FOOD SYSTEM INNOVATION AND POLICY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL
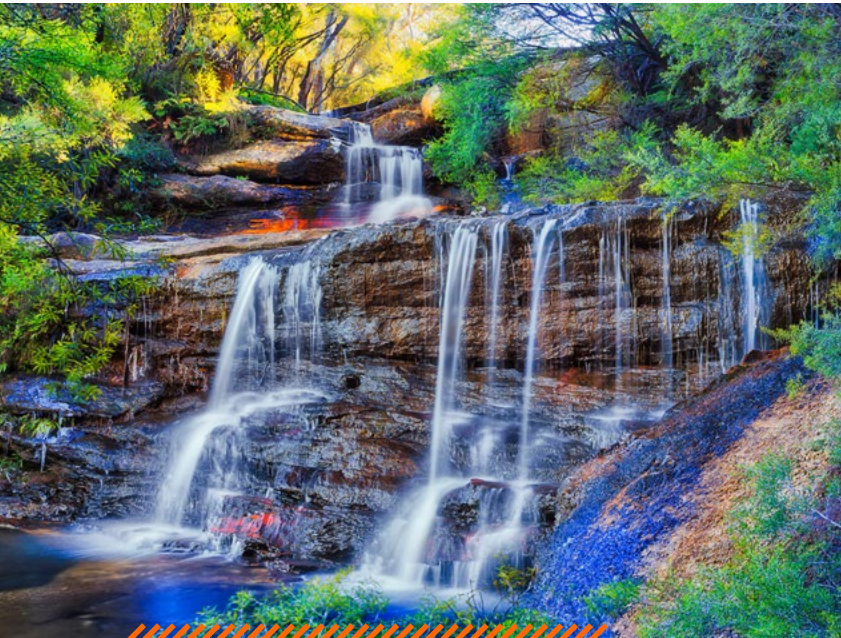
A report on six local governments in New South Wales and Victoria

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

William Angliss Institute

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https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/

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WE ACKNOWLEDGE the Traditional Custodians of the lands that we stood upon when undertaking this research. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and give thanks to the land and to the peoples and culture who stewarded, respected and honoured this beautiful country for tens of thousands of years before us. We acknowledge your enduring knowledge of the interconnectedness of landscapes, plants, creatures, seasons, people and culture.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that sovereignty over these lands was never ceded, and the devastating impact of colonisation. We commit to walking a path of care, respect, healing, justice and regeneration.

WE MUST LEARN FROM YOU, come back to your wisdom, and honour and care for this country as you have always done.

Contents

Executive summary

The contemporary food system is placing significant and unsustainable stress on population health, ecological systems, and social equity.

Transformative change is required from 'paddock to fork' to ensure access to healthy food for all, within finite planetary boundaries. Collaboration and coordination between diverse stakeholders is necessary to achieve this transformation, including all levels of government. However, while state and national governments' influence over food systems has been the focus of much research and reporting, less is known about the role of Australian local governments (LGs) in addressing these health, sustainability, and equity challenges.

This report provides a summary of six case studies of Australian LGs conducted by researchers from the University of Sydney, University of Wollongong, and William Angliss Institute of TAFE (Melbourne). The researchers interviewed staff members from six LGs (3 from NSW, 3 from Victoria) to gather information on these LGs' food system policies and initiatives, as well as their perceptions of the barriers to and enablers of this work.

These LGs were involved in a range of food system activities, including: community gardens; food-related tourism and branding; food access and food security; food waste; local, sustainable food production; and community events, education and workshops on topics such as food system sustainability and healthy eating. Enablers of their food system work included: internal leadership and prioritisation of food issues within LG, and internal collaboration between LG departments; collaboration with other LGs, and other organisations; a state-level public health and wellbeing mandate for LG action; funding; and community support and participation. Barriers were: the lack of an explicit state government mandate for food systems work; limited/restrictive funding and resources; LG departmental silos; lack of relevant data; external events (such as COVID-19); and challenges engaging some food system sectors (e.g., farmers).

Based on these findings, we draw the following conclusions regarding LGs' development and implementation of food system policies and programs:

01 Having a dedicated food system policy is beneficial as it increases coherence, brings together the range of food system activities undertaken by LG, and reduces departmental silos.

02 Extensive community consultation during policy development is important for ensuring diverse representation and that the policy is relevant to the local context.

03 The creation of a policy evaluation framework alongside policy development enables measures of success to be built into food system policies from the start.

04 Adequate financial and other resourcing, such as a dedicated Food Systems Officer, is important for policy implementation and accountability.

05 Partnerships with other LGs and organisations enable policy implementation by increasing the reach, resources, and expertise available to LGs.

06 Food system work can be strengthened by integrating food-related issues into non-food policies and programs, such as Community Strategic Plans (NSW) or Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (Victoria).

07 Comprehensive, concurrent evaluation is essential for demonstrating policy impact and gaining ongoing support for food system work.

The following supports would enhance Australian LGs' ability to undertake food systems work:

01

Policy mandate
An explicit legislative and/or policy mandate on **food systems** from state government.

02

Funding
Ongoing, dedicated funding for food systems work from state government.

03

Collaboration
Establishing collaborative working groups between LGs.

04

Data
Up-to-date, locally-relevant data on food system topics and related outcomes.

Introduction

The contemporary food system has profoundly negative impacts on human health, environmental sustainability, and equity. We face escalating challenges in nourishing a growing global population within planetary boundaries. On the one hand, there are entrenched issues of diet-related chronic disease (such as diabetes) as well as polluting and unethical forms of food production (such as factory farms).[i] On the other, the food system is under great pressure from climate change and COVID-19-related supply chain disruptions.[ii] Making matters worse are the impacts of the Ukraine-Russia war and associated sanctions, which have sent food prices to record levels and are pushing tens of millions of people into acute food insecurity.[iii]

The solutions to these problems require a profound food system transformation[iv] Local governments (LGs) have a critical role to play, alongside other levels of government, businesses, and civil society. However, local governments are often thought of as only acting on 'rates, roads, and rubbish',[v] and less is known about how Australian LGs contribute to addressing food system challenges, as compared to our state and federal governments.

[i]Dury S, Bendjebbar P, Hainzelin E, Giordano T, Bricas N. Food Systems at Risk: New Trends and Challenges. Rome, Montpellier, Brussels: FAO, CIRAD and European Commission; 2019.

[ii]Bisoffi S, Ahrn HYPERLINK "https://www.frontiersin.org/people/u/110233" é L, Aschemann-Witzel J, Báldi A, Cuhls K, et al. COVID-19 and sustainable food systems: What should we learn before the next emergency. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 2021;5:650987.

[iii]World Food Programme. Projected increase in acute food insecurity due to war in Ukraine. Rome: WFP; 2022 [cited 2022 May 9]. Available from: https://www.wfp.org/publications/projected-increase-acute-food-insecurity-due-war-ukraine

[iv]IPES-Food. Another perfect storm? How the failure to reform food systems has allowed the war in Ukraine to spark a third global food price crisis in 15 years, and what can be done to prevent the next one. Brussels: IPES-Food; 2022 [cited 2022 May 9]. Available from: https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/AnotherPerfectStorm.pdf

[v]Dollery B, Wallis J, Allan P. The debate that had to happen but never did: The changing role of Australian Local Government. Australian Journal of Political Science. 2006;41(4):553-67.

About the report

This report explores the role of LGs in NSW and Victoria (Australia's two most populous states) in creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. It presents six case studies of LGs (3 from NSW, 3 from Victoria) with innovative food system policies and programs.

This report:

01

Describes the methodology and sources of data used in this research;

02

Presents findings from case study research on six LGs with innovative policies and initiatives relevant to creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system;

03

Summarises what other LGs can learn from the case studies about food system policy development and implementation; and

04

Recommends a series of reforms that would strengthen LG action on food systems.

About the Strengthening Local Food Systems Governance project

This project began in 2019 with funding from the Australian Research Council. It investigated the role of law, policy, and regulation in enabling LGs and communities to contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. It was led by Dr Belinda Reeve, with the other lead investigators being Professor Karen Charlton (University of Wollongong) and Dr Nick Rose (William Angliss Institute, Melbourne).
Using a multi-disciplinary approach, the project analysed policies and initiatives developed by LGs in NSW and Victoria, as well as those from Australian civil society organisations, that contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. The project's findings will inform recommendations for policy and legislative reforms that will empower LGs and communities to respond to food system challenges at the local level.
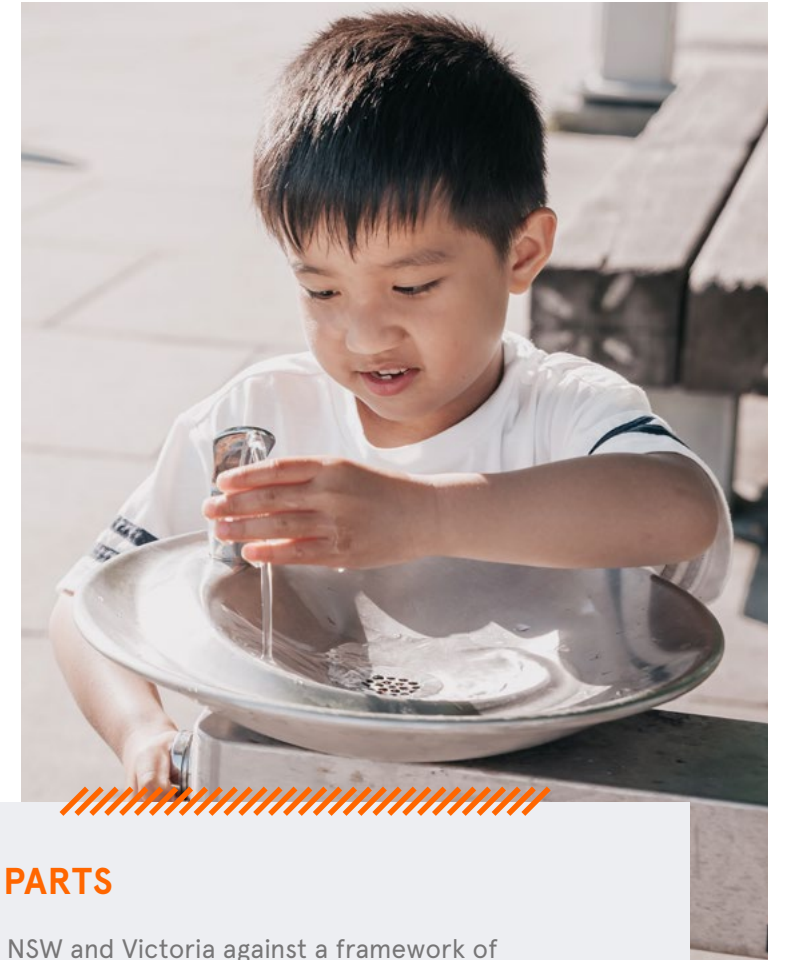
THE PROJECT HAS FOUR PARTS

01 An analysis of policies from all LGs in NSW and Victoria against a framework of recommended actions for creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. Part 1 also included a survey of these LGs to explore policy implementation 'on the ground', and to collect information on the barriers to and enablers of food system work.

02 Case studies of six LGs to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes of food system policy development and implementation. This report presents the methods and findings of this study.

03 A survey of Australian civil society organisations involved in food system governance to determine the nature of their activities, and to understand the barriers to and enablers of their work, as well as their relationships with local governments.

04 Case studies of nine civil society organisations to explore in more detail their activities, and factors that support or inhibit their food system work.

Further information is available through the project website.

Methods

Selecting the case study local governments

We based our selection of LGs for the six case studies primarily on our [policy mapping study](#) of all LGs in NSW and Victoria. From all 207 LGs across both states, we compiled a shortlist of twenty LGs based on:

A high level of engagement in food system issues, as identified through the policy mapping study;

The presence of a joined-up food system strategy/policy (although our policy mapping study identified only two NSW LGs with dedicated food system strategies/policies);

Different demographic profiles and sizes;

Different geographical locations: NSW and Victoria; urban, regional or rural.

From this shortlist we selected seven priority LGs to invite to participate in the research. One LG declined the invitation to participate. The LGs that participated in the study were:

NSW

City of Canada Bay

Inner metropolitan LG
with the *Sustainable Food Strategy*. Canada Bay was one of the two NSW LGs with a dedicated food system strategy.

PENRITH CITY COUNCIL

Outer metropolitan LG
Although without a dedicated food system policy, this LG scored well against the framework of recommendations used in our policy mapping study. This was due to the presence of food-related actions in general policies and strategies, including the *Community Strategic Plan (Community Plan) 2017*, *Sustainability Strategy* and *City Strategy*.

GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL

Rural LG
Gwydir Shire did not have a dedicated food system policy, but the Shire is home to The Living Classroom – a practical example of a holistic, systems-based project that combines food growing, education, career preparation, tourism, economic development, and circular systems.

Victoria

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Inner metropolitan LG
with *Food City: City of Melbourne Food Policy*.

Cardinia

Peri-urban LG
with the *Cardinia Community Food Strategy 2018–2026*.

CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO

Regional LG
with *Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy 2020–2030*.

Conducting the focus groups

Between February and April 2021, we held a focus group with each LG, consisting of two team members from the research project and between two and five staff members from the relevant LG. Participants were nominated by a senior staff member as those involved in implementing food system-related policies and/or activities. They were employed in positions within the following departments/units: Health and Wellbeing/Social and Community Planning, Infrastructure and Environments, Planning and Urban Design, and Operations.

The focus group discussion was guided by a set of questions that explored:

· The processes and stakeholder groups involved in developing the relevant policies or projects;

· Drivers, enablers of and barriers to, policy development and implementation, or food system initiatives;

· How relevant policies were translated into action 'on the ground';

· Partnerships with other LGs, state and federal government, and other stakeholders; and

· Legislative, policy, or practical supports that could strengthen the role of LG in creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system

The focus groups were transcribed, and the resulting data analysed for themes and insights common across all the focus groups. The next section of this report describes the results of each focus group, followed by a concluding section that sets out key learnings for local governments and other stakeholders on supporting LGs to strengthen their food systems work.

Case studies

NSW

City of Canada Bay

NSW's only holistic food system strategy

Location & demographics

Traditional lands of the **Wangal People of the Eora Nation**

Inner-west of Sydney, NSW, bordered by the Parramatta River to the north and east

POPULATION
96,550
in 2020[i]

MAJOR SUBURBS
Concord, Abbotsford, Rhodes, Breakfast Point

HERITAGE

0.5%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

40%
born overseas
(mostly from Italy, Hong Kong, China, and South Korea)[i]

LANGUAGE

41%
speak a language other than English at home[i]

Concerns and issues

- Only 7.1% adults eat the recommended serves per day of vegetables; 51.5% for fruit[ii]
- Competing priorities to house a growing population in a variety of built forms while maintaining adequate private and public space for people to grow seasonal, local, and sustainable food
- Urban transformation, urban infill and development of old industrial sites into residential housing[iii]
- Sustainable development[iii]
- Housing affordability - meeting the ownership and rental needs of different demographic groups[iii]
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation[iii]

[i] id consulting. 'City of Canada Bay Community Profile'. https://profile.id.com.au/canada-bay.

[ii] City of Canada Bay. 'Sustainable Food Strategy'. 2014.

[iii] City of Canada Bay. 'YOUR future 2030: Community Strategic Plan 2018-2030'. 2018.

Sustainable Food Strategy

The *Sustainable Food Strategy* ("the Strategy"), adopted in 2015, aims to "improve the environmental sustainability and health of [the] community through increased awareness, consumption and availability of sustainably sourced foods and enhanced local food systems". The Strategy's aims address eight key areas: community consumption and food production behaviours; local food production and availability; Council leadership; food waste and composting; embedding sustainable food outcomes into all Council policies and assets; partnerships; promotion and availability of healthy, safe and nutritious food; and multicultural food traditions and food diversity.

FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES

underpin the Strategy's actions

01 Community Education, Engagement and Empowerment

02 Leadership and Governance

03 Planning and Infrastructure Management

04 Fostering Partnerships

Other relevant policies

- *Community Garden Policy*
- *Environmental Strategy*
- *Affordable Housing Policy*
- *Positive Ageing Strategy*
- *Mobile Food Vending Policy*

Policy development

The *Strategy* was a new, food-specific Council initiative that complemented existing policy documents, including the *Community Garden Policy; Sustaining our Environment Strategy; Positive Ageing Strategy; Child and Family Needs Strategy; Nature Strip Policy;* and *Greenhouse Action Plan*. The Strategy responded to growing community interest in and feedback on food system issues (e.g., opportunities to grow food in community and school gardens), identified through school networks and Council-run 'place programs'. The Strategy was also motivated by community and Council interest in reducing food waste and food emissions, and in improving food security and community health.

To inform and develop the Strategy, Council staff drew on research by their own Community Development and Waste teams, state government demographic databases, and food policy examples from other councils. While no community engagement or consultation specific to the Strategy was undertaken, staff used a previous consultation that informed the *Sustaining our Environment Strategy*.

At the end of the Strategy's implementation period (2015-2018), the City of Canada Bay transitioned to incorporating food issues into other policy documents instead of reviewing, updating and implementing a food-specific policy. 'Place Plans' targeted six regions within the municipality and reflected the interests and priorities of residents. Each Plans' outcomes addressed local business, public spaces, community health and amenities, and incorporated messages about food emissions reduction and growing food. Integrating food issues into non food-specific documents, such as environmental and community health policy, reflected the Council's recognition of food issues as interdisciplinary and cutting across different Council departments.

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Partnerships

Council partnered with various local non-government organisations (NGOs) and food businesses to deliver community workshops, often as part of broader state-wide campaigns, including Love Food Hate Waste, and collaborated with local restaurants as part of Good Food Week. Council also supported community-led food-related initiatives, such as the Concord Rotary's Farmers' Market. Council increasingly supported community organisations and businesses to take ownership of and implement initiatives, and played the role of facilitator via resourcing, creating networks, and promotion.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the Strategy was sporadic and mixed, with Council staff using varied measures to evaluate the success of individual projects (but not the overall success of the Strategy). Council staff aspired to, in the future, map results against state health statistics, including those available through the Sydney Area Health Service, and to evaluate community greenhouse gas emissions (and segment these to identify food-related emissions). Indirect, informal measurements were also used, including an increase in the number of farmers' markets, interpreted as an indicator of increasing community engagement with healthy and sustainable food systems.

Key implementation activities

COMMUNITY EVENTS
- Food waste – Love Food Hate Waste workshops
- Local food – Good Food Month events highlighting local food through restaurants

BUSINESS FOOD WASTE
- More than 300 local businesses participated in the NSW Environment Protection Authority's (EPA's) Bin Trim program, including reducing food waste sent to landfill

COMMUNITY GARDENS
- Community Garden Policy
- Promoting urban agriculture and social connection through sites adjacent to Neighbourhood Houses and churches
- The numbers of community gardens increased from one to six between 2014 and 2018

Enablers

INTERNAL CHAMPIONS & PRIORITISATION OF FOOD SYSTEMS

Two interrelated factors were critical to the Strategy's development. An individual Council staff member, who was also actively involved with community initiatives, championed and drove the Strategy's creation. In addition, other Council staff members took the initiative to link residents' single-issue concerns under the umbrella of a dedicated food system strategy. Council-directed formulation of the Strategy, in response to varied community interest in food issues, suggested that staff played a decisive role in driving policy development.

EMBEDDING FOOD IN OTHER PROGRAMS

Council staff members' interest in food system issues meant those issues were incorporated in other programs not explicitly targeting food. For example, staff members leveraged workshops and education sessions about community greenhouse gas emissions and landfill waste to discuss nutrition and seasonal produce, or included bushfoods within projects primarily focused on biodiversity and trees. This approach was perceived as an "easy" way to develop conversations and to encourage residents to recognise their role within their local food system.

COLLABORATION ACROSS COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS

Staff from the Sustainability Team and Resource Recovery Team worked with the Events Team and Place Teams to incorporate food-related messaging into events and individual 'Place' communities. Sustainability and Resource Recovery staff collaborated with the Events Team to deliver an "all-of-Council" Paddock to Plate-themed *Concord Carnival*. In line with their Place Management model, staff members worked with individual Place Teams to implement projects that were tailored to a specific community, including Concord West's "Good Food" promotions and Rhodes Peninsula's food growing initiatives.

FUNDING

Staff were allocated a small pool of funds from Council's budget for programs related to implementation of the Strategy, including on healthy eating, food waste, and community gardens.

Barriers

LACK OF STATE GOVERNMENT MANDATE

The absence of a state government legislative mandate concerning food systems was linked to difficulties initiating and sustaining projects. When such issues were not prioritised or even recognised at state level, it was challenging for Canada Bay to prioritise food system work.

LACK OF AND RESTRICTIVE FUNDING

Funding and grants from state government to support Council's food systems work were rare, stemming from the lack of recognition of and mandate for such issues at state level. A lack of funding also forced staff to reduce the proposed program of activities to relatively few, small-scale community development initiatives in low socio-economic communities. Restrictions specified by funding bodies and disproportionate funding for different food-related topics caused Council to prioritise some initiatives, with food waste-related projects pursued and not others.

TURNOVER OF STAFF AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Changes in the availability, knowledge and skills of both Council staff and school networks impacted the timely delivery of Council initiatives. When a parent or teacher from partnering schools left the network, Council staff were forced to spend more time and resources repeating the processes of upskilling new staff and community volunteers.

Learnings

City of Canada Bay staff highlighted two important considerations they would act on if they could go back in time and redevelop the Strategy:

01 A comprehensive community consultation process – specific to food system issues – as part of policy development. This would include working with community service organisations to engage vulnerable population groups.

02 A greater focus on supporting local organisations to implement food initiatives, with Council taking a facilitator role, to maximise external community expertise and reduce duplication.

Future goals

To extend their future work on food system issues, City of Canada Bay staff said they would investigate options for regional collaborations between local governments (including the Southern Region Organisation of Councils), with the benefit of scaling up and sharing resources.

Wish list

01 A state government mandate that supports and focuses conversations about food system issues

02 Funding to enable Council's involvement with food system-aligned projects (e.g., the Edible Garden Trail) and increased support for school-based initiatives

NSW

PENRITH CITY COUNCIL
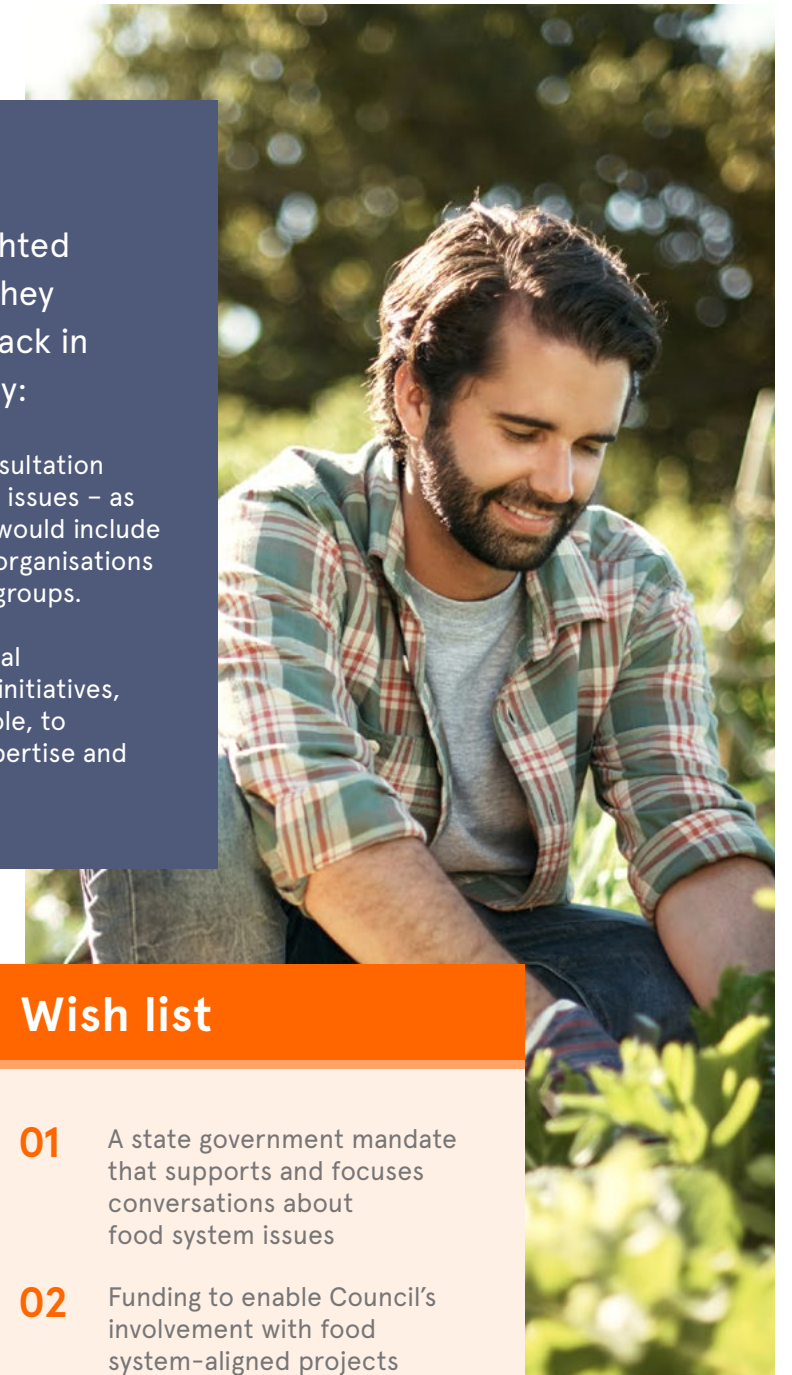
A place-based approach to tackling health inequalities

Location & demographics

Dharug Country

Western fringe of the Sydney metropolitan area, on the plains below the Blue Mountains

POPULATION
216,282
in 2020[i]

MAJOR SUBURBS
Penrith, Glenmore Park, Kingswood, St. Mary's

HERITAGE
3.9%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

22%
born overseas (mostly from the UK, New Zealand, the Philippines, India)[i]

LANGUAGE
17%
speak a language other than English at home[i]

Concerns and issues

- 32% adults overweight, 37% obese[ii]
- Stark differences in level of disadvantage between different suburbs[iii]
- Mix of rural and residential areas and conflicts arising from desire to protect agricultural land, scenic landscapes, native vegetation and biodiversity, and lifestyle areas
- Development of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis (airport and surrounding city) and export of locally grown food while residents in local neighbourhoods experience food insecurity
- Population increase and resultant demand for increased affordable housing

[i] id consulting. 'Penrith City Community Profile'. https://profile.id.com.au/penrith.

[ii] Penrith City Council. 'Penrith Community Profile 2018: Statistics on the communities across Penrith City'. Penrith City Council; 2018.

[iii] REMPLAN. 'Penrith City Council: Our Place - Our Community'. 2022. https://app.remplan.com.au/penrith/community/wellbeing/seifa-relative-disadvantage.

Relevant policies

Penrith City Council did not have a dedicate food system strategy, yet were undertaking a wide range of actions related to food system issues. These issues and actions were integrated into various policies:

- *Community Gardens Policy*
- *Sustainability Strategy*
- *City Strategy*
- *Penrith Health Action Plan*
- *Penrith Waste Resource Strategy*
- *Food Trucks on Council Land Policy*
- *Mobile Local Food and Homelessness Support Services Policy*
- *Sustainable Events Policy*
- *Child Friendly City Strategy*
- *Economic Development Strategy*
- *Rural Lands Strategy*
- *Neighbourhood Renewal Plans*

Policy and program development

Consultation and research

Community consultation was central to Council's Neighbourhood Renewal Program, and *Health Action Plan*. It resulted in food-related projects targeted to specific community interests and needs. Community engagement processes were supported by recording health statistics, behaviours and food literacy using Council's Healthy Built Environment Audit tool. This tool - developed by Council - drew on data from the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District and Public Health Network. Staff also researched and mapped food access, including access to grocery stores and fast-food outlets in the area.

Use of a placed-based approach

The Neighbourhood Renewal Program applied a place-based approach to local food policy, with initiatives targeted to four separate communities. Place managers and teams applied a holistic approach to food-related issues that intersected with socio-economic factors, local business and infrastructure. The approach supported localised strategies for communities that varied based on levels of disadvantage, food insecurity, and health outcomes.

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Partnerships

Council preferred to support community organisations to deliver food-related projects, rather than being a direct service provider, because of community organisations' expertise and closer connections with residents. These projects included school gardens and food hubs, and Permaculture Sydney West's delivery of gardening workshops, which Council supported by providing resources and building community networks.

Council trialled food relief partnerships with national food waste recovery organisation SecondBite and Sydney-based social enterprise The Staples Bag, although these did not achieve long-term sustainability and were deemed unsuccessful. On reflection, Council staff recognised the importance of being strategic when establishing partnerships, and ensuring the partners would be able to deliver services to meet the needs and expectations of residents.

Evaluation

Council surveyed residents to gather data on enjoyment, usefulness and learning outcomes for all community events. However, staff recognised the limitations of these data in drawing conclusions about the efficacy of such interventions on short- and long-term behavioural (e.g., food purchases) and health (e.g., overweight and obesity) outcomes.

Key implementation activities

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

- Educational workshops – healthy eating skills and knowledge, food literacy
- Food waste – Love Food Hate Waste workshops
- 'Village Café' – multi-site pop-up events to connect residents with one another and social support services, but also to increase access to healthy, fresh produce

COMMUNITY GARDENS

- *Community Garden Policy*
- Support (resources, promotion, identifying grant opportunities) to school and community gardens
- Prioritised for specific neighbourhoods under a place-based approach, drawing on community demand and health demographics

PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND

- Using planning instruments and strategies to preserve land for food production instead of development of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis or residential and industrial uses
- Considering how to retain locally grown food for residents instead of being exported

INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY FOOD

- Advocate to Settlement Services International to establish a low-cost food outlet (the Staples Bag)
- Partner in the Western Sydney Health Alliance to improve liveability through, for instance, advocating for change to state planning controls

Enablers

COUNCIL PRIORITISATION OF FOOD

The interest and priority given to food system issues by Council staff enabled both development and implementation of food-related policy actions. For example, staff recognised that food plays a critical role in greenhouse gas emissions production, which led to food-related actions being incorporated into the *Sustainability Strategy* (2015–21), including the development of an urban food program. Council prioritised projects that supported food waste reduction, food access, urban agriculture and food emissions reduction.

PARTNERSHIPS & DRAWING ON EXISTING RESOURCES

Partnerships with NGOs and community groups allowed for the delivery of certain projects (e.g., food relief, community gardens) using the expertise and resources of other organisations and individuals while minimising the human resource commitment required of Council. For example, by encouraging and supporting local schools to apply for funding for kitchen gardens through the NSW Department of Education's Sustainable School Grants program, Council was able to achieve the outcome of increased food growing while maintaining internal funds for other initiatives.

The Western Sydney Health Alliance was a major enabler of Penrith Council's work on food system issues. The Alliance's objectives included increasing healthy food access through changes to state government planning controls that would see LGs given greater power in the planning system. Additionally, the Promoting Healthy Food Access and Choices Working Group within the Alliance sought to address:

- Physical and financial access to healthy food;
- An empowered, consulted, knowledgeable community;
- Culturally appropriate access to healthy foods; and
- An engaged food system

Council had well-established partnerships with the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District, the Nepean Primary Health Network, and community health services that contributed to the delivery of programs such as the 'Village Café', and to their ability to draw on health services data to map food literacy levels, healthy food access, and health and wellbeing outcomes.

FUNDING

Funding availability determined whether Council could implement key food-related projects, including the Village Café and Love Food Hate Waste events. The former was originally state government-funded, and Council staff indicated that funding was due to run out at the end of the 2020/2021 financial year. Love Food Hate Waste events and resources were made possible by funding from the NSW EPA.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Community feedback shaped individual Neighbourhood Renewal Plans and later became a tool used by Council to write grant applications and justify food-related initiatives. This included the Live, Work, Play Grid project, a pedestrian walking loop designed to improve access and use of public spaces.

Barriers

LACK OF STATE GOVERNMENT MANDATE

Council staff attributed the lack of a holistic food systems policy to, in part, the inability to act on food-related topics in the absence of a legislative mandate from the state government. Council was attempting to address this by advocating for state government policy reforms, and leveraged their membership in the Western Sydney Health Alliance to advocate for such changes. Council staff also felt limited in their ability to protect agricultural land in the face of the NSW Government's takeover as the planning authority for some of these lands through the development and expansion of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.

LACK OF COMMUNITY RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR ACTION

Outside of Council's formal community engagement processes, there was a lack of proactive, independent community voice or demand for food systems action. Council staff believed this to be a result of residents' low food literacy and interest in food issues, and misconceptions about their health status (i.e., self-reported health as 'good' while other evidence pointed to high rates of diet-related disease and inadequate consumption of recommended healthy foods and beverages).

CHALLENGES ATTRACTING FUNDING & MANAGING SCARCE RESOURCES

Penrith Council struggled to acquire funding for relevant programs because food and diet-related issues were not included in their *Community Strategic Plan*. The *Community Strategic Plan* is the overarching strategic document for LGs in NSW, and is informed by what community members perceive to be the key concerns for their local area. As diet-related health was not perceived as important by residents, this created a "chicken and egg" situation, where Council aimed to improve community engagement and food literacy via tailored initiatives, but funding for those initiatives relied on community health statistics and other data that demonstrated the need for such programs.

Limited funding presented challenges for evaluating projects over the long-term, as well as for coordinating and financing a growing portfolio of programs across the themes of waste and resource recovery, biodiversity, climate change, disaster preparation, and food sustainability.

Wish list

01 Changes to state government legislation that would empower local governments to control business mix in retail zones, enabling them to increase and support provision of fresh, healthy food, and limit fast food outlets

02 Platforms for information sharing between Councils regarding food system policy/program development and implementation, as well as on non food-specific programs such as community resilience building

03 Increased capacity for food relief programs and community service providers to supply a diverse range and consistent volume of healthy foods

NSW

GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL

The Living Classroom:
A groundbreaking whole-of-food system initiative

Location & demographics

Kamilaroi Country

North West Slopes and Plains region of NSW

POPULATION
5,258
in 2016[i]

SMALL TOWNS:
Bingara, Warialda, Gravesend

HERITAGE

5.7%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

15%
born overseas
(mostly from England, New Zealand, Germany, the USA, Philippines)

LANGUAGE

2.2%
speak a language other than English at home[i]
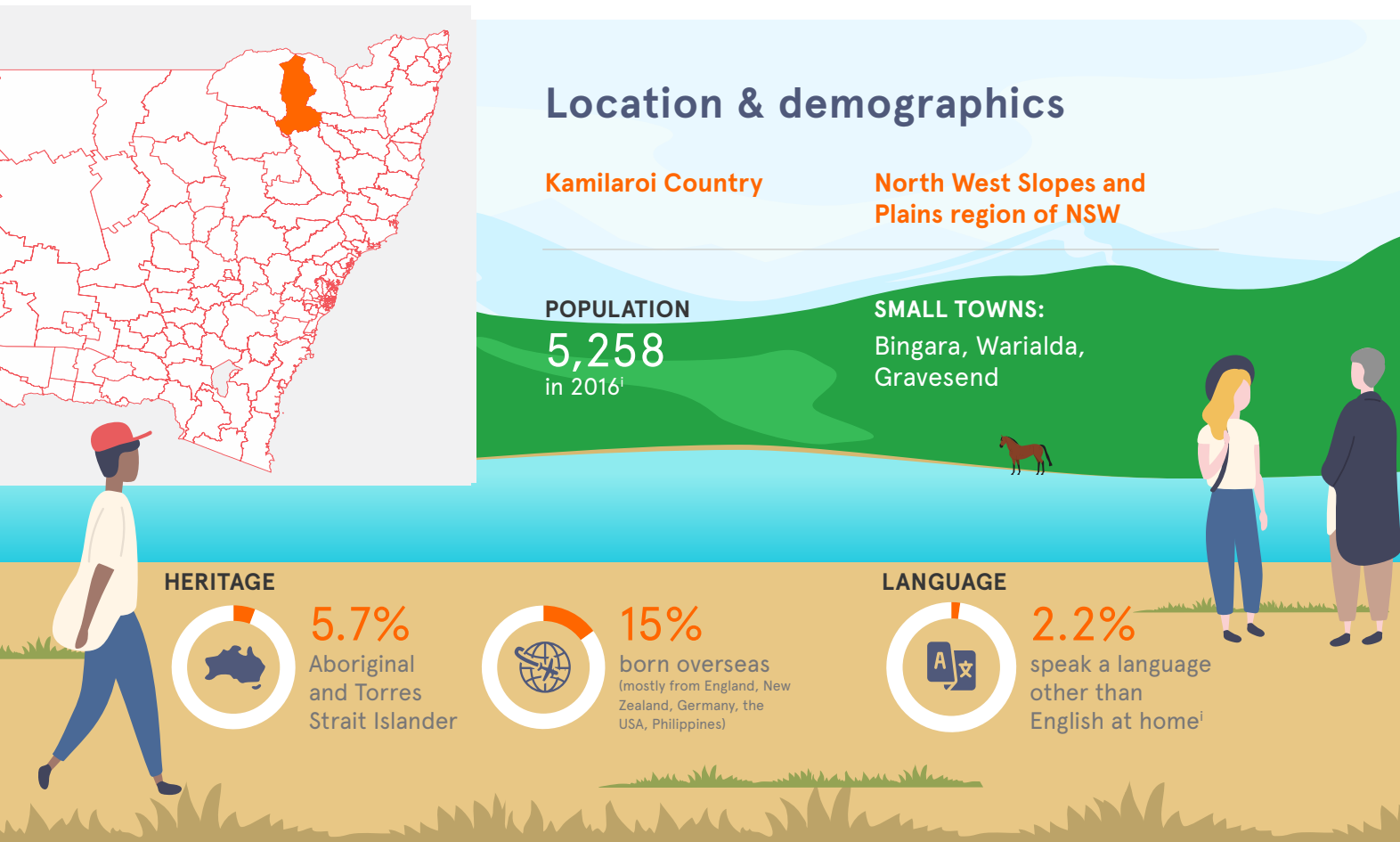
Food and diet context

- Agriculture remains the primary land use and economic activity in the Shire. This includes livestock production and broadacre cropping[i]

- Decreasing labour demand caused by technological advances in agriculture has heightened the need for the Shire to diversify its economic base

- Like many regional/rural Australian areas, there are fewer food retail options compared with metropolitan areas, and residents must travel greater distances to access them

- Local level data on food, nutrition and diet (including related health outcomes) are lacking, however, regional-level data from the Hunter New England Health District indicate extremely high levels of overweight and obesity (55% of adults) and diabetes (12%) in this area

[i] Australian Bureau of Statistics. '2016 Census QuickStats: Gwydir'. 2021. https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA13660

Relevant strategic documents

Gwydir Shire Council did not have a dedicated food system strategy, but was the site of an innovative food system program in the form of The Living Classroom (explained below).

- *Community Strategic Plan*

- *Delivery Program and Operational Plan*

- *Economic Development Strategy*

- *Destination Management Plan*

- *Bingara Preschool Nutrition Policy*

The Living Classroom

Beginning in 2011, The Living Classroom reclaimed 150 hectares of public land adjacent to the town of Bingara for the purpose of creating a learning centre that links together education, tourism, regenerative agriculture, and research using a food systems lens. The creation of The Living Classroom by the community group "Vision 2020" followed decades-long research indicating there were no known international examples of Council land developed for a regenerative agriculture centre. This group created a regeneration policy for the region, *Regeneration: Bingara and District Community Vision 2006,* which became the *Bingara Town Strategy 2011* and included plans for the The Living Classroom. The Living Classroom aligns with four pillars identified by Gwydir Shire Council as central to economic prosperity in the region: agribusiness, education, tourism, and conferencing.

The Living Classroom combines classrooms, a fruit and nut orchard, Bush Tucker Project, The Carbon Farm, Chinese Medicinal Garden, Kitchen Garden, Mediterranean Garden, Aussie Farm Dam Makeover project, and Grassland Regeneration. It was developed as one of three primary trade training centres designed to increase student traineeships in partnership with two local schools, Bingara Central School and Warialda High School.

The Living Classroom is also a community engagement space, acting as a classroom and venue for outdoor events. The site hosted the Pulse of the Earth Festival in 2019, a celebration of regenerative agriculture, soil health, food, art and culture. The international visit of an agricultural nutrition expert and guest speaker was supported by the Shire's Local Land Services.

The Living Classroom has or is developing a variety of community garden projects including a Chinese Medicinal Garden, in partnership with Gwydir Shire's sister council, Willoughby Shire Council (metropolitan Sydney), and an 800 square metre maze-style vegetable garden, inviting people who attend the Motor Home and Camper Van Rally to help build this garden.

As an interactive teaching garden, The Living Classroom has held outdoor school classes on growing, harvesting and cooking skills, as well as on bush tucker, linked to a discussion of Indigenous Australian history and truth-telling. Preschool visitors enjoy their own garden plots, where children learn to harvest, cook and eat their own produce.

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Partnerships
Partnerships with various organisations and institutions have been central to the delivery of The Living Classroom. School classes visited The Living Classroom for learning experiences, and this relationship also led to discussions about building edible gardens in school grounds. Farmers from the Central West of New South Wales and South East Queensland sub-leased part of The Living Classroom, using the space to showcase carbon capture and sequestration on The Carbon Farm. Organisers of The Living Classroom often engaged local Indigenous organisations and individuals about food systems initiatives. This included investigating opportunities to increase native foods available to nearby Indigenous communities by partnering with Black Duck Enterprises. The Living Classroom had partnerships with Southern Cross University's Regenerative Agriculture facility, the University of Sydney's Plant Breeding Institute, and Moree TAFE.

Evaluation
The Living Classroom was not formally evaluated, but data such as visitation and partnership numbers were used as informal indicators.

Seeking grants
Community organisers made regular grant applications, which were essential for the delivery of The Living Classroom, Big River Dreaming and other projects. However, as is commonly experienced, the success rate of applications was low.

Key implementation activities (outside The Living Classroom)

TOY LIBRARIES
- Educational activities delivered by Council's Social Services team in the townships of Bingara and Warialda
- Workshops for young families (preschool-aged children and their parents/caregivers) about nutrition, healthy eating and healthy relationships
- Cooking workshops to improve fine motor skills and follow instructions while learning about food preparation, safety, and healthy eating
- Hosted visiting dietitians from the Hunter New England Area Health Service, who presented healthy lifestyle workshops.
- The Area Health Service Child & Family Health Nurse provided information on breastfeeding, baby-led weaning, and starting solids
- Hosted a community lunch as part of Families Week, with healthy eating advice on offer
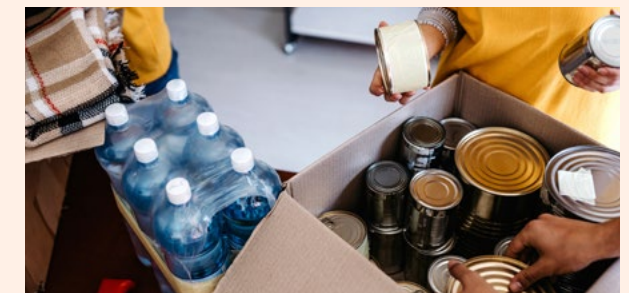
FOOD RELIEF
- Partnered with OzHarvest to deliver a fortnightly food relief service through Bingara Neighbourhood Centre and Bingara County Women's Association

BIG RIVER DREAMING
- Regional tourism project funded by a State Government Regional Growth grant
- Integrated, spiritual health, economic, and recreation project
- Highlighted Bingara's Indigenous history and culture, The Living Classroom, and waterfront pontoon to create a "Weaving Water Way" walkway

Key implementation activities cont...

FOOD BUSINESS INSPECTIONS

- Inspection of retail food businesses as required under the NSW Food Act

KOOL SKOOL KIDS

- Run by Council's Social Services team, Kool Skool Kids is an after-school program for primary school-aged children. Cooking was one of the activities included

FOOD WASTE AND COMPOSTING

- Kerbside food waste collection (FOGO) since 2013
- Educating residents on reducing food waste through Gwydir's membership in the Northern Inland Regional Waste Group
- Food and other organic waste is composted at the local tip, and is put to use at The Living Classroom to enrich the soil
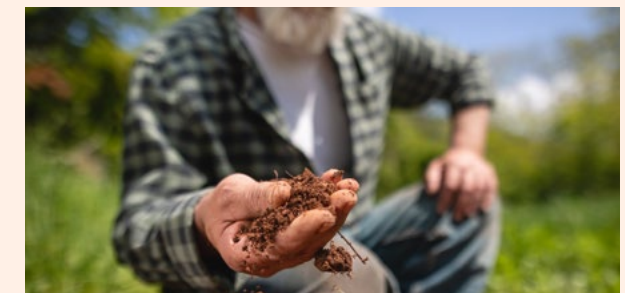
CARBON FARM

- 100 hectares of previously degraded grazing land that borders The Living Classroom.
- A hands-on, educational site for farmers, visitors, students and researchers to learn about carbon capture and soil health

Enablers

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

A history of community engagement and momentum around regenerative agriculture set the scene for development of The Living Classroom. One person, now employed by Council, led conceptualisation of The Living Classroom, including the incorporation of education, tourism and food systems. He was actively involved in the local food system prior to and during the time he spent championing The Living Classroom's development, and understood the importance of "localising" the food system – inverting the food system to produce more locally-grown food, create jobs and generate agricultural diversity. His instigation of The Living Classroom as a community organiser, not as an employee of Gwydir Shire Council, demonstrated the potential for community members to advocate for food systems change reflective of local needs.

HIGH-LEVEL SUPPORT

The Council's General Manager was supportive of The Living Classroom because of its alignment with the Shire's aspiration to improve education, including life-long education. He saw it as a pathway to enhance (low) educational attainment levels in the region through traineeships and developing vocational-based skills, and supported partnerships with the local schools to achieve these outcomes.

FUNDING

Grant funding facilitated development of The Living Classroom and two other primary trade training centres. Separate funding from Gwydir Shire Council and a New South Wales Government Regional Growth grant enabled the construction of two additional buildings within The Living Classroom site, due to be completed in late 2021.

Barriers

LACK OF STATE GOVERNMENT MANDATE

Council's food systems work was limited in two ways by the lack of a state government legislative mandate on food systems. First, Council's obligated assessment of food retail businesses (under the NSW Food Act 2003) was limited to food safety and hygiene, with no authority granted by state government to assess or improve the healthiness of available foods. Second, because The Living Classroom and its associated activities were outside the normal range of local government activities, Council staff found it challenging to justify its relevance as a Council project. Supporters of The Living Classroom were forced to continually convince some Councillors of its validity and value for the local community.

LACK OF SECURE, ONGOING FUNDING.

Significant time and expertise were spent finding and applying for grants so that projects were sustained and new initiatives could begin. Organisers of The Living Classroom went through this process without any guarantee that funding would be received. The Council staff member with primary responsibility for The Living Classroom was employed only on a part-time basis, partly due to the lack of funding.

EXTERNAL EVENTS – COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns caused community events and education programs to be cancelled or postponed. The Pulse of the Earth 2020 festival, hosted by The Living Classroom in partnership with Bingara and District Vision 2020, was postponed until September 2021. Preschool programs that connected young children with food and cooking were also paused indefinitely. The cancellation of these events caused a loss of community interconnectivity, learning and conviviality within Gwydir's food system.

Future goals

Increase partnerships with health groups and/or tertiary institutions to extend the Council's capacity to deliver food and nutrition-focused initiatives

Wish list

01 Greater recognition by universities of the fundamental principles on which The Living Classroom was founded. These include the importance of local food industries, improved food literacy, and the strategic integration of tourism and education

02 State and federal science-based agricultural policy that demonstrates understanding of local-level issues and supports local food policy

03 Increased funding opportunities for local and regional initiatives

Victoria

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Victoria's first
dedicated food policy

Location & demographics

The Traditional Custodians
are the Bunurong Boon
Wurrung and Wurundjeri
Woi Wurrung peoples of the
Eastern Kulin Nation

POPULATION
183,756
in 2020, but with an average daily
weekday population of 910,800[i]

CAPITAL CITY:
Victoria
made up of 14 suburbs

MOST POPULOUS SUBURBS:
**Melbourne, North and West
Melbourne, Southbank**[i]

HERITAGE

0.5%
Aboriginal
and Torres
Strait Islander

56%
born overseas
(mostly from China,
Malaysia, and India)[i]

LANGUAGE

48%
speak a language
other than
English at home[ii]

Concerns and issues

- Increasing rates of food insecurity, from 25.8% in 2019 to 32.9% in 2020, and 17.5% of residents running out of food in 2020 compared with 13.8% in 2019[iii]

- Only 7% of adults consumed the recommended serves of fruit and vegetables in 2020[iii]

- High rates of overweight and obesity – over 25% of adults, and over 50% of young adults aged 18–24 years[iv]

- Significant population growth, with the population estimated to increase by 79% by 2040, reaching over 328,500 residents1[v]

Food City: City of Melbourne food policy

Adopted in 2012, *Food City* was one of the first dedicated food policies created by a Victorian local government.

Food City describes a vision of a food system that is secure, healthy, sustainable, thriving and socially inclusive. It recognises the far-reaching connections food has with the economy, society and culture, and physical and mental health across five themes:

1. A strong, food secure community

2. Healthy food choices for all

3. A sustainable and resilient food system

4. A thriving local food economy

5. A city that celebrates food

In delivering the policy, the City of Melbourne see its role as encompassing:

- Education and community development

- Leadership and advocacy

- Building and strengthening partnerships

- Regulation and infrastructure management

- Research

The policy is accompanied by a comprehensive implementation plan and evaluation framework that specifies actions, responsible department(s) and staff, and internal and external partners.

[i] City of Melbourne. 'Melbourne facts and figures'. https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/about-melbourne/melbourne-profile/pages/facts-about-melbourne.aspx.

[ii] City of Melbourne. 'Residents profiles'. https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/about-melbourne/research-and-statistics/city-population/Pages/residents-profiles.aspx.

[iii] City of Melbourne. 'Food Security in the City of Melbourne'. https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/hwp-food-security.pdf.

[iv] City of Melbourne. 'Health and wellbeing profile 2020'. https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/health-wellbeing-profile-2020.pdf.

[v] City of Melbourne. 'City of Melbourne forecasts 2020-2040'. https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/forecasts-2020-2040-infographic-2021.pdf

Other relevant policies

- *Community Garden Policy*

- *Climate Change Mitigation Strategy*

- *Future Melbourne 2026*

- *Green Our City Action Plan*

- *Nature in the City Strategy*

- *Resilient Melbourne Strategy*

- *Startup Action Plan*

- *Waste Management Plan Guidelines*

- *Waste Resource Recovery Strategy*

Policy development

Community health, food system sustainability and food security were three driving forces behind the Policy's development. Discussions regarding the development of a strategic approach to food stemmed from the previous success of the Green Light, Eat Right pilot program in improving access to affordable and nutritious food.

Policy development was led by the Health and Wellbeing Branch within the Community and City Services Division. A *Food Policy Discussion Paper*, prepared by food system consultants, summarised current local, national and international food issues and approaches. The document was then shared with community groups, individuals, stakeholders and businesses for feedback, as part of an extensive community-engagement process.

 The "What does food mean to you?" campaign distributed 10,000 postcards, with a survey also asking , "What is the most important food issue our community will face in the future?" Working closely with the Community Engagement team, this process was supported by posters, forums and infographics, in order to capture community insights.

Using data collected through this first consultation round, a draft food policy was submitted and endorsed by Council. It was then shared with community members and stakeholders for a second consultation round, feedback was incorporated and the final policy was produced.

Steering Committee and Advisory Group

Two internal groups steered the policy's development, with staff from various departments:

1. Food Policy Steering Committee – General Manager of Community and City Services Division, Director of Health and Wellbeing Branch, and the Health Projects Team

2. Food Policy Advisory Group – Health Services, Recreation Services, Business and International, Sustainability, Community Services, Strategic Planning, City Design and Engineering Services

Research

Extensive consultation and community engagement was supported by community mapping, research on existing food policies, and stakeholder analysis of more than 100 local and international agencies. Council mapped all food-related activities run by community partners at the time. This later became a tool that Council referred to annually when considering possible new food activities. An emphasis was placed on European and North American examples of local food policies, with Council communicating with the City of Michigan's Detroit Food System Council during early stages of policy development. These references were combined with the food security policies of other Victorian local governments, including Darebin City Council.

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Partnerships

Council partnered with various individuals, organisations and businesses from the food sector to harness expertise and knowledge. Partners included social enterprises (Doing Something Good), food system platforms and networks (Open Food Network, Sustainable Table), horticulture/gardening services (WormLovers), food relief organisations, hospitality (Touche Hombre), and Council contractors (SERCO, Citywide).

A long-term partnership with Melbourne University's Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab played a critical role in developing a body of research on local food systems issues. This included investigating urban agriculture's role in resilient city food systems, increasing equitable access to fresh, healthy food, and mapping Melbourne's food bowl.

Collaboration across Council departments

Health and Wellbeing staff worked with other teams to deliver informational and sustainable food production projects. These included:

- Partnering with the Events Team to roll out "Healthy Choices" campaign at Moomba Festival

- Partnering with Communications and Strategic Marketing and Media Teams to promote Town Hall veggie patch and Grow Show program

- Partnering with (then) Neighbourhood Development Team and Engineering Services Group to introduce sustainable food production projects (worm farms, recycling, beehives and Biofilta Foodwalls) to City Gardens residential complex

Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation framework used a Results Based Accountability model and was embedded during the policy's early development. Defined aims and outcomes were used to create implementation and action plans, including key performance indicators.

Evaluation used evidence collected from questionnaires, program surveys, staff surveys, workshops, and qualitative and quantitative data from programs and events.

Key implementation activities

COMMUNITY GARDENS AND PUBLIC PLACE FOOD GROWING

- Sites for growing food, holding gardening workshops, food swaps, and building social connections

- Situated on underutilised public land, public housing estates, laneways, a university campus, and in conjunction with Neighbourhood Houses, with varying degrees of public access

- 2016 trial of a Laneway Garden on Davis Street, Kensington, to increase urban food growing and social inclusion. Led to a model for future Council projects to enliven underutilised spaces.

- Annual veggie patch outside Melbourne Town Hall during the Sustainable Living Festival that featured a display of fruit trees, herbs, vegetables and edible flowers

HIGHLIGHTING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD OPTIONS

- *The Community Food Guide* mapped all community food programs in the City, including food banks, food relief programs, community gardens, community kitchens, fresh produce markets and food rescue sites

- Update to the *Catering Suppliers Resource Guide* to characterise catering options according to nutrition, cost, culture, sustainability, and social enterprise criteria

- *Healthy Choices* guide (formerly "Green Light, Eat Right") integrated into events (Moomba, Melbourne Fashion Week, Melbourne Awards)

Key implementation activities

GROWING FOOD SYSTEM ENTREPRENEURS

- Local Food Launchpad (2015) program in partnership with the Open Food Network and Do Something Good Network. The program comprised a series of workshops to support, mentor and advance local, innovative ideas for food systems transformation

- Resulting businesses and programs include Waratah Market Garden, Edible Educators, and 'Food Ed'

COMMUNITY KITCHEN AND FOOD LITERACY PROGRAMS

- Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food Mobile Kitchen (2015) in partnership with the Good Foundation provided 598 people with food knowledge and cooking skills. Program participants included single parents, the unemployed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and residents at risk of diet-related diseases

- Support to Community Kitchen programs that strengthen social inclusion through food

Enablers

COUNCIL LEADERSHIP ON AND PRIORITISATION OF FOOD

Development of *Food City* was driven by an internal top-down request that a food policy be investigated. This high level leadership and prioritisation of food by Councillors and senior management influenced other staff to support food policy. Buy-in from lower-level Officers and Team Leaders also facilitated development of the policy.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANDATE

The Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)* provided a platform for Council to address food- and nutrition-related issues through the local public health plans that Victorian Councils must create under this Act. The Council's Health Projects Team, situated in its Health and Wellbeing branch, were responsible for both the *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan* ("the Plan") and food policy. *Food City* initiatives fell under the umbrella of the Plan and were viewed via a public health lens. The legislative health and wellbeing mandate meant Council staff were accountable for creating the Plan and delivering actions on diet-related health and community health. It also gave legitimacy to and focused Council's attention on food systems-related issues.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The City of Melbourne joined the *Milan Urban Food Policy Pact*, which provided the City with an international community of practice. The Pact is an agreement and working tool for local governments to address food-related issues in urban areas. The framework combines 37 actions within 6 categories of governance, sustainable diets and nutrition, social and economic equity, food production, food supply and distribution, and food waste.

Council's membership with the Pact enabled food policy implementation in two ways.

- Knowledge sharing between signatories supported decision-making during the policy's lifespan
- Alignment with international examples of local food policy strengthened Council's local credibility and leadership concerning food issues, which drove internal and external support for food-related actions

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic increased general Council awareness of food insecurity and food systems issues, including the associated financial and social barriers to accessing food. Despite the immediate negative impacts of the pandemic, it led to the development of a Community Food Relief Plan 2021-2025.

Barriers

LACK OF COLLABORATION ACROSS COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS

Council departments tended to work in silos and this impacted the cross-organisational approach required to implement *Food City*. Engaging a high volume of staff with diverse objectives was a challenge to achieving a collective vision. At the time of developing their food policy, staff were limited by the lack of clear oversight across Council departments. Engaging staff from across difference departments on food-related objectives was difficult, so despite advocating for food systems thinking in strategic documents (food in all policies), this was not widely reflected in the *Future Melbourne 2026, Climate Adaptation, Urban Forest* and *Open Space* strategies.

LACK OF DATA

Council's understanding of, and therefore responses to, local food issues were restricted by a lack of up-to-date data and research. This included rigorous data on food security, as well as information on the effectiveness of various policy and program initiatives in relation to improving health, sustainability, and equity outcomes.

LACK OF STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

A lack of state government leadership on food systems issues resulted in a lack of direction for Council staff when it came to implementing local food policy. Compared to the relative strength of the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan's* requirements concerning local-level health and wellbeing policy, the absence of a similar framework for food systems left Council unclear about its role. Lack of state-level leadership also resulted in the duplication of research and initiatives by local governments that would have been better coordinated by state government.

EXTERNAL EVENTS – COVID-19

From early 2020, implementation of *Food City* was inhibited by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused Council to focus on core functioning, which resulted in less focus on macro issues such as urban agriculture, and greater focus on acute issues such as the provision of food relief.

Future goals

01 Develop a long-term strategy to address food insecurity beyond a model that relies on food relief. Become preventive rather than responsive

02 Complete a review of *Food City* by the end of 2022 and include a shift to community resilience-building approaches and an overall **systems-based** framework

03 Ensure the monitoring and evaluation framework is within the capabilities of Council staff and available resources
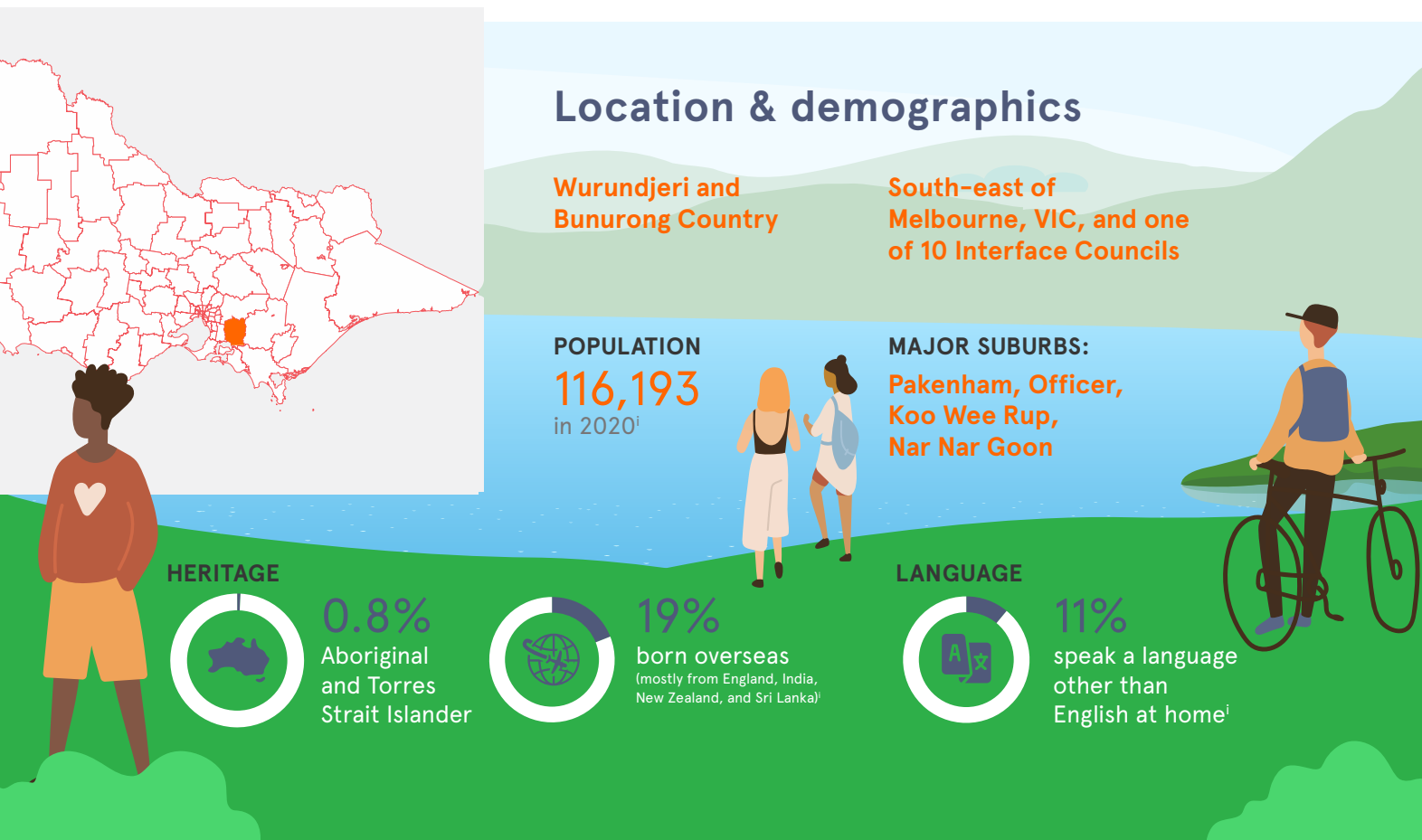
Wish list

01 Council to support creation of an internal working group to improve policy development and implementation. The proposed membership would include Health and Social Planning, Community Services, Aged Services, Aboriginal Melbourne, Climate and Sustainability, Planning, Communications, Waste, Open Space, and Events. The working group would provide general oversight, and promote cross-organisational collaboration as a practical example of systems-based approaches

02 A state government mandate for food systems, similar to the Public Health and Wellbeing mandate. Legislative changes should create coherence in food systems policy at the state government level, and reduce duplication of research and resources at Council level

03 Access to a state-coordinated body of research that enhances councils' understandings of local food systems, supports evidence-based decision-making and policy development, and provides comprehensive indicators for measurement and monitoring of food system issues, including food security

Victoria

Cardinia

Working collectively for food system improvement

Location & demographics

Wurundjeri and Bunurong Country

South-east of Melbourne, VIC, and one of 10 Interface Councils

POPULATION
116,193
in 2020[i]

MAJOR SUBURBS:
Pakenham, Officer, Koo Wee Rup, Nar Nar Goon

HERITAGE

0.8%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

19%
born overseas
(mostly from England, India, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka)[i]

LANGUAGE

11%
speak a language other than English at home[i]

Concerns and issues

- Combination of urban and non-urban areas
- Projected 60% population growth between 2017 and 2029[ii]
- Land use and loss of arable land due to population growth, particularly in the 'green wedge'
- 'Food swamps' – characterised by high ratio (9:1) of fast food outlets to fresh produce stores[iii]
- High rates of obesity – 25% of adults[ii]

[i] id consulting. 'Cardinia Shire Community Profile'. https://profile.id.com.au/cardinia.

[ii] Cardinia Shire Council. 'Cardinia Shire's Liveability Plan 2019-29: Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan'. 2017.

[iii] Needham et al. 'Food retail environments in Greater Melbourne 2008-2016: Longitudinal analysis of intra-city variation in density and healthiness of food outlets'. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health. 2020;17(4):1321.

Cardinia Community Food Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2026

The *Cardinia Community Food Strategy* describes a vision to achieve a healthy, delicious, sustainable and fair food system for all Cardinia Shire residents, with the objective of increasing access to affordable, nutritious food by 2026.

The Strategy targets five key pillars:

1. Protecting and utilising fertile land for growing food

2. Growing a vibrant economy that includes local growers and access to local produce

3. Enhancing food literacy and culture through engagement across communities

4. Reducing and diverting food waste from landfill, and reusing water to grow food

5. Community capacity building in support of leadership and participation in food systems work

The Strategy draws on a socio-ecological model of health in identifying five levels of intervention: individual, interpersonal, institutions, community, and public policy.

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Other relevant policies

- *Western Port Green Wedge Management Plan*

- *Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy*

- *Sustainable Environment Policy*

- *Open Space Strategy*

- *Aspirational Energy Transition Plan*

- *Integrated Water Management Plan*

- *Nature Strip Guidelines*

- *Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and Action Plan*

Policy development

Creation of a dedicated food system strategy was motivated, in part, by concerns associated with community health outcomes and protection of farmland. Prior to the *Community Food Strategy's* creation, a 'Food' domain was built into Cardinia's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (*Cardinia Shire's Liveability Plan 2017–29*), with the *Community Food Strategy* subsequently giving strategic direction on how this 'Food' domain was to be implemented.

Collective impact approach

A collective impact approach underpinned development and implementation of the Strategy. Collective impact is a collaborative, place–based approach that brings together diverse stakeholders and organisations to deliver activities under a shared agenda. Council partnered with Sustain: The Australian Food Network, who acted as the 'backbone' organisation to guide the vision and strategy; support aligned activities; establish shared measurement practices; build public will; advance policy; and mobilise funding. Alongside the backbone organisation, the policy was informed by a Food Circles Governance Group (a steering group), the Cardinia Food Network, and the wider community. Another significant contributor to the development of and ongoing implementation of the policy was the Food Circles Collective Impact and Urban Agricultural Facilitator (employed by Council).

Consultation and research

In developing the Strategy, Cardinia Shire Council undertook extensive community and stakeholder engagement, supported by a review of existing relevant Cardinia Shire Council policies, research on other local government food policies, and a review of the global, national, and state policy context. The engagement process involved:

- 20 Kitchen Table Conversations with approximately 400 residents, which were facilitated by "Community Food Animators" (local residents trained for the role);

- An online platform and physical postcards through which residents could submit ideas;

- A workshop with 50 organisational partners and key stakeholders from community health, education, academia, and business

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Allocation of a specific staff role

Following the loss of four years of state funding for improving health outcomes (including for healthy and sustainable food), the CEO and Council decided the work was too important to stop. They then invested in the Food Circles Collective Impact and Urban Agricultural Facilitator role for a term of three years. This secured expertise to oversee implementation of the Strategy and specific activities, but with a focus on enabling the community. The role was also a mechanism to provide support for community gardens and urban agriculture.

Adopting a collective impact approach

A collective impact approach during policy implementation enabled effective management of resources and eliminated duplication by ensuring that partners were aware of the actions of others. Partnerships fostered during the extensive policy development consultation processes carried over to policy implementation. Early engagement facilitated buy-in by external organisations (e.g., Conservation Volunteers Australia, the Sikh Community, Monash Health, Port Philip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, schools), facilitated project delivery, and created a sense of legitimacy for implementation of the Strategy. Partners continued to be involved in the evaluation of activities and Strategy implementation.

Strategy evaluation

Evaluation of the Strategy was aligned with the legislated annual review process prescribed under the State's *Public Health and Wellbeing Act Vic (2008)*; however, staff believed six-monthly reviews would strengthen monitoring. Individual strategies and projects carried their own evaluation, such as measuring the volume of waste in residential green bins to assess the impact of the kerbside food waste collection service, or surveying residents who participated in workshops and events.

Key implementation activities

COMMUNITY GARDENS & URBAN AGRICULTURE

- 2021 review of the *Community Garden Policy* with intention to create a *Community Garden & Urban Farming Policy*

- Community demand for urban farms, community farms, and community orchards

- Moving away from more traditional models of community gardens, such as those attached to Neighbourhood Houses

- Integrated urban agriculture into the *Open Space Policy*

- Extended the Food Circles Collective Impact Facilitator staff position to include Urban Agriculture, funded for 6 months under 'Working for Victoria' (state initiative assisting local governments to employ jobseekers as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic)

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- 2017 inaugural Cardinia Community Food Forum, featuring Devita Davison of Foodlab Detroit and attended by over 100 residents and visitors

- 2019 Cardinia Community Food Forum, featuring Devita Davison and coinciding with the public launch of the Cardinia Community Food Strategy

- 2020 Cardinia Farm and Food Festival. Over 350 residents attended, learning about local food, farmers, and culture

- 2020 The Future of Food: Sustainable Food Systems – Lessons from British Columbia, Canada, featuring Associate Professor Lenore Newman from the University of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia

- 2020 Come Ferment With Me, featuring world fermentation guru Sandor Katz

- 2021 The Long Farm Feast, Cardinia Community Food Hub

Key implementation activities

CIRCULAR SYSTEMS – FOOD WASTE AND WATER REUSE

- Popular educational booth at the Farm and Food Festival providing practical suggestions residents could implement at home

- Kerbside food waste collection service began late 2020, with resultant compost provided to local food producers

- Rebates for residents for compost bins/ worm farms, mulchers, reusable sanitary products, reusable nappies

- Waste services adhering to waste hierarchy: avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle, dispose

- 2020 update to Council's planning scheme to place strategic emphasis on the need to reduce and divert food waste from landfill and reuse water to grow food

PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND

- 2018 overlay applied to Planning Scheme to protect high quality soil for agriculture and horticulture in the Western Port region

- 2021 update of Council's Planning Scheme to protect land for food production

- Food strategy engagement processes inspired local residents to advocate for protection of land, with a working group preparing a submission to the Victorian Government's Green Wedge Agricultural Land Review

Enablers

COUNCIL PRIORITISATION OF FOOD

The support of key Council employees (including the CEO) and Councillors (elected members) who valued the creation of a healthy and sustainable food system was an important factor in the development of the Strategy and its ongoing implementation and resourcing. Instead of abandoning momentum when state government funding was pulled, Cardinia Shire Council chose to allocate internal funds to employing the Food Circles Collective Impact and Urban Agricultural Facilitator, and sought out partnership with Sustain to continue the earlier food systems work. Further, the political leadership and insight into the long-term nature of this work from the-then CEO resulted in a commitment that the Strategy be a minimum 10-year initiative.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANDATE

Victoria's *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)* created an opening for Cardinia Shire to put food systems on the agenda. A 'Food' domain had previously been integrated into their *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan* ("*Liveability Plan*"), based on extensive research and analysis that identified food as an important public health issue. Recognition of food as a key strategic issue, but the lack of a existing policy or comprehensive set of actions, necessitated the development of the Strategy.

COLLABORATION ACROSS COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS

Both the collective impact approach and the fact that Cardinia Shire experienced limited resourcing relative to other local governments encouraged staff to collaborate and be innovative in order to implement policy actions. While different Council departments had particular areas of relevance within the Strategy, overlaps across the five pillars meant that staff from different departments were required to work together. This collaboration brought with it the benefits of ensuring time and resources were not wasted through duplication.

Barriers

LACK OF STATE GOVERNMENT MANDATE

The absence of a national and/or state food systems policy was a barrier to the development of a local-level policy. The lack of recognition at these higher levels resulted in a set of related issues:

· A lack of legislative mandate granting power to local governments to act on food systems;

· Dearth of funding specifically allocated to food system work;

· Use of a siloed lens that caused state- and national-directed programs to address single topics (e.g., food security or food waste) rather than considering food as a system;

· Uncertainty regarding long-term implementation measures necessary for food system transformation, stemming from short-term project-based grants, and short-term staff contracts

CHALLENGES ENGAGING FARMERS

Despite using a collective impact approach and making efforts to engage farmers in consultation processes, this proved challenging. The fragmented nature of local, small-scale farmers – who do not sit under an industry group – made it hard to capture their voices during the policy development engagement activities.

LACK OF DATA

There was an absence of up-to-date local data on aspects of the food system including health, the number of food growers in the region, and food waste. This limited Council's ability to demonstrate a need to act, and to include food systems in strategic planning, which in turn reduced the likelihood of success when applying for funding.

EXTERNAL EVENTS – COVID-19

The pandemic distracted from the broader systems-based nature of the Strategy. Instead of improving food access through a social determinants lens, major funding grants were targeted at expanding food relief services in light of an increasing number of people facing food insecurity with the loss of their jobs.

Future goals

To continue the Cardinia Community Food Hub trial – combined community space, youth training kitchen, and food box scheme – with the view to cement it as a model for community capacity-building and a way to ensure residents have dignified access to nutritious, locally-grown food.

Wish list

01 Recognition at state and federal levels of the systems-based nature of food and that food is not merely a commodity, with the subsequent appointment of a 'National/State Food Minister' or equivalent, and creation of national and state food system strategies to provide a top-down framework in which to situate the work of local governments

02 Long-term funding from the higher tiers of government for food systems work

03 A state government standard for the assessment, utilisation, and reduction of food waste to direct more edible but cosmetically 'imperfect' produce to consumers

04 Use of consistent language in state and local planning schemes and local food policies to assist streamlining policy development processes

05 Creation of a farm cooperative to assist Council's engagement with the region's food growers

Victoria

CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO | Building community support through comprehensive consultation

Location & demographics

Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country

Central Victoria, and Victoria's third most populous city

POPULATION
119,980
in 2020[i]

MAJOR TOWNS:
Heathcote, Marong, Strathfieldsaye[i]

HERITAGE

1.7%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

8%
born overseas (mostly from the UK, New Zealand, India and Burma)[i]

LANGUAGE

5%
speak a language other than English at home[i]

Concerns and issues

- 53% of adults overweight or obese, which is higher than the state average[ii]
- Low fruit and vegetable consumption; high sugar-sweetened beverage consumption[ii]
- Large differences in level of disadvantage between different suburbs[iii]
- Community members identified the following as their main food system concerns:[iv]
  - Food waste and food packaging waste
  - Lack of healthy fast food/snacks
  - Chemicals used in food production
  - Inadequate access to locally grown food
  - Poor knowledge and skills to cook fresh food

Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy 2020–2030

Greater Bendigo's *Food System Strategy* describes a vision to achieve a healthy, equitable and sustainable food system that supports the local economy, culture, and health and wellbeing of local communities. The Strategy includes actions at the five levels described by the socioecological model of health: individual, interpersonal, institutions, community, and public policy. It incorporates the *One Planet Living* framework, which acknowledges that the human race is currently living beyond planetary boundaries, and sets out 10 principles for living that would allow us to thrive with the one planet available to us.

The four objectives of the Strategy are to:

1. Enable communities to access safe, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food 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

[i] id consulting. 'City of Greater Bendigo Community Profile'. https://profile.id.com.au/bendigo.

[ii] City of Greater Bendigo. 'Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021.

[iii] id consulting. 'City of Greater Bendigo: SEIFA by profile area'. https://profile.id.com.au/bendigo/seifa-disadvantage-small-area.

[iv] City of Greater Bendigo. 'Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030. 2020.

Other relevant policies

- *City of Gastronomy Strategy and Action Plan*
- *Environment Strategy and Action Plan*
- *Greening Greater Bendigo Strategy*
- *Pandemic Relief and Recovery Plan*
- *Settlement Strategy*
- *Healthy Facilities Policy*
- *Public Space Plan*
- *Sustainable Water Use Plan*
- *Housing Strategy*

City of Gastronomy

In October 2019, Greater Bendigo was the first Australian region to receive the designation of a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. The four pillars underpinning this application and subsequent action plan are:

- Celebrate and elevate First Nations' culture, creativity and knowledge
- Recognise creativity, cultural diversity and innovation
- Improve health and wellbeing, particularly through healthy eating
- Prioritise environmental sustainability, sustainable agriculture and food production to tackle climate change

Policy development

Momentum for developing a food system policy had been building since at least 2014 when a food security study and report recommended developing such a policy. The recommendation was supported in the 2017-2018 *Community Plan*, which contained the following action: "explore opportunities to develop a food policy that coordinates a broad range of themes, including healthy eating and a Greater Bendigo Food Hub". The inclusion of food-related actions in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* was another strategic driver for development of a dedicated food system strategy.

Consultation, drafting, refining

Council invested time and resources into more extensive engagement than usual because they recognised it was a significant piece of work and that they needed to make the most of the opportunity it presented. Consultation and engagement involved:

1. Initial community consultation – between March and June 2019, approximately 1000 people and community groups participated in an online survey, stakeholder workshops, face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews, listening posts, engagement stalls, focus groups and community sessions. Feedback was received from school students, teachers and parents, farmers and growers, organisations and businesses, hospital and health service staff, food distributors and food relief agencies, food retailers, sporting facilities, and Indigenous and multicultural groups

2. Producing an Issues and Opportunities Report, which was discussed in an action planning workshop with 50 key partners and stakeholders to inform a draft strategy

3. Releasing the draft strategy for public comment

4. Incorporating feedback to produce the final *Food System Strategy*

Policy implementation

KEY PROCESSES

Promote cross-departmental collaboration

Concerted efforts were made to increase communication and collaboration between different Council departments: Community Partnerships, Safe and Healthy Environments, Healthy Greater Bendigo, Active and Healthy Lifestyle Units, Strategic Planning, Tourism and Major Events. Staff from these departments comprise Council's internal Food System Working Group.

Secure funds to employ a dedicated staff member

Council staff submitted a budget bid that would have allowed for a consultant to deliver a food system strategy. To their surprise, they were successful in securing more than the requested amount, which allowed Council to instead fund a Food Systems Officer position for 10 years to facilitate the creation and implementation of the *Food System Strategy*.

Adopt a collective impact approach

Stemming from the *Health and Wellbeing Plan*, Council took a collective impact approach to implementing the Strategy, acknowledging that a whole-of-community response is essential, and that other organisations are often better positioned than Council to implement relevant activities. This approach resulted in partnerships with more than 30 organisations and institutions, including community health, food relief, agribusiness, local manufacturing, waste recovery, and education. These partnerships were central to delivering the diverse actions within the Action Plan's four objectives.

> "We need others in the community to lead and to deliver actions where we can't, in spaces where we don't work".

Evaluate implementation and impact

Progress on the Strategy's actions is monitored through quarterly meetings of an internal working group and external steering group; however, a formal measurement and evaluation framework (with specific indicators) was not built into the Strategy from its inception. Annual review and reporting will be conducted by Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy Reference Group, and the internal working group also contributes to evaluation. Partners identified as 'lead organisations' in the Strategy's Action Plan will report to the reference group on their respective actions.

Key implementation activities

COMMUNITY GARDENS

- Sites for growing fresh and healthy food, connecting residents, providing education sessions, and composting food waste
- Located in spaces such as public parks, schools, hospitals, church grounds, and Neighbourhood Houses
- Often supported by community organisations, such as Bendigo Regional Food Alliance, and Long Gully Neighbourhood Centre

LOCAL FOOD BRANDING AND TOURISM

- Increased food tourism is a potential positive outcome of the *City of Gastronomy Action Plan*, with consumers recognising that food businesses who align with the four pillars of the Plan provide unique experiences
- Creation of a local food brand to heighten awareness of local producers and retailers
- Developed (in partnership with Bendigo Regional Tourism) the *Bendigo and Region Gastronomy Guide* – an interactive guide to local food trails and experiences

ACCESS TO FRESH FOOD

- Use of local planning provisions to support access to fresh, healthy food:
  - Allocating space for community gardens in public buildings;
  - Ensuring new residential developments were within walking distance to a fresh food grocer
- Advocating to state government for regionally-located FoodShare Hubs to receive an equitable amount of funding relative to metropolitan regions

Enablers

ESTABLISHED HEALTH PROMOTION/ PREVENTIVE HEALTH FRAMING

The National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health and Healthy Together Victoria left a legacy of increased local awareness of and engagement with the links between food and health, spanning the decade prior to the Strategy's development. This, alongside the *Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan* (which included actions to increase healthy eating, improve access to affordable, nutritious food, and address affordable housing), *Food Security Report* and *Community Action Plan (2017–2018)* established a context for development of a food system strategy.

COUNCIL PRIORITISING FOOD SYSTEMS

Leadership demonstrated by Council's Director of Health and Wellbeing, and the interest of Councillors were key factors to the Strategy's development and implementation.

> ❝ *"If we had nine Councillors who were all about rate-capping and roads, rates and rubbish, we wouldn't be making as much headway in the space as we are at the moment".*

The Director of Health and Wellbeing was pivotal to the adoption of a collective impact and 'The Water of Systems Change' models in developing and implementing the Strategy.

Council's recognition of the importance of food systems was also demonstrated by the successful submission of a budget bid. The budget allocation funded the development of the Strategy (including extensive community consultation) and a two-year Food Systems Officer position.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COUNCILS

Collaborating with other Councils supported policy implementation by increasing access to resources, extending networks, and reaching a wider audience. Collaboration with neighbouring Councils took place under the umbrella of the UNESCO City of Gastronomy framework.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Partnerships with diverse organisations extended the scope of what was possible for the region under the Strategy. Connecting these organisations under the cohesive vision of the Strategy allowed Council to build a network of expertise, bring program providers and recipients together, maximise knowledge and resources, build credibility, and create new relationships. For example, partnership with the North Central Catchment Authority and Bendigo Kangan TAFE recognised that farmers were best reached by non-Council institutions and demonstrated the importance of specialised educational institutions within a multi-stakeholder approach.

Barriers

STATE GOVERNMENT INCOHERENCE

Council's ability to deliver good health outcomes under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act Vic (2008)* is made more difficult by the fact that health and wellbeing factors are not included in the State's planning scheme or ratings guidelines. This significant omission is a barrier to Council making planning decisions in the interests of their community. This rendered Council unable to decline applications by fast food outlets to open new outlets within the area.

A lack of coordination between the Food Safety and Health Promotion teams within the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services resulted in significant barriers and red tape for groups wanting to serve healthier options (e.g., corn on the cob, veggie burgers) at community events and fundraisers. Sausages (and white bread and onions) had previously been deemed "low risk" foods, without acknowledgement of the long-term health risks associated with these foods. In contrast, serving healthier options required payment of fees and the attendance of a food safety supervisor at the relevant event.

" *"The state government needs to align its work across departments because they're conflicting with each other at times".*

CHALLENGES ENGAGING FARMERS

During the consultation undertaken to inform development of the Strategy, Council found it challenging to gain feedback from farmers but knew this was important for gaining a holistic perspective on local issues and potential solutions. However, as they had allocated significant time to consultation, they could change their approach and organise telephone interviews with this stakeholder group.

LIMITED FUNDS

Despite the successful budget bid to fund development of the Strategy and employ a Food Systems Officer, funding for delivering food system activities on-the-ground was limited. Council's ability to introduce new projects was further limited by rate capping (introduced by the Victorian government in 2016). This meant that staff were unable to propose any operational budget bids for new work unless they were able to demonstrate savings of an equivalent amount.

Future goals

01   Land mapping to identify areas of high agricultural quality, as part of the Council's Managed Growth Strategy

02   Continue advocacy, in partnership with Healthy Greater Bendigo, to improve the health and happiness of local residents

Wish list

01   A state government food systems mandate that establishes the role and importance of food in local government policy and programs, provides additional powers to local governments to respond to their local food system context, and streamlines local policy development

02   Changes to the Victorian Planning Scheme that would empower local governments to consider health and wellbeing factors when assessing new development applications, with the view to being able to decline applications by fast food outlets

03   Equitable allocation of funding by state government to regional Foodshare hubs, relative to metropolitan food relief services

04   A collaborative working group with neighbouring Councils, similar to the VicHealth Food Security Working Group, that creates a collective voice, expands the remit and resources beyond that of an individual local government, and improves opportunities for engagement with state government

Conclusion

The previous section of this report described six case studies of local government food system policy making and implementation in NSW and Victoria. This section makes some recommendations for other Australian local governments on how to strengthen food system policies and programs, drawn from those case studies. We end the report with a summary of what our LG participants told us would assist them in enhancing their work on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system.

What can other local governments learn from the case studies about *policy development*?

While some LGs took a 'place based' approach to addressing food systems, having a **dedicated food systems** policy can be beneficial as it:

1. Ensures the LG is taking a whole-of-food-systems approach (from production through to waste/recycling);

2. Joins together all the food-related activities undertaken by the LG;

3. Reduces departmental silos and improves internal coordination on food system issues;

4. Drives the creation of objectives, targets, and monitoring/accountability frameworks (and reporting against those objectives, targets, and frameworks); and

5. Provides a platform for designating funding to specific deliverables

Food system work can also be strengthened by integrating food-related issues into general policies and strategies, such as Community Strategic Plans (NSW), and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (Vic) by ensuring alignment on food systems across these and other relevant documents.

Conducting **extensive consultation** during policy development is important for ensuring diverse representation and gaining a range of perspectives on the proposed policy. It also assists with the process of later engaging stakeholders as partners for policy/project implementation. Where resources allow, consultation specific to the development of a food system policy/strategy is most likely to deliver these benefits.

Building an **evaluation framework** into the development of the policy means that thought is given to policy evaluation early in the process. It also allows for specific targets to be identified and for progress on them to be monitored once the policy is implemented.

What can other local governments learn from the case studies about *policy implementation*?

Employing a Food Systems Officer enables responsibility for food system policies and programs to be delegated to a specific person. It can also bring invaluable expertise to LGs and can reduce departmental silos by facilitating communication and collaboration across local government.

Working with partners in the community extends the scope of what LG can achieve, draws on already available expertise, and reduces duplication.

LGs can leverage opportunities to **integrate food into non-food programs**. For example, using conversations with parents on reducing plastic waste through "nude food lunchboxes" to discuss healthier, less processed foods.

Conducting evaluation alongside policy implementation is essential for demonstrating impact. It creates evidence of success that can be important for securing funding to continue LGs' food systems work.

What supports do local governments need to do more in this area?

An **explicit legislative and/or policy mandate** on food systems from state government that empowers them to develop and implement food system policies and programs that achieve positive health, environmental, and economic outcomes for their community.

Funding from state government for core, ongoing work is necessary to provide LGs with the resources to ensure rigorous policy development processes, employ staff, implement activities to a high standard, and conduct meaningful evaluation.

Pathways to establishing **collaborative working groups** (communities of practice) with neighbouring LGs to share ideas and experiences, build expertise, and strengthen potential implementation activities through regional approaches.

LGs require **up-to-date, locally-relevant data** on a broad range of food system topics and outcomes (e.g., on levels of food insecurity and diet-related ill-health). These data are essential for informing policy development (needs assessments – what are the issues?) and for demonstrating policy effectiveness.