calls for a seismic shift in mindsets from dealing with problems to cultivating 'whole-systems thinking' and creating the conditions in which alternative ways of organising our food system can arise and find a foothold. As we have seen with the response to COVID-19, individuals and communities are naturally creative - they will self-organise and experiment when they have the space and capacity to do so - this is human nature. People want to build a bright future for all. Indeed, many have already started (or never really stopped), and we have much to learn from their endeavours.

Transforming the way we feed ourselves in Victoria will be essential to meet global commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and our climate pledges to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 and interim reduction targets before then. Fortunately, the Victorian Government is well-positioned to show leadership for food systems transformation. Its commitment to bushfire recovery, climate change, circular economy and rebuilding a fair and robust economy (post-COVID-19) provides a solid policy platform for developing an integrated and well-resourced pathway forwards.

## The Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Working Group

The Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Working Group (the Working Group) was established in April 2020 under the auspices of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to help coordinate the food relief response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Working Group membership was drawn from across the food system and included farmers, food relief organisations, social enterprises, academia, peak nutrition organisations, and statutory bodies. After initially developing a plan to safeguard acute food security, the Working Group shifted attention to prioritising action towards ensuring long-term food security. This Consensus Statement is the outcome of that work.

*Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement* articulates a collective reimagining of our food system in Victoria. The Consensus Statement is grounded in evidence, global best practice and adopts a rights-based food systems approach. It proposes ten mutually reinforcing policy priorities, which call for action on key leverage points that the Victorian State and Local Government(s) and others should implement to catalyse the transition towards the healthy, regenerative and equitable food system needed. The breadth of cross-sector support for this Consensus Statement recognises the importance of this work.

The approach taken to develop the Consensus Statement is in [Appendix 1](#).



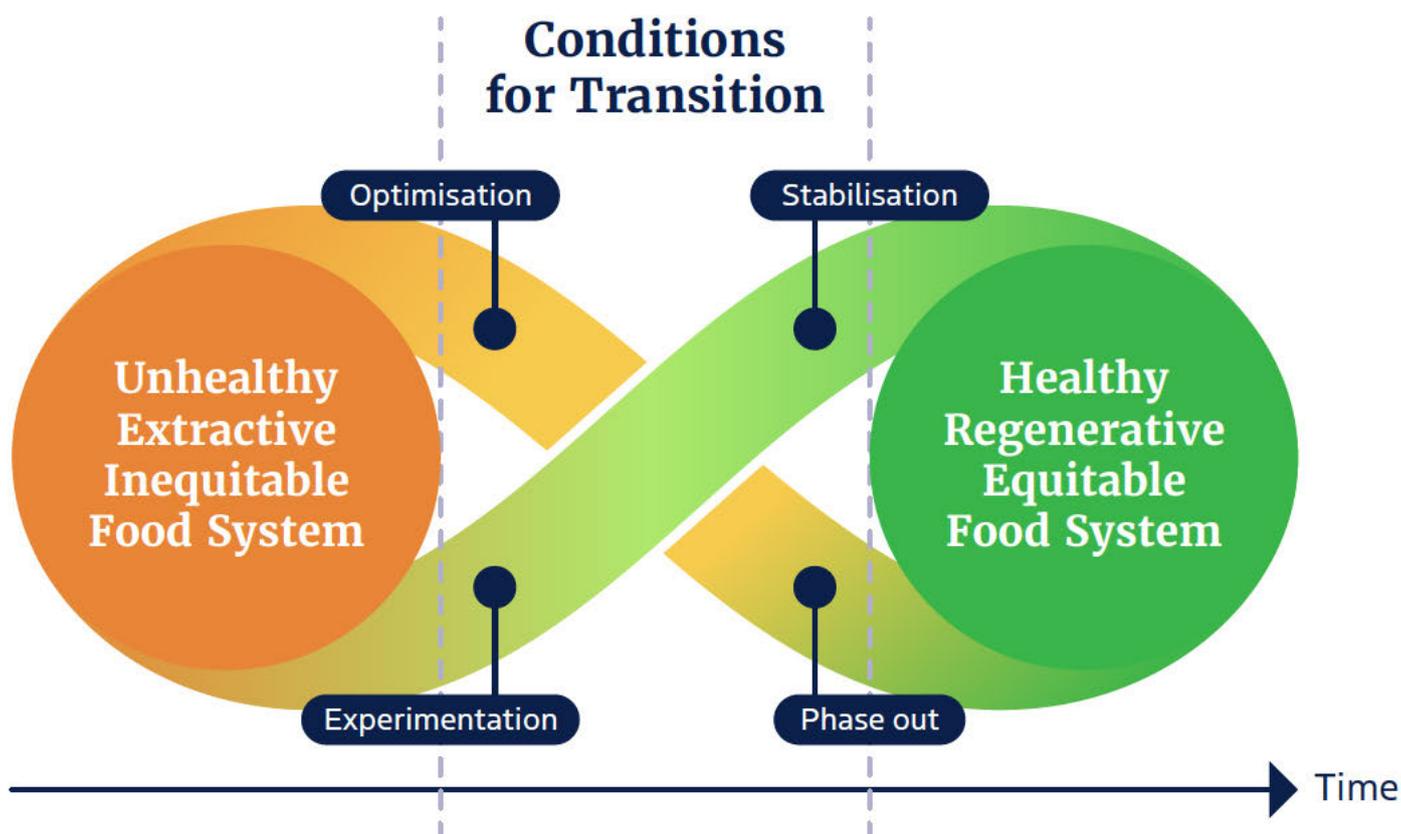
# Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria

A Consensus Statement by cross-sector organisations to catalyse a transition towards a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system in Victoria by activating key leverage points for change and calling on State and Local Governments and others to act.

This Consensus Statement articulates a shared vision, guiding principles and actions that governments, communities and individuals should take to mobilise a transition towards a healthy, regenerative and equitable food future for all Victorians. Implicit in the Consensus Statement's recommendations is a recognition that this transition, though critical, is not inevitable. Multiple factors keep us locked onto a path that is unhealthy, extractive and inequitable.

Unlocking path-breaking models of production and provisioning is contingent on cultivating the enabling conditions for different, values-based food system practices and arrangements to emerge from our farmers, food producers and communities, and for these to scale out and prevail (Figure 2).<sup>31</sup> In turn, enabling conditions hinge upon ensuring that the transition process is participatory and inclusive – that who gets to move us forwards and who decides how we will get there – is grounded in a rights-based food systems approach.





**Figure 2.** Food System Transition

Adapted from: Loorbach, D., Frantzeskaki, N. and Avelino, F. Sustainability Transitions Research: Transforming Science and Practice for Societal Change. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2017. 42(1): p. 599-626.

## Food System Vision

An equitable, regenerative, prosperous and resilient food system that ensures access to healthy and culturally appropriate food for all Victorians; a system that values nourishment, fairness, dignity, democracy, participation, inclusivity and stewardship of the natural environment.

## Guiding Principles

### *Upholds*

the right to food unconditionally - meaning that all Victorians, at all times, enjoy dignified access to healthy and culturally appropriate food that is produced and exchanged fairly, in ways that regenerate agroecosystems.

### *Values*

inclusion, self-determination and adopts a rights-based approach so that people, especially historically disadvantaged groups, participate in the decisions and activities to (re) shape the food system.

### *Provides*

healthy foods within planetary boundaries - diverse, nutritious, minimally processed foods that are produced and exchanged through agroecological and circular economy principles - conserving water, regenerating soil and promoting biodiversity while cutting greenhouse gas emissions, food and packaging waste and pollution.

### *Strengthens*

local and regional food economies - fostering social connection, diversification and resilience, and creating rewarding job opportunities.

### *Cultivates*

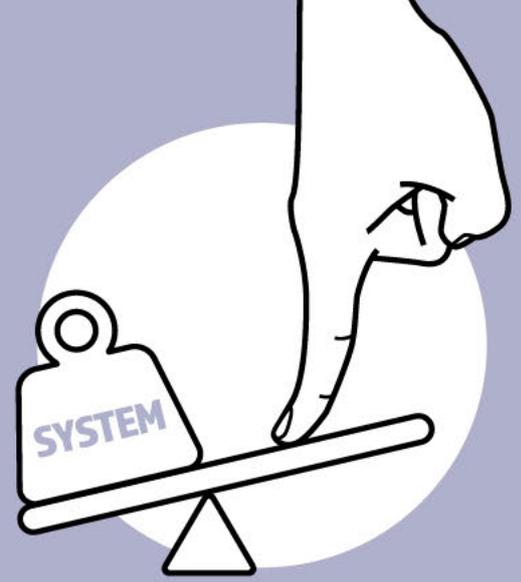
food literacy in the broader context of ecoliteracy - the vital knowledge and skills to sustainably grow, prepare and enjoy healthy food.

### *Promotes*

fair incomes and working practices for farmers and food workers and ensures animals equal regard and compassion.

### *Celebrates*

the traditional food practices of Victoria's multiple ethnicities and diverse communities.



## Leverage Points

The Working Group has identified the following leverage points as crucial opportunities to promote the necessary conditions for a fair transition to a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system:

### Leverage Point 1: Right to Food Law

*Create an enabling policy environment to transform Victoria's food system by legislating the right to food in Victoria and embedding it into all relevant State and Local Government policies, budgeting processes and activities.*

### Leverage Point 2: Food Systems Governance

*Strengthen food systems governance capacity by establishing a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.*

### Leverage Point 3: Food Systems Monitoring

*Advance better food systems strategy and policy design by establishing a comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring framework in Victoria's State of the Environment Report.*

### Leverage Point 4: Agroecological Food Production

*Support the transition to regenerative farming practices to enhance ecological function and build resilience by proactively supporting and resourcing agroecological solutions.*

### Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure

*Strengthen local and regional food systems by creating a Local Food Investment Fund to grow capacity, improve coordination and drive efficiencies in local food infrastructure.*

### Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail

*Transition all public sector food procurement and retail to preference healthy and sustainably produced food sourced locally or regionally by developing compulsory social and ethical food procurement and retail standards and implementation assistance.*

### Leverage Point 7: School Food Systems

*Transform Victorian school food systems and enhance food systems literacy by working with our educational community and allocating appropriate resourcing and investment.*

### Leverage Point 8: Community Food Systems Strategies

*Require, empower and resource local councils to lead the participatory development of community food system strategies by amending the Public Health and Well-being Act 2008.*

### Leverage Point 9: Community Food Systems Planning

*Prioritise and promote healthy community food systems by reforming Victorian Planning Provisions legislation to explicitly state the promotion of health, alongside economic, environmental and social well-being considerations.*

### Leverage Point 10: Food Relief Models

*Improve dignified access to fresh and healthy food by developing a new, coordinated and collaborative approach with the food relief sector.*

# Supporting Evidence



## Leverage Point 1: Right to Food Law

*Create an enabling policy environment to transform Victoria's food system by legislating the right to food in Victoria and embedding it into all relevant State and Local Government policies, budgeting processes and activities.*

The core purpose of our food system should be to ensure that all Victorians, at all times, enjoy the right to dignified access to healthy and culturally appropriate food that is produced and exchanged fairly in ways that regenerate agroecosystems. However, rising food insecurity, diet-related disease, environmental degradation and social inequalities show that our current food system is not pursuing this life-giving function and is failing our communities, especially our most vulnerable. While Australia is a signatory to international human rights laws that formally recognise the right to food, we need to incorporate provisions into Victorian legislation to allocate responsibility and establish the food systems governance mechanisms, policies, investment, monitoring and enforcement to uphold these rights.

The right to food has been internationally recognised as a human right since its inclusion in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The right to food is *"realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement"*.<sup>32</sup> The right to food is the legal concept and, as with all human rights, entails three forms of obligations for the government to 1. *Respect* the right to food – to not interfere with a person's ability to access food, 2. *Protect* the right to food – to ensure that others do not interfere with a person's ability to access food and 3. *Fulfil* the right to food – to pro-actively engage in actives intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security, and provide food to people in an emergency or in circumstances where self-provisioning is beyond their control.<sup>33</sup> In other words, upholding the right to food means a government is duty-bound to undertake the necessary steps to ensure that people live in circumstances in which they can provide for themselves and their families and achieve food security (Box 1) with freedom and dignity.

To date, at least 45 countries have taken the step of institutionalising human rights obligations in their legal protections, including through constitutional recognition or in legislative frameworks. While most examples are at a national constitutional level, precedent for sub-national level adoption also exists, including the US state of Maine, which recently updated its constitution (see case study). The Australian Human Rights Commission states that *"to ensure that the human rights standards contained in international treaties are observed and enforceable within Australia, the government must introduce them into domestic law"*.<sup>34</sup> So, while Australia is a signatory to international human rights laws that recognise and agree to the fundamental right to food *in principle*, this right is not recognised in domestic law, including the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (Box 2) and relevant government policy frameworks, meaning it cannot be legally enforced *in practice*.

One of the most powerful leverage points for change in a system is its purpose because it is this that shapes a system's structure and processes and lies at the heart of all of its behaviour.<sup>29</sup> As it stands, the purpose of our food system is not written into our laws which means that the State Government lacks the legal power to invoke the transformational changes needed to our food system, and Victorians cannot hold the government accountable to meet their obligations in this regard. To strengthen food systems governance capacity and address the systemic causes of food insecurity, the Victorian Government should introduce a Right to Food Act to amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and provide the formal mechanism to uphold these rights. Implementation of the Right to Food law, and in particular, where local governments and communities have responsibility, must have adequate financing and resourcing (see also [Leverage Point 2: Food Systems Governance](#), [Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure](#) and [Leverage Point 8: Community Food System Strategies](#)).

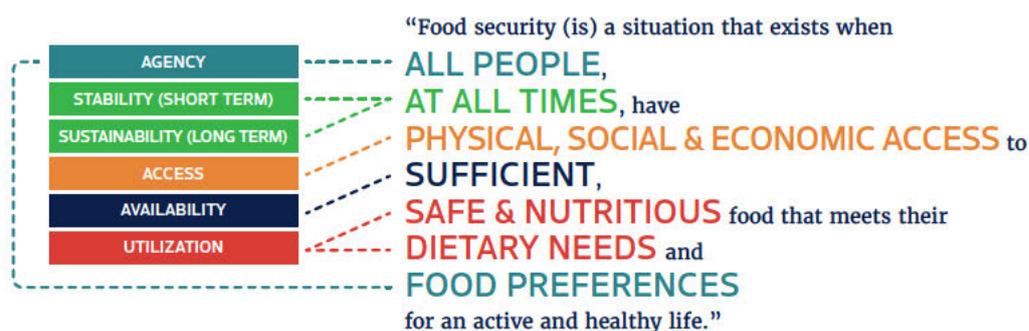


### Box 1: Food Security

Food security is not simply a situation where people are free of hunger. If this were so, the response to food insecurity would be to ensure people don't go to bed hungry at night, and policies would be geared around producing more food as cheaply as possible to achieve this outcome. But these actions would only address the immediate 'problem' of hunger. They would not manage the systems that manifest hunger in the first place (including food systems), nor would they recognise that freedom from hunger is not the end goal for a thriving and prosperous society.

The concept of food security extends beyond freedom from hunger to incorporate six interconnected dimensions:

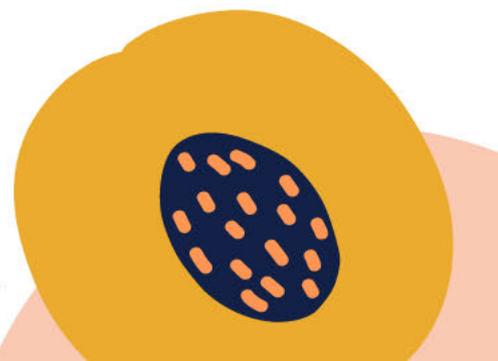
1. Agency – people individually or collectively can decide what foods they produce and eat, how to produce and distribute that food and participate in processes that shape food systems.
2. Stability – people have adequate access to food at all times, including not risk losing access to food due to sudden shocks.
3. Sustainability – food systems provide food security and nutrition in a way that does not compromise the economic, social and environmental bases that generate food security and nutrition for future generations.
4. Access – people can access adequate resources, including suitable legal, political, economic and social arrangements for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.
5. Availability – food systems provide sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality.
6. Utilization – people can utilize food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutrition well-being and satisfy all physiological needs.<sup>27</sup>





## Box 2: Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities' 20 Rights

1. Right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
2. Right to life (section 9)
3. Right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (section 10)
4. Right to freedom from forced work (section 11)
5. Right to freedom of movement (section 12)
6. Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)
7. Right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 14)
8. Right to freedom of expression (section 15)
9. Right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association (section 16)
10. Right to protection of families and children (section 17)
11. Right to take part in public life (section 18)
12. Cultural rights (section 19)
13. Property rights (section 20)
14. Right to liberty and security of person (section 21)
15. Right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (section 22)
16. Rights of children in the criminal process (section 23)
17. Right to a fair hearing (section 24)
18. Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)
19. Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)
20. Retrospective criminal laws (section 27)





## Case Study: Right to Food Law in Maine

### *Incorporating Right to Food into a State-level Constitution*

In November 2021, 60% of voters in the US state of Maine approved an amendment to the state's constitution to add a right to food clause into Maine's declaration of Rights, stating:

Right to food: All individuals have a natural, inherent and unalienable right to food, including the right to save and exchange seeds and the right to grow, raise, harvest, produce and consume the food of their own choosing for their own nourishment, sustenance, bodily health and well-being, as long as an individual does not commit trespassing, theft, poaching or other abuses of private property rights, public lands or natural resources in the harvesting, production or acquisition of food.

*Maine Constitution, Article 1, §25*



The right to food amendment, the first of its kind in the US, had already been cleared by the state legislature earlier in the year (it passed by 73% House and 70% Senate), which then sent it to voters following the state's rules for amending the constitution. Reports suggest similar provisions are being considered in other US states.<sup>35</sup>

This constitutional update follows a long history in developing progressive food laws, which gives residents more control over how their food is grown, distributed and sold. In 2007, Maine became the first US state to introduce an explicit food sovereignty law – An Act to Recognise Local Control Regarding Food Systems - which permits municipalities to regulate their local food systems.

To date, the food sovereignty law has prompted nearly 100 Maine cities and towns (of 500) to pass local ordinances (formerly titled Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance). A key driver for the food sovereignty law has been the protection and promotion of small-scale farmers who were previously subject to exorbitant regulatory compliance costs to adhere to regulations designed for larger operators.<sup>36</sup> The diffusion of these local ordinances has spurred interest from small growers and producers, as the law allows them to sell directly to customers on-site.<sup>37</sup>

Other states, including Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and North Dakota, have introduced similar legislation.



## Leverage Point 2: Food Systems Governance

*Strengthen food systems governance capacity by establishing a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.*

Realizing the right to food is not solely a means of addressing food insecurity but is a distinct objective in itself – guiding an approach to food systems governance that is founded on the principles of dignity and accountability and that seeks to address the underlying structures and processes that give rise to the problem of food insecurity in the first place. Despite extensive knowledge of the issues associated with our current food system, the pace of transition to a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system is slow – held up in part by a compartmentalized and short-term approach to policy development. However, siloed policymaking is ineffective in responding to entrenched, cross-cutting systemic challenges. We need an integrated and rights-based governance model that reaches across political boundaries, transcends electoral cycles and meets the needs of Victorians where they are.

The events of the past two years, including bushfire devastation, unprecedented floods and COVID-19, have shone a bright light on the extreme shortcomings of our food system. Not least, the extensive disruption and economic impact of COVID-19, including multiple lockdowns, business closures and cutbacks of social welfare (after JobSeeker supplements ended) has meant that food insecurity is a more prevalent and growing issue – estimated to affect almost 1 in 4 Victorians.<sup>1</sup> These multiple converging crises and other contextual pressures, including (but not limited to) population growth, urbanization, climate change and the rapid degradation of nature, warrant a new integrated, long-term approach to food governance based on systems thinking. The Victorian Government is well-positioned to show leadership across the whole food system and has a proven track record of working effectively towards a common agenda across portfolios. Recent examples of the [Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund](#), [Recycling Victoria: A New Economy](#), childhood obesity prevention, [Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan](#), [Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedge](#), and [Agricultural Land](#) and [Agriculture Workforce Plan](#), are cases in point.

A food systems governance model which integrates considerations across the totality of the food system must also facilitate and ensure participation by Victorians – especially by elevating the voices of people that are most disadvantaged and impacted by current arrangements, including those that speak for nature. Adopting a rights-based approach to food systems transformation is critical for ensuring a fair and inclusive transition because it means that decision making processes for food systems governance are underpinned by the human rights principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Transparency, Human Dignity, Empowerment and Rule of Law following the PANTHER framework.<sup>5</sup> A recent systematic review concluded that rights-based approaches, including the right to food and food sovereignty, have demonstrated potential to strengthen efforts to improve food security across a wide range of contexts.<sup>38</sup>

A suitable mechanism to implement a rights-based systems approach to food governance would be in the form of a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee housed within the Department of Premier and Cabinet.<sup>25,39</sup> The Committee would require ministerial and departmental membership spanning the Health, Environment, Agriculture, Regional Development, Planning and Education portfolios, and it would need to build multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks that support participation and representation, including the voices of historically disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable groups.



The Committee would be responsible for:

- Planning and overseeing a state-level food system strategy and investment plan,
- Monitoring and measuring the performance of the Victorian food system (see also [Leverage Point 3: Food Systems Monitoring](#))
- Advising and making recommendations to the government on food policy issues,
- Fostering better communication among all food system actors,
- Assisting Victorians in understanding the food system and encouraging their involvement in food policy setting, particularly at a local level,
- Educating committee members about each other's roles and perspectives,
- Facilitating research on food systems.<sup>40</sup>



## Case Study: The Massachusetts Food Policy Council

### *Instituting a Whole-of-government Food Systems Governance Model*

Established in 2010 through state legislation, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (the Council) *“works to increase farming and sales of Massachusetts grown foods and support programs to bring healthy foods to everyone in the state”*.<sup>41</sup> Council membership includes senior officials drawn from departments in state government, including the Agricultural Resources, Housing and Economic Development, Public Health, Environmental Protection, Education, and Transitional Assistance. In addition, there are legislative members (two senators and two representatives) and an array of food system representatives (e.g., farmer, food processor, academia) appointed by the Governor. Council meetings are open to the public.

The remit of the Council includes:

- Increasing production, sale and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods,
- Developing and promoting programs that bring healthy Massachusetts-grown foods to Massachusetts residents through various programs such as:
  - Targeted state subsidies,
  - Increased state purchasing of local food for school and summer meals and other child and adult care programs,
  - Direct market subsidies to vulnerable groups,
- Increasing institutional purchases of Massachusetts-grown foods and other programs to make access to healthy Massachusetts products affordable,
- Increasing access to healthy Massachusetts-grown foods in communities with disproportionate burdens of obesity and chronic diseases,
- Protecting the land and water resources needed for sustainable local food production,
- Training, retaining and recruiting farmers to ensure the continued economic viability of local food production, processing and distribution.

In 2013, the Council began creating a plan for the state's food system and launched the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan two years later. The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative (the Collaborative) was later established to promote, monitor, and facilitate the Plan's implementation.

Membership of the Collaborative includes broad participation of food system stakeholders from across the state. The Collaborative auspices various projects, including convening a network of more than 20 local food policy groups spread throughout the state to strengthen connections, share best practices, and provide education, such as conducting a community food system assessment. Other projects include advocacy for adequate funding of the state's Healthy Incentives Program, food waste reduction, various working groups, and toolkit development. An amalgamation of philanthropic organisations financially supports the Collaborative.



### Leverage Point 3: Food Systems Monitoring

*Advance better food systems strategy and policy design by establishing a comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring framework in Victoria's State of the Environment Report.*

There is currently little integrated monitoring or reporting of food system impacts beyond productivity measures, limiting policymakers' ability to consider what trade-offs are being made and identify and prioritise actions to drive food system transformation for a prosperous future. We need to evaluate our food system's performance in terms of its capacity to affirm the right to food for all Victorians, including its broader environmental, social and health impacts, and formalise regular, comprehensive food systems performance monitoring to facilitate coherent policy responses.

For a long time, the performance of our food system has been measured on a yield per hectare productivity metric, aligned with the idea that its purpose is to supply enough food to stave off hunger and meet human energy needs. However, this simplistic measure fails to 'measure what matters' – whether our food system fulfils its actual purpose, which means doing so equitably, in a way that promotes health and without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs when their time comes.<sup>42</sup>

The external effects (externalities) of our food system on the environment and our communities are, for all intents, invisible, not accounted for (internalised) in the price paid and current assessments of performance. Looking at the environment as an example, our food system is the single most significant driver of habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, and catastrophic disruption to carbon, water, and nitrogen cycles. Yet while these externalities remain hidden, this continued 'invisibility of nature' drives a vicious cycle without a proportionate systemic response to counteract it.<sup>43</sup>

If we do not measure the actual impacts of the food system, in broader terms than productivity, then 'what matters' will continue to go unaccounted for in policy decisions that shape our food system and our future. True cost accounting is an economic assessment model that looks beyond the visible financial gains to the 'hidden costs' of food systems and brings them into focus so we can properly account for them. The concept is akin to a 'food systems balance sheet', which integrates and openly manages the trade-offs on the pathway to food systems transformation.<sup>44</sup>

Globally, many examples of food system balance sheets have been developed to shed light on the complex dynamics of food systems.<sup>45</sup> The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity AgriFood Evaluation Framework is one example and included as a case study. These sustainability frameworks can inform the development of a holistic food systems performance monitoring program, which the government could build into existing data collection and reporting mechanisms.

The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 includes a statutory requirement for the Commissioner to “prepare and submit to the Minister a periodical Report on the State of the Environment of Victoria prepared at intervals not exceeding 5 years”.<sup>46</sup> While the Victoria’s State of Environment (SoE) report includes a broad set of 170 indicators, many of which relate to food systems, the reporting is currently not organised in such a way to draw out the interconnectedness between our food system, our natural environment and our communities. For example, the framework for the 2018 SoE report includes chapters on the state of our natural systems, including air, water, land, biodiversity, and the impacts of climate change. It also has chapters with assessments on two critical social-environmental systems – transport and energy. However, a ‘report card’ of our other primary social-environmental system – food, is notably absent.<sup>47</sup>

The SoE report has begun transitioning to a new framework that enables progress reporting against the SDGs (the first state government to do so).<sup>47</sup> In recognising that transforming food systems is integral to achieving the SDGs, the SoE report provides an avenue to address this shortfall in food systems performance monitoring. Moreover, the statutory obligations of the SoE report give a direct mechanism for ministerial influence and open a pivotal window of opportunity to identify and drive priority actions to transform our food system and generate improved social, environmental, health and economic outcomes.





## Case Study: The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Framework for AgriFood

*Adopting a Systems Approach to Measuring and Monitoring Food System Performance*

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) is an initiative hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme.<sup>48</sup> Inspired by the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, which revealed the economic inconsistency of inaction with regard to climate change, Environments Ministers from the governments of the G8+5 countries agreed to address the economic invisibility of nature.<sup>49</sup> TEEB emerged from this decision.

The ‘TEEBAgriFood Evaluation Framework’ (the Framework) supports a holistic assessment of food system performance by incorporating its most significant externalities across environmental, economic, health, and social dimensions. The Framework contrasts to the conventional, compartmentalized approach to evaluating isolated aspects of the food system, for instance, considering only the retail sector or economic metrics. Instead, it draws attention to how the food system elements interact to form (and reproduce through ongoing feedback loops) the system as a whole and the outcomes it generates.

The Framework (Figure 3) includes four elements – stocks, flows, outcomes, and impacts. Stocks comprise the four capitals (natural, produced, human, and social) that form the basis of the food system – the essential ‘wealth’ or goods drawn upon to produce and circulate food to people. The stocks underpin a variety of flows, which can be materials or information. Income, value added to the economy and food outputs are the most apparent material drivers/flows of the food system. However, there are also ‘intermediate’ goods like purchased agricultural inputs (labour, water, energy, agrochemicals etc.), and ecosystem services (pollination, nutrient cycling etc.). Residual material flows, including pollution (GHGs, fertilizer run-off, food loss and waste, etc.), are drivers of some of the most severe outcomes incompatible with our food system’s sustainability, and these must be measured.<sup>50</sup> The patterns and dynamics of the stocks and flows produce outcomes and impacts that regenerate or degenerate the stocks and produce positive or negative externalities. Of crucial importance is that outcomes and impacts are not end states but parts of continuous processes that loop back into the system as feedback.

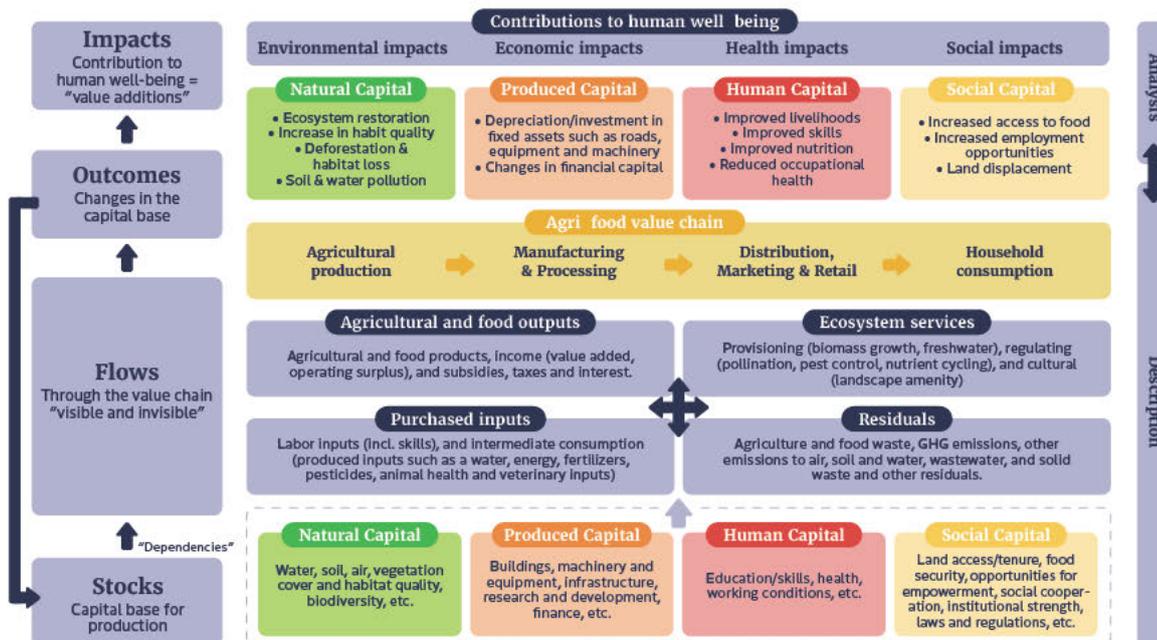


Figure 3. TEEB AgriFood Evaluation Framework<sup>50</sup>

The Framework aims to understand the extent of the food system’s externalities and promote a decision-making environment where the beneficial outcomes and impacts flourish, and the adverse outcomes and impacts diminish.



## Leverage Point 4: Agroecological Food Production

*Support the transition to regenerative farming practices to enhance ecological function and build resilience by proactively supporting and resourcing agroecological solutions.*

Over many years, driven by the need to achieve economies of scale (i.e., “get big or get out”), there has been an ongoing restructuring of our farming landscapes towards increasing consolidation, concentration and specialisation. These tendencies have come at the expense of many adverse environmental, social and health outcomes, including (but are not limited to) water scarcity, soil erosion and degradation, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss and the homogenisation of diets. We need to support the growing number of Victorian farmers willing to transition to agroecological practices through proactive investment and capacity building.

While the intensive production methods of industrial agriculture are widely acknowledged as being unsustainable, the approach taken to date to deal with these problems has centred on developing technologies to make industrial agriculture ‘work better’ and enable its continued expansion. However, through a systems lens, it is clear this response does not address the underlying structural arrangements and processes that give rise to these problems in the first place. Instead, we need to move beyond iterative tweaking of the industrial model and confront systemic issues with a truly integrated response.

An agroecological model offers a genuine alternative that orientates around producing diverse, nutritious foods, regenerating ecosystem processes (rather than running them down) and enhancing farmer livelihoods. A growing international community, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, recognise the transformative role of agroecology<sup>W,51-55</sup>

Agroecological practices are attuned to local contexts and draw heavily on local and Indigenous knowledge and insights from ecological science. In other words, there is no definitive list of ‘things to do’. However, in general, agroecological practices promote biodiversity and renew soil fertility through intercropping, crop rotation, mixed crop and livestock systems, and composting, and by stimulating interactions between different plants, insects, and birds to manage pests. Working sensitively to the unique, local ecosystems (agroecosystems) minimizes or avoids reliance on costly, scarce or damaging inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. As a result of a systems approach, multiple benefits are simultaneously realised. These include more diverse and resilient agroecosystems that conserve water, build soil health, restore habitats, promote biodiversity and reinvigorate food economies across rural, peri-urban, and urban communities through job creation.

<sup>W</sup> We recognise that agroecology is framed in different ways and there are iterations that extend beyond farming practices to agroecology as an alternative paradigm for food systems in a fuller sense. While it is used here in a discussion of production systems, the principles of an agroecological shift in food and farming, including community-led efforts to re-localise decision-making, are tacit in many of the other leverage points included in this Consensus Statement.

It is essential to recognise that agroecological practices are not a new model of agriculture. Agroecology is as old as agriculture itself – rooted in the traditional, place-based knowledge systems and cultures of Indigenous peoples.<sup>56</sup> Before colonisation, Aboriginal peoples were farming agroecologically across Australia, perhaps for millennia.<sup>57,58</sup> Acknowledging the past, ongoing and future contributions that Indigenous lifeways should make to transitioning to a regenerative food system is an integral part of our collective journey of reconciliation.

Victoria is fortunate to be home to some fledgling efforts to diffuse agroecological production systems. For example, a draft agroecology strategy is currently in development by the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.<sup>59</sup> In addition, many farmers across the state and Australia more broadly are already experimenting with alternative agroecological methods; however, they are not yet strongly connected to the food system at multiple scales.<sup>57</sup>

Much more needs to be done by the State Government to support these incumbent farmers and new entrants who aspire to farm agroecologically but are hindered for various systemic reasons. Opportunities for the Victorian Government to play an enabling role in scaling agroecology include (but are not limited to):

- Rebuilding a robust social welfare base for farmers that will maintain their livelihoods while transitioning to agroecological practices (e.g., transition loans or grants),
- Ensuring secure, long-term, affordable and equitable access to land and infrastructure for agroecological communities of practice, including safeguarding public land for growing (see also [Leverage Point 9: Community Food Systems Planning](#)),
- Making agroecology central to research, education and extension, including building capacity via investment in learning platforms and knowledge co-creation and exchange (especially horizontally between farmers (e.g., mentorship), and between farmers and their communities,
- Supporting the emergence and growth of networks that strengthen agroecological communities of practice,
- Providing access to local and regional markets (see also [Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure](#) and [Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail](#)).
- Improving the collection and recovery of food and garden organics for reprocessing into composts and organic fertilisers for farms and investing in infrastructure for farmers to produce their own organic fertilisers or soil conditioners by recycling nutrients on farms.<sup>57,60-62</sup>





## Case Study: RegenWA (Regenerative Agriculture in Western Australia)

### *Supporting the Emergence and Growth of Agroecological Communities of Practice*

Established in 2018, [RegenWA](#) is the leading network of more than 1,200 West Australian farmers and industry stakeholders who are identifying, implementing and sharing sustainable land management practices. RegenWA emerged from recognising the need to support and encourage farmers who are willing and interested in breaking away from conventional farming and trialling regenerative farming practices that may prove to be more sustainable (financially, socially and environmentally).

RegenWA's main objectives are to:

1. Facilitate a peer-to-peer support and learning network between farmers who are willing to investigate, share and demonstrate leading sustainability practices,
2. Support collaborative and independent research to evaluate the applicability of these leading production systems, practices and technologies,
3. Identify mechanisms that enable farmers to demonstrate their sustainability credentials to consumers who want to make more informed purchasing decisions.

RegenWA is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's state natural resource management (NRM) program and managed by Perth NRM. It is guided by a steering committee of 11 members who bring a wide range of skills in farming, land management, business and marketing and health education.





## Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure

*Strengthen local and regional food systems by creating a Local Food Investment Fund to grow capacity, improve coordination and drive efficiencies in local food infrastructure.*

The same logic of economies of scale that generate trends of concentration and consolidation in food production are echoed in the large-scale collection, processing and distribution infrastructure that moves food from producers to communities. To support the transition to agroecological farming practices will necessitate the development of local and regional food networks that move the food from these relatively smaller operations into our communities. We need to enhance local and regional food systems by investing in this critical infrastructure.

The changes in farming practices mentioned earlier (see also [Leverage Point 4: Agroecological Food Production](#)) are contingent on shortening the distance between growers and eaters by developing local and regional food systems. Re-localisation provides markets for farmers in transition and means that a more significant proportion of revenues are retained (particularly by the farmer) to circulate in the local economy and deliver greater prosperity for communities. For example, a UK study compared the multiplier effects of shopping for fresh produce in a supermarket and from a local organic box scheme, finding that every £10 spent with the box scheme resulted in total spending of £25 in the local area, compared with just £14 when the same amount was spent at the supermarket.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond economic development, stimulating local food systems can deliver multiple environmental benefits beyond the farm gate, including cutting carbon footprint through lower production and transport-related GHGs and producing less waste. Local food systems also reconnect communities with eating seasonal, diverse diets and shift agency to communities, especially and importantly, to vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrant workers and those on low incomes. This creates opportunities for communities to participate to a greater degree in decisions about what foods to grow and eat, how to do so, how they are processed and distributed – all foundational ideas embedded in a rights-based approach.<sup>64</sup>

There are many different ways of organising local and regional food systems. Food hubs are one example that seeks to directly connect small and medium-size producers with individuals and businesses in their local communities, which they would have difficulty accessing due to their relatively small production scale (Figure 4). Food hubs are a common model used worldwide but are only beginning to gain traction in Australia. Victoria, for example, is already home to several food hubs, including Baw Baw, CERES and Melbourne.

The nature of food hubs can vary in that they can operate on different scales and fulfil various functions. For instance, regional food hubs increase market access for local and regional producers by offering a combination of production, distribution and marketing services that allow producers to gain entry into new and additional markets that would be difficult or impossible to access independently.<sup>65</sup> Regional food hubs can complement and add considerable value to existing food distribution arrangements. For example, providing a single point of purchase for consistent and reliable supplies of source-identified products can make it easier for small and medium-size farms to serve public sector procurement contracts (see also [Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail](#)).<sup>65</sup> As most food hubs are firmly rooted in their community, they also often carry out several additional services, including improving access to healthy food by establishing delivery mechanisms to underserved areas, building food literacy by providing nutrition and cooking education, and increasing the awareness of the benefits of buying local food.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4. Food Hub

For food hubs or other enterprises that aggregate and distribute local food, limited funds can be a barrier to entry, growth beyond the start-up phase and long-term sustainability. To realise the many benefits of local food systems and build long-term, generalised resilience into a secure and nourishing food supply will require investment.<sup>66</sup> The Victorian Government should play a crucial role here by investing in essential local food infrastructure for markets, storage, processing and other necessary food system components (e.g., cooperative small scale mobile abattoirs) to support the decentralisation of production and distribution networks.





## Case Study: The US Food Hub Experience

### *Supporting the Pollination of Food Hubs in the US through Increased Government Recognition of their Value and Sustained Investment in their Infrastructure*

In 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), under the Obama administration, established the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” Initiative to strengthen connections between farmers and communities by developing local and regional food systems.<sup>67</sup> The project task force identified early on that small and medium-size producers lacked critical infrastructures, such as warehousing and vehicles, and services, that if made available, would allow them to take advantage of the growing demand for local and regional food in larger volume markets, such as public sector procurers including schools and hospitals.<sup>67</sup>

The USDA partnered with the Wallace Center (a non-profit organisation working to transform the food system) to create the National Food Hub Collaboration, which brought together practitioners and researchers to pilot, test and share successful models of values-based food systems. Although the project did not have a budget, the Collaboration highlighted existing, sometimes overlooked, funding available to build local and regional food systems.

Later on, the 2014 Farm Bill introduced specific funding for the Local Food Promotion Program – a \$150 million<sup>x</sup> investment over five years allocated for farmers markets and projects that develop, coordinate and expand local and regional food enterprises like food hubs. Grants are available for planning stages (\$5,000 to \$25,000), such as conducting feasibility studies, market research, accessing training or technical assistance, or expanding infrastructure (\$25,000 to \$100,000).<sup>68-70</sup>

As a result of the increased recognition of the value (social, economic, and environmental) of local and regional food systems and investment in them, the food hub model has expanded rapidly in the US. According to the USDA Food Hub Directory, there are over 200 food hubs across the US, compared with fewer than 50 in 2000.<sup>71</sup> The National Food Hub Survey in 2019 also demonstrates how food hubs have become a critical connecting point to enhance the flow of locally produced healthy food (particularly fresh produce, eggs, meat, and poultry) into the communities they serve, including vulnerable groups.<sup>72</sup> Notable features of the US food hub landscape include:

- Food hubs connect from three to 190 producers per hub, with an average of 48 producers,
- 39% of hubs have a primarily wholesale business model; 32% have a hybrid model of both wholesale and direct to consumer, and 22% are primarily direct to consumer,
- 56 food hubs spent more than \$31.8 million on purchases from small and medium-sized farms,
- 74 food hubs reported more than \$174 million in combined revenue from product sales, with an average revenue of \$2.4 million per hub,
- More than half of food hubs are located in low income, low access communities – emphasising their role in supporting food security in vulnerable groups,
- Over half of food hub management positions are held by women, and 14% by people of colour,
- The proportion of food hubs over five years old has increased since 2013, and established hubs employ more people – demonstrating the maturity of the sector,
- 44% of food hubs received federal government funding and 22% state government funding.

<sup>x</sup> All dollar amounts in this case study are USD.



## Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail

*Transition all public sector food procurement and retail to preference healthy and sustainably produced food sourced locally or regionally by developing compulsory social and ethical food procurement and retail standards and implementation assistance.*

Every day vast quantities of foods and beverages are served and sold in public settings across Victoria, from schools, tertiary institutions and healthcare services to food relief and emergencies, representing an extensive population reach, including vulnerable groups. While the Victorian Government has taken some steps to prioritise fresh, healthy and locally sourced food in some settings, there remains significant scope to enhance this work by mandating, monitoring and enforcing more integrated standards, which include sourcing from Victorian farmers using or transitioning to agroecological practices via local and regional food networks.

The Victorian Government's [Healthy Choices framework](#) aims to increase the procurement and provision of healthy foods and drinks in public facilities, including public hospitals and health services, sport and recreation centres, workplaces and parks, tertiary institutions and emergency food relief (the latter is under development - see also [Leverage Point 10: Food Relief Models](#)). There is also the voluntary School Canteens and other Food Services Policy introduced in 2006, which applies in school settings (see also [Leverage Point 7: School Food Systems](#)). While Healthy Choices has supported many improvements and exemplary practices in public sector food procurement and provision, these standards are only (recently) mandatory for hospitals and health services.<sup>73</sup> Beyond these settings, Healthy Choices is incentivised but not mandated or monitored.

Victoria is uniquely placed in providing government funding for the Healthy Eating Advisory Service, which offers free technical assistance and a range of tools, resources and training opportunities to support settings to supply and promote healthy foods and drinks (through retail, vending and catering). However, given the scale and complexity of the public sector, transformative change is slow, and evaluations to date have shown low compliance with the Healthy Choices framework in some settings.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, while the primary focus is on improving nutrition, Healthy Choices does not currently include local, regional or agroecological sourcing parameters. For farmers to take on the challenge of diversifying their production and transitioning to agroecological practices and for local food economies (including social enterprises) to grow and strengthen, they need markets - one of which should be the public sector. To cultivate enabling conditions for this to happen will require building the capacity of local and regional food networks (see also [Leverage Point 4: Agroecological Food Production](#) and [Leverage Point 5: Local Food Infrastructure](#)) and working with procurement managers across the public service to map current arrangements and identify opportunities to progressively target procurement from proximate sources.

We need a healthy, regenerative and equitable food procurement and retail policy directive, which prioritises producers using or transitioning to agroecological practices through local and regional food networks and provides a clear signal to the market that the Victorian Government will lead by example and spend taxpayer dollars in a way that provides values for money as well as value for money - by setting the standards, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and implementation assistance for the purchase, subsidy, provision, distribution, preparation, service and sale of food. In so doing, public sector food procurement and retail represents a significant lever to catalyse the transformation of the food system at large.



## Case Study: The Good Food Purchasing Program

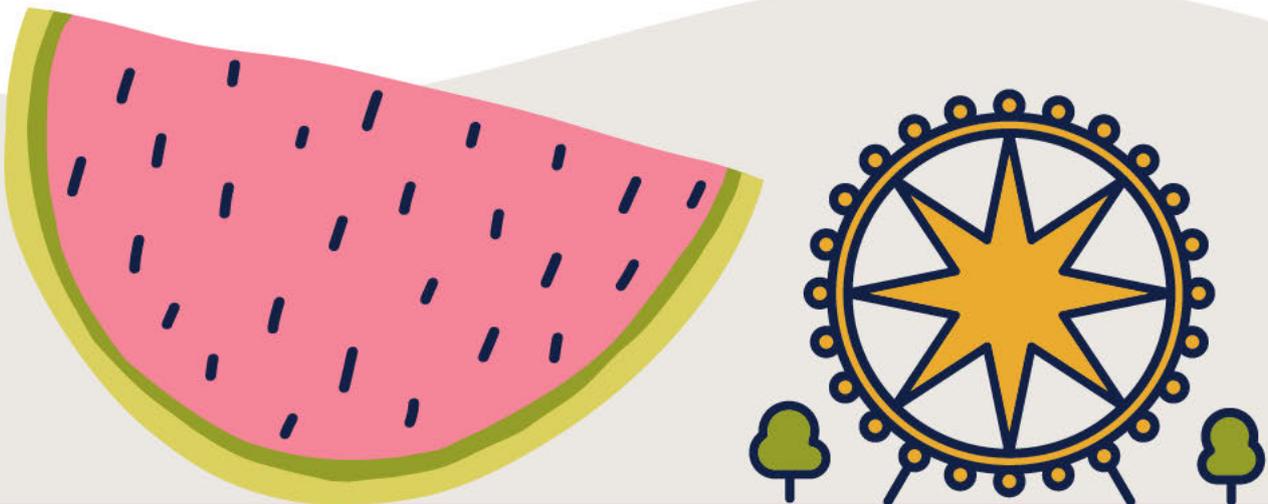
### *Institutionalising Healthy and Sustainable Public Food Procurement Standards*

Established in 2012, the Good Food Purchasing Program (the Program) works to transform the procurement policies of public institutions across America by redirecting their buying power towards five core values - local economies, nutrition, a valued workforce, environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

The Program provides a metric based, flexible framework to guide holistic action, alongside a comprehensive suite of tools, technical support and a rigorous certification system. To date, 12 cities have enrolled in the Program, collectively redirecting billions of taxpayer dollars and transforming local food systems in the process. Example impacts of the inaugural Program in the Los Angeles Unified School District include:

- Redirecting \$17 million<sup>Y</sup> to purchase from local growers and manufacturers,
- Creating 220 new, well-paid local food system jobs,
- Shifting the purchase of wheat for approximately 50 million annual servings of bread in-state, with no price change,
- Saving an estimated 19.6 million gallons of water weekly.

The Program is a project of Community Partners – a non-profit organisation that receives financial backing from city governments that adopt the Good Food Standards.



<sup>Y</sup> All dollar amounts in this case study are USD.



## Leverage Point 7: School Food Systems

*Transform Victorian school food systems and enhance food systems literacy by working with our educational community and allocating appropriate resourcing and investment.*

The food systems approach underpinning this Consensus Statement is grounded in an appreciation that the behaviour of systems (made visible through particular patterns of food production and provisioning) emerges from the nature of connections within and around those systems. This profoundly holistic, multi-dimensional view is nurtured when we foster ecoliteracy – a sensibility for the interconnectedness of all life. Ecoliteracy is multidisciplinary, and therefore it makes sense that sustainability enriches our children's core education as a cross-curriculum priority within the Australian Curriculum. In the context of this ecological learning, food is the rarest of tools that can connect children to themselves, each other and the Earth. Consequently, school food systems are a unique leverage point to catalyse a reorganisation of food systems at large, both by shaping the world view, systems sensibility and food practices of future generations and by changing the food made available in schools. We need to work with our educational community to understand how to best stimulate action to transform school food systems and resource and invest accordingly.

Schools are a unique connecting point in communities - where families live, work, and play together and where, as they learn and grow, children form lasting connections with the world around them. Food is the essence of so many of these connections, from sharing meals and conversation in the company of friends at recess, to learning how food grows in relation to natural cycles and where the food we eat comes from. Intentional or not, these connections are teachable moments woven throughout school life, offering unrivalled opportunities to engage the next generation with food in positive ways in their minds, bodies and hearts. There are also the connections made when changing the food bought and brought into schools, including 1. What food is purchased (such as local, diverse, healthy and culturally appropriate), 2. From whom (for example, small-scale family farms and other disadvantaged producers), and 3. From what type of production systems (for instance, those that lean more towards industrial practices versus agroecological) which can lead to ripple effects beyond the school itself into homes, communities and the broader food economy (see also [Leverage Point 6: Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail](#)).<sup>75</sup>

There is considerable scope to strengthen school food systems in Victoria and expand the integration of food into school life as a way to understand and read the world, and in so doing, build an appreciation for the importance of food in personal, community and ecological health.<sup>76</sup> The Victorian Curriculum Foundation through to Year 10 pares back food literacy, relegating it to a brief and disjointed appearance in only two of eight learning areas (Health and Physical Education and Design and Technologies).<sup>77</sup> The lack of value placed on food literacy as a core dimension of learning means that while children may have reasonable food and nutrition knowledge levels, they lack the practical skills, understanding and deeper connections (i.e., food systems literacy) that is only fostered through direct participation in food practices such as growing, cooking and composting.

Furthermore, all Australian states and territories have voluntary school food nutrition policies; however, adherence is variable and often poor, and monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are lacking. In Victoria, the State Government first introduced voluntary school food guidelines in 2006, with the School Canteens and other Food Services Policy.<sup>78</sup> Since the Policy's inception, research over the past 15 years has consistently shown poor adherence, and the latest survey in 2019 of 60 randomly selected primary schools showed none were compliant with the Policy.<sup>78-81</sup>

In recognition of the value in adopting a systems approach to transforming food in schools, the Food and Agriculture Organisation recently published the School Food and Nutrition Framework (Figure 5).<sup>82</sup> The Framework expands beyond what is generally regarded as a whole-school approach to school food – the curriculum and food environment – to broaden and include linkages across four synergistic areas of 1. Food environment, 2. Food education, 3. Food procurement and 4. An enabling institutional and policy context. While this Framework is relatively new, the approach it advocates underpins many existing transformational school food programs worldwide.



**Figure 5.** FAO School Food and Nutrition Framework<sup>82</sup>

Somewhat aligned with this systems approach to school food, some schools in Victoria already invest in developing and maintaining bespoke food literacy resources and voluntary programs (e.g., school kitchen gardens) or access and adapt shelf-ready learning materials for their classrooms and enforce a school food policy. However, though program evaluations show positive outcomes for improving food literacy, this approach can be burdensome to teachers by significantly impinging on their time and capacity.<sup>83</sup> It is also piecemeal, relying heavily on teachers' engagement with food literacy and likely further amplifies inequalities among schools and student health and learning outcomes. There is a significant gap and opportunity for the State Government to work with our educational community to strengthen school food systems in Victoria, including remaking connections to the local and regional food economies and nurturing the next generation of ecologically-minded farmers, food producers and food citizens.



## Case Study: California Food for California Kids

### *Transitioning School Food Systems and Building Food Literacy*

Established in 2010, the [California Food for California Kids Initiative](#) (the Initiative) from the Center for Ecoliteracy builds the capacity and commitment of public school districts to transition to school food systems that provide all students with fresh, locally-grown food and food literacy education to build ecological understanding. The Initiative offers various programs, resources and inspiration for school food service professionals, educators and school communities. It operates at multiple levels of scale, including a statewide network, regional clusters of school districts and partner organisations, and school district-level programs.<sup>7</sup>

An example school program is California Thursdays, where districts serve fresh, local ingredients one day a week and gradually transition their food service from that baseline. The success of this program has inspired other US states to launch similar programs, including Minnesota, Nebraska and New York.<sup>84</sup>

The Center for Ecoliteracy supports the Initiative's statewide network of 89 school districts across 33 counties (over 2 million students) with guiding strategies, coordinated activities, data collection and reporting and communications. Galvanised by the work of the Center for Ecoliteracy on school food systems, in June 2021, California became the first state in the US to permanently adopt free school meals for all kindergarten to grade 12 students to help address child food insecurity, eliminate stigma and support academic attainment.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>7</sup> School food systems look different in Australia to many other upper-income countries. Elsewhere and including in California, public schools often have catering services that routinely provide cooked meals to students in a semi-formal seated cafeteria arrangement. The Australian approach is more pared back. Children eat food in their classrooms or, weather permitting, outside, and the food provided by schools mainly acts as an adjunct to lunchbox food that children bring from home. If provided, school food is usually in the form of an onsite 'tuckshop' canteen or an offsite food delivery service. Indeed, many schools may not even have a food service. Despite these differences in operating models, there are still learnings that can be taken from the approaches taken by California Food for California Kids and other transformational school food models worldwide to apply to the Victorian context.



## Leverage Point 8: Community Food System Strategies

*Require, empower and resource local councils to lead the participatory development of community food system strategies by amending the Public Health and Well-being Act 2008.*

Community food systems are well-recognised as a powerful tool to address multiple aspects of social well-being, including improving diets, promoting environmental stewardship and contributing to local economic development.<sup>86</sup> Local councils are well-placed to play a central role in invigorating local food systems, particularly by facilitating and ensuring participation by community members. However, holistic food system planning processes and joined-up food policies are not currently within their remit. We need to empower our local councils to work with their communities to determine what steps they can take to improve their food systems at a local level.

Increasing healthy eating is one of the four focus areas in [Victoria's Public Health and Well-being Plan 2019-2023](#), which local councils must regard when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Well-being Plans (Municipal Plans). Noting that personal factors such as food literacy, taste preferences and momentary hunger do not solely determine people's choices around what to eat - the context in which choices are made profoundly shapes behaviour. The food system context includes the physical, economic, political, social and cultural arrangements in which foods are made available. This context can vary, for instance, in terms of the kinds of food available, their cost and distribution including, the number, type, location and accessibility (including operating hours and location) of food vendors (which may also be producers), as well as advertising (see also [Leverage Point 9: Community Food Systems Planning](#)).<sup>87</sup> Local actions to improve dietary patterns can be hampered unless these systemic influences are considered and addressed.

We already have a sense of what can be achieved when local councils are empowered and resourced to develop place-based food system strategies that meet the particular needs of their communities.<sup>88</sup> From 2005-10, VicHealth's Food for All initiative catalysed a range of strategic food systems programs across selected Victorian councils. Various initiatives flowed from this work, including the flagship Healthy Together Victoria from 2010-16 and the Department of Health and Human Services' [Healthy Food Connect model](#). Funding for these initiatives has since ended; however, several councils have recognised the benefits of an integrated and localised food system approach and continued without financial or resource assistance from the state government or statutory agencies. Eleven Victorian councils currently have food system strategies, and examples of this exemplary work in Greater Bendigo and the North East are included as case studies.<sup>88</sup>

Developing community food systems strategies with residents in a participatory manner will ensure that actions proposed to promote healthy eating in municipal plans align with the current evidence base of a systems approach to promoting health. Furthermore, there is a precedent for amending the Public Health and Well-being Act, suggesting this would be a suitable mechanism to create the right conditions for local-level efforts to transform community food systems. In 2008, following Recommendation 94 of the Royal Commission in Preventing Family Violence, an amendment was made to require councils in their Municipal Plans to specify measures to prevent family violence and to respond to the needs of victims of family violence.





## Case Study: City of Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy 2020–2030

### Developing a Place-based Food Systems Strategy: City of Greater Bendigo

The [Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy 2020-2030](#) (the Bendigo Strategy) provides strategic direction to guide the City of Greater Bendigo, partner organisations and groups to strengthen and support Greater Bendigo’s regional food system over ten years (Figure 6).<sup>89</sup> The Bendigo Strategy’s vision is that “*Greater Bendigo’s food system is healthy, equitable and sustainable and supports the local economy, culture, and health and well-being of our communities*” and underpinned by the following objectives:

1. Enable communities to access safe, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate foods and drinks
2. Strengthen and support a sustainable local food economy that enables the growth, production and sale of healthy food locally
3. Support local food growing and producing, sourcing, cooking and sharing knowledge, skills and culture
4. Reduce and divert food waste from landfill

The Bendigo Strategy’s Action Plan identifies a raft of initiatives that work towards the four strategic objectives and commits to annual reporting to monitor progress against pre-agreed success measures. Work in the Strategy’s first year included fundraising towards a new community food hub, establishing the Bendigo Food Pantry with an online ordering system, mapping water fountains in the region to promote public awareness and launching the YouFoods project with Bendigo Foodshare to tackle youth food insecurity.

The Bendigo Strategy was developed using a participatory approach with input from an external expert advisory group and engagement with more than 1,000 community members. The Strategy utilises a Collective Impact framework, which recognises that multiple entities working collaboratively towards a shared vision maximises efforts.

**Figure 6.** ►  
*City of Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy*<sup>89</sup>





## Case Study: North East Local Food Strategy 2018–2022

### *Developing a Translocal Food Systems Strategy for Multiple Local Government Areas*

Before 2018, much work was being done across the North East Victoria region to address food system issues at the level of local councils. However, it was becoming clear to agencies working in the region that many local food system issues crossed local government area boundaries and required a regional approach. In response to this identified need, the North East Local Food Strategy (the North East Strategy) was developed by health, local government, agriculture, tourism and community partners through a collaborative, cross-sector approach.<sup>90</sup>

The North East Strategy “aims to contribute towards a strong, sustainable and equitable food system in North East Victoria” by driving action to achieve each of the five Aspirational Goals:

1. North East Victoria has a coordinated approach and collective voice that drives a strong local food system,
2. North East Victoria has a thriving, diverse and resilient agricultural sector, where sustainable land management practices ensure natural resources are protected and enhanced,
3. North East Victoria has strong short food supply chains where producers have access to logistics appropriate to their scale of operation at all stages of the supply chain,
4. All community members have access to fresh local produce, understand the benefits of a strong local food system and make informed and healthy choices,
5. Waste is minimised through closed-loop food redistribution systems and initiatives that reduce the use of single-use packaging and support recycling.

While the lack of designated funding and COVID-19 have hampered the delivery of the North East Strategy, the following impacts have nevertheless been achieved:

- Formation of a multi-agency, cross-sector North East Local Food Strategy Action Group to progress the strategy,
- Development and adoption of a new local food policy developed by Indigo Shire Council, and incorporation of food into other local council strategies and planning,
- Delivery of capacity building events to increase skills in sustainable agricultural methods,
- Provision of support to community and school initiatives that enhance food literacy, for example, providing spaces to grow food and home wicking beds, organizing food swaps, and supporting community or school gardens,
- Securement of funds to:
  - Gather community input into two projects - Short Food Supply Chains: Opportunities and Challenges for Farmers in North East Victoria and The Open Road Project,
  - Update the [Mountain to Murray Local Produce Guide](#) and fresh food access guides for Indigo and Alpine Shires,
  - Establish the Acres and Acres Co-operative.



## Leverage Point 9: Community Food Systems Planning

*Prioritise and promote healthy community food systems by reforming Victorian Planning Provisions legislation to explicitly state the promotion of health, alongside economic, environmental and social well-being considerations.*

Our neighbourhoods play a significant role in ensuring our health and well-being in many ways, including shaping the relative exposure to healthy and unhealthy foods. Under current Victorian planning legislation, the population health impacts of planning applications are not sufficiently considered when authorities weigh up policy objectives and priorities. This means that planning decisions can run counter to what would be in the best interest of public health with harmful consequences. We need an integrated approach to planning that recognises the importance of community health and the transformative potential of local food systems.

Affirming the right to food is directly related to planning for food production and provisioning. Land use planning (including zoning bylaws) determine the permitted and preferred use of available land within a jurisdiction and, in so doing, can promote healthier community food systems. For example, planning provisions can protect land from urban sprawl and promote its use for localised food production (urban and peri-urban agriculture), improve access and proximity to sources of healthy and fresh food (grown and sold) so that it is more convenient, and they can limit the density and location of fast-food outlets and drive-throughs. Differential rates could also, for example, be used to preference sustainable farming practices. Integrated approaches that encourage healthy foods and discourage unhealthy foods in communities are essential to shaping health-promoting food systems where people live, learn, work and play.

Unfortunately, community health is neither a policy nor objective under current Victorian planning laws. It is no surprise then that research shows that in population growth areas in Victoria, unhealthy food outlets (including fast-food outlets, takeaways and convenience stores) have increased and rapidly outpaced the expansion of healthy food outlets to reach a ratio as high as 9:1. This ratio has nearly doubled from 2008-2016.<sup>91</sup>

Continuing with fast-food outlets as an example, in 2013, the Yarra Ranges Council refused planning permission for a new McDonald's outlet in Tecoma.<sup>92</sup> The council's decision was consistent with community sentiment, having received 1,300 objections from residents on the grounds that included health implications. However, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) overturned the local council's decision, resulting in a prolonged and disruptive community activism campaign at the site. Despite the apparent public dissatisfaction with this outcome, similar planning decisions have been made around Victoria.<sup>92</sup>

There has long been a broad consensus that significant reforms are needed to align planning policy with public health goals. In 2012, the Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health in Victoria received several submissions for the State Planning Policy Framework to comprehensively address health and well-being. A recommendation made by the Inquiry was that *"the Victorian Government amends the State Planning Policy Framework within the Victoria Planning Provisions to include a policy on planning for health and well-being"*.<sup>93</sup> However, almost a decade has passed, and this amendment is yet to be made.

We urgently need to update the objectives of planning law to promote community food systems that support people to lead active lifestyles and enjoy healthy diets. Actions to improve community food systems through planning may involve:

1. Shaping physical access - in terms of the presence, location and nature of food sources within a community – how easily all residents, including low-income and other vulnerable groups, can reach sources of sufficient, healthy, affordable, safe and culturally appropriate food.<sup>94</sup> Examples include enabling food production by providing equitable access to and land for urban agriculture; encouraging healthy/discouraging unhealthy food retail through zoning, permits and licenses, fiscal measures, business advice and training; facilitating mobility/public transportation.
2. Shaping desirability – this concerns the messaging (advertising, marketing, labelling) around food and the presentation (visibility and attractiveness) of food. An example would be restricting unhealthy food advertising in neighbourhoods.

There is a growing international precedent for planning approaches that take these measures to improve community food systems. Closer to home, planning laws have also been used to reduce exposure to unhealthy food through introducing progressive restrictions on outdoor food advertising (e.g., bus shelters) in Mandurah in Western Australia – showing that progress is possible.<sup>95</sup>



### Case Study: National Planning Policy Framework (England) *Integrating Healthy Community Food Systems as a Core Element of Planning Policy*

In England, the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (the Framework) states: “*Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which: enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example, through the provision of ... access to healthier food*”.<sup>96 (p.27)</sup> The Framework empowers local government areas (LGAs) to impose controls on the spread of unhealthy food outlets on health grounds.

A recent census found that over a third of LGAs have a policy with health-focused planning criteria.<sup>97</sup> The most common approach is introducing exclusion zoning (distance and walking time) around places where children and families gather, like schools, parks and leisure facilities, including sports centres and youth clubs.<sup>97</sup> The second most common approach is through caps that limit the density of takeaway food outlets in retail areas. Research with local government planning and health professionals shows that they feel these policies can effectively regulate fast-food outlets to improve health.<sup>98</sup>





## Leverage Point 10: Food Relief Models

*Improve dignified access to fresh and healthy food relief by developing a new, coordinated and collaborative approach with the food relief sector.*

The reality that thousands of Victorians do not have the means to enjoy a healthy diet or cannot even afford enough food to satisfy hunger demonstrates a systemic failure to uphold the right to adequate food. However, addressing the root causes of this deeply entrenched, wholly unacceptable problem so that handouts become a thing of the past will take time and concerted action (as outlined in leverage points 1 – 9). Right now, the prominence of ultra-processed unhealthy food in the food relief sector has significant health implications for recipients and compounds their risk of long-term health issues, in addition to mental ill-health due to stigma and shame. We need a new, coordinated and collaborative approach to food relief that involves people with lived experiences of food insecurity and provides dignified access to healthy food.

Food insecurity was evident in Victoria before COVID-19 but has become more pronounced through the cascading effects of the pandemic. During the initial COVID-19 restrictions from May to June 2020, the proportion of Victorians reportedly running out of food and unable to buy more increased from 4% to 7%.<sup>99</sup> In addition, 23% of Victorians reported relying on a restricted range of low-cost unhealthy foods due to running out of money.<sup>1</sup> A follow-up survey in September 2020 found no significant difference in the number of Victorian adults reportedly experiencing food insecurity, highlighting that food insecurity is an entrenched and ongoing issue for substantial numbers of Victorians.<sup>100</sup> Recent cross-sectional research also shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. The risk of experiencing food insecurity has significantly increased among those with a disability, those living in rural areas, those with dependents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.<sup>101</sup> Food insecurity may contribute to poor physical, social and psychological health outcomes among children and adults who experience it, including irreversible adverse effects on cognitive development and growth in young people.<sup>102,103</sup>

As a direct consequence of rising food insecurity, many Victorians access food relief to meet their basic food needs; however, these models of food provision rely heavily on donated surplus food from the industrial food system. As a result, non-perishable, ultra-processed unhealthy foods are abundant, and there is a distinct shortage of healthy foods such as fresh vegetables and fruits, which exacerbates health issues in vulnerable groups.<sup>104</sup> At least in the relatively short term, before food relief is phased out, there is an opportunity to review models of food relief and reflect on how they can make a positive and valuable contribution to a fair transition towards the food future envisioned.

The food relief sector could become a leverage point for system change if the standards and model to which it operates (the quality and sourcing of the food that is provided) are adjusted, as far as is practicable, in line with the guiding principles for systems change (see [Guiding Principles](#)).<sup>105</sup> This means preferencing fresh and healthy minimally processed and sustainably grown food that is sourced locally or regionally where possible (contract grown under subsidy or charitably funded, if needed and appropriate)—a shift which tax incentives could bolster.<sup>106</sup> There are also opportunities for the food relief sector to do more to support recipients navigating permanent pathways out of food insecurity, which may also contribute to food systems change (e.g., see Community Food Centres Canada case study). Ensuring that Federal and State funding for food relief flows equitably beyond metropolitan to regional and rural food relief agencies should support work on this leverage point.

*The Working Group would like to recognise the ongoing work of the Victorian [Food Relief Taskforce](#) that has emerged in parallel to the development of this Consensus Statement. The Food Relief Taskforce provides a crucial mechanism for achieving the approach to food relief advocated for in this leverage point.*



## Case Study: Nutrition Guidelines for the Food Relief Sector (South Australia)

### *Maximising the Availability of Healthy Foods to Recipients of Food Relief*

Developed in 2019 to support the South Australian Food Relief Charter, the Nutrition Guidelines for Food Relief (Nutrition Guidelines) aim to increase the provision and proportion of healthy foods in the emergency food relief sector. Despite their name, the Nutrition Guidelines are food-based but also go beyond food standards to provide advice on creating a health-promoting food environment, such as using prominent placement, competitive pricing, and increased promotion of 'green' and 'amber' classified foods.

The Nutrition Guidelines also integrate sustainability principles; for instance, they advocate supporting local growers and producers to reduce handling and transport costs and related GHGs and accepting produce with slight physical imperfections to minimize wastage of food that is otherwise safe to eat.

The Nutrition Guidelines are an outcome of the Food Security Project - a joint initiative of the Department for Healthy and Well-being and the Department of Human Services.



## Case Study: Community Food Centres Canada

### *Creating Community Food Centres as Spaces to Advance Community Food Security*

Community Food Centres Canada was founded in 2012 to develop and expand the Community Food Centre model across Canada, based on the Stop Community Food Centre (Stop) in Toronto. Stop is located in one of Ontario's lowest-income, most diverse communities and was initially established as a food bank in the mid-1970s.<sup>107</sup> While Stop maintains its emergency food efforts, it now complements this work with a range of capacity- and skills-building programs, including community kitchens and gardens.

Stop's mission is *"to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality"*. To achieve this mission, Stop adopts an integrated approach whereby it provides a place for community members to come together to grow, cook, and eat food and pursue food systems change to strengthen community food security.

Food anchors the work of Stop, but this means more than 'just' the direct provision of food or experiences to build food literacy. Stop also provides an opportunity for people to connect with social services and entitlements or to others in the community. In this way, food is viewed not only as an end in itself but a means to achieve a broader goal of more empowered, healthier people and communities.

The Stop's strategic objectives are:

- Increase low-income community members' access to healthy food,
- Increase knowledge and skills around healthy food,
- Increase participants' connection to the community by linking them to Stop's programs, mutual support networks, and other community supports,
- Increase community members' knowledge and ability to advocate on food policy and income security,
- Increase the Stop's leadership on food issues and awareness of community food centre model,
- Create an environment at Stop that respects individual dignity and cultural diversity,
- Strengthen Stop's financial and organizational capacity to serve the community.

Following its pioneering work, Stop became recognised as a national leader and after further pilots in other locations, and there are now 13 more Community Food Centres across Canada.

# Shifting Approaches to Unlock Transitions



With policymaking processes, it is common practice to start where we are now – to look at the problems that are imminently facing us and find ways to optimise the systems we have to solve them. However, without adjusting the underlying organising principles, gradual changes to established systems will not address the root causes of the multiple converging crises we face. Indeed, what if the way we ordinarily respond to these problems is *part of* these crises?

What could happen then, if instead of jumping into ‘solution mode’, we ask questions around what sort of food future do we want and how would we be in that ‘not yet’ world? From this response emerges all kinds of ideas of how food systems could be otherwise – many of which stem from an awareness of those who already experience that reality. Questions like how do we pollinate an economy grounded in currencies of solidarity, circularity and well-being and ensure that public monies are redirected in line with these principles for vitality and sustainability? How can our communities have more say about and involvement with the food systems where they live and spend their time? And how can we seed this ecological worldview in future generations using food as our tool?

This approach is entirely different to policymaking processes that attempt to lay a step-by-step pathway to a new food future – as if the steppingstones are all available at our fingertips and there is a clear and final destination to navigate to with surety. Rather than engineering fixes, this way of contemplating the ‘not yet’ holds the possibility for a different path of inquiry – a collaborative policymaking approach where we question how to leverage the *enabling conditions* that would unlock a transition towards that healthy, regenerative and equitable future.

In these times of uncertainty, *Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria* is a compass to guide collective action and investment so that the will and creativity of our farmers, food producers and communities can flourish, together.



# Glossary

<b>Agroecology</b>	The application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems, and more broadly, the ecology of food systems. In discussions of farming practices, it is used here interchangeably with the notion of regenerative farming.
<b>Healthy Foods</b>	Healthy foods are unprocessed or minimally processed foods from the five food groups in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.
<b>Food Literacy</b>	The ability of an individual to understand food to develop a positive relationship with it and make decisions and enact food practices (e.g., growing, cooking, composting) that support the attainment of personal and environmental health.
<b>Food Security</b>	A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
<b>Food Sovereignty</b>	The rights of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.
<b>Leverage Point</b>	Places within a system where a small shift will produce large changes across the whole system.
<b>Lock-in</b>	A key mechanism (a self-reinforcing process) that holds a system in a 'dynamically stable' state.
<b>Food System</b>	The entire range of actors and their interconnected practices and processes involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, eating and disposal of food.
<b>Right to Food</b>	A legal concept which is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.
<b>Ultra-processed Foods</b>	Formulations of ingredients, mostly of exclusive industrial use, typically created by a series of industrial techniques and processes, in accordance with the NOVA system. Some common ultra-processed foods are carbonated soft drinks; sweet, fatty or salty packaged snacks; confectionery; mass-produced packaged bread and buns, biscuits, pastries, cakes and cake mixes; margarine and other spreads; sweetened breakfast cereals and fruit yoghurt and energy drinks; pre-prepared meat, cheese, pasta and pizza dishes; poultry and fish 'nuggets' and 'sticks'; sausages, burgers, hot dogs and other reconstituted meat products; powdered and packaged instant soups, noodles and desserts; infant formula.
<b>Transition</b>	The long-term process of change from one 'dynamically stable' system to another. Transitions involve complex, co-evolutionary reconfigurations of technology, policy, infrastructure, knowledge and socio-cultural practices.

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## Appendix 1: Approach to the Development of the Consensus Statement

### 1. **Agree on a clear purpose and course of action**

Recognising the need to prioritise action towards long-term food security and food equity, the Working Group agreed to develop the Consensus Statement; a vision to strengthen and improve Victoria's food system and priority areas of action to inform Victorian State and Local government policy.

### 2. **Generate a draft vision, guiding principles and priority areas for policy and action**

All members of the Working Group put forward their vision for our food system and brainstormed ideas for policy options. These were collated and condensed to generate a draft overarching vision, guiding principles and priority areas for policy and action.

### 3. **Achieve consensus**

The draft of the overarching vision, guiding principles and priority areas for policy and action was shared within the Working Group for discussion and feedback. Voting against the list of options determined priorities with consideration to the:

- Importance, potential impact, and cost-effectiveness;
- Potential for implementation to occur within a reasonable time period (2 to 5 years); and
- Relevant jurisdictional context and links to existing policy opportunities.

### 4. **Refine content and wording**

The content and wording of each priority area were refined, with expertise sought from outside the Working Group when appropriate.

### 5. **Endorse consensus statement**

Members sought endorsement from their respective organisations on the final version of the Consensus Statement.

### 6. **Invite broader support**

The Consensus Statement was circulated to stakeholders for further endorsement.

***Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Working Group Membership***

Amber Bastian, Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), Deakin University  
Holly Beswick, VicHealth (April 2020 to June 2021)  
Tracy Bialek, OzHarvest  
Lisa Brassington, Cardinia Shire Council  
Amy Brown, City of Greater Bendigo  
Rachel Carey, University of Melbourne  
Simone Carson, SecondBite  
Melanie Chisholm, VicHealth (April 2020 to January 2021)  
Kristine Cooney, VicHealth (September 2021 to present)  
Kirsten Corben, VicHealth (April 2020 to May 2021)  
Christine Couzens MP  
Lisa Fitzgerald, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre  
Tess Gardiner, The Community Grocer (November 2021 to present)  
Marcus Godinho, Fareshare  
Lucinda Hancock, Nutrition Australia – VIC, SA, TAS, WA  
Tara Heneghan, VicHealth (January 2021 to May 2021)  
Greg Jacobs, City of Melbourne  
Dheepa Jeyapalan, VicHealth (September 2021 to present)  
Matthew Kerlin, City of Greater Bendigo  
Sue Kleve, Monash University  
Kirsten Larsen, Open Food Network  
Rebecca Lindberg, Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), Deakin University  
Sylvia Ly, VicHealth (April 2020 to June 2021)  
Anna Mckinlay, Beechworth Health Service and Clare Schultz, Gateway Health –  
representing the North East Local Food Strategy Working Group  
David McNamara, Foodbank Victoria  
Jim Mullan, SecondBite  
Veronica Nunez, VicHealth (September 2021 to present)  
Jane Potter, VicHealth (September 2020 to May 2021)  
Rob Rees, Cultivating Community and Moving Feast  
Chanel Relf, City of Greater Bendigo  
Nick Rose, Sustain  
Russell Shields, The Community Grocer  
Bernardo Tobias, OzHarvest  
Linda Weatherson, City of Melbourne  
Elisha West, OzHarvest  
Ebony Yin, OzHarvest



