



Research results

Cost of purchasing locally grown fruit and vegetables

Autumn 2023

*Research developed and conducted
by Deakin University,
commissioned by Healthy Loddon Campaspe.*



The Healthy Loddon Campaspe initiative is supported by the Victorian State Government

What is Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC)?

Healthy Loddon Campaspe is an initiative that encompasses the six local Councils of the Loddon Campaspe region - Campaspe Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, City of Greater Bendigo, Loddon Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire and Mount Alexander Shire. The initiative is aimed at improving health outcomes in the region.

The initiative, which was originally known as Healthy Heart of Victoria, was developed in response to the region showing higher than Victorian average rates of obesity, chronic disease and high-risk health behaviours.

HLC projects are designed to focus on those parts of the community that are the least supported to help encourage healthy eating and get more people, more active, more often.

Research background

Healthy Loddon Campaspe is developing a Regional Food System Framework to help guide the work of local government and key community organisations in creating a healthy, equitable and sustainable regional food system.

As part of this work, perspectives from community groups and stakeholders were gathered to discover some of the key issues impacting the food system in the Loddon Campaspe region.

Some of the key issues that emerged include:

- A lack of food literacy, understanding of seasonality and skills in healthy food preparation; and
- Cost of living, affordability of fresh food and the perception that locally grown food is more expensive than imported food.

To help address these concerns, Healthy Loddon Campaspe collaborated with researchers from Deakin University to investigate in each season, whether prices for fruits and vegetables differ based on whether they're grown locally or outside the region.



What we did

During May-June 2023, researchers from Deakin University analysed the price of 10 fruits and 27 vegetables that are most commonly consumed by the Australian population and can be feasibly grown in our region.

A total of 60 stores were audited, with most located in the City of Greater Bendigo (n=20) and Campaspe Shire (n=14), followed by Macedon Ranges Shire (n=11), Mount Alexander Shire (n=8), Central Goldfields Shire (n=4), and from Loddon Shire (n=3).

34 small supermarkets were surveyed, along with 17 large supermarkets, six greengrocers and three farmers market stalls.

The results

Key findings from the research for Autumn included:

Local Availability

- Out of a total of 1802 audited fruit and vegetable items, just over 5% were locally grown, while around 16% originated from Victoria, almost 74% were sourced from other parts of Australia, and approximately 3% were grown internationally.
- Locally grown produce was predominantly found at local farmers markets (35.4%), followed by greengrocers (32.3%) and small supermarkets (32.3%).

Cost and Significance

- Ten fruits and vegetables, including lettuce, cucumber, potatoes, leek, butternut pumpkin, radishes, eggplant, bok choy, sweet corn, and garlic, were found to be cheapest when locally grown.
- However, statistical analysis determined that only three of these items – lettuce, corn, and butternut pumpkin – were significantly cheaper when locally grown compared to Australian and Victorian alternatives.
- Most importantly, none of the fruits and vegetables analysed were significantly cheaper when imported from elsewhere / not grown locally, dispelling the myth that locally grown produce is less affordable.

Retailer Knowledge

- A significant discovery was that the majority of retailers, particularly smaller supermarkets, were unaware of the origin of the produce they sold. Many retailers sourced their produce from large warehouses without knowledge of the specific origin of each item.



What does this mean?

Importantly, the research indicates that purchasing locally grown fruit and vegetables is no more expensive than purchasing produce that is grown outside our region. This helps to break down the barrier of price as a deterrent to purchasing locally grown produce.

It also means that price can be highlighted to the community as an additional advantage of buying and consuming locally grown fruit and vegetables.

This is in addition to other benefits including produce being fresher and thus having more nutrients, eating seasonally, less food miles, and supporting local growers and retailers.

What next?

The research highlights the need for more advocacy work to be done to facilitate a local food supply chain, as well as shift consumer perspectives towards an understanding that not only is locally grown produce better for the health of our community and environment, it is also no more expensive than that grown elsewhere.

Additionally, the lack of awareness from some retailers about where their produce was grown suggests that more work is needed to connect growers with retailers, as well as more promotion to raise overall community awareness about where our food is coming from.

Healthy Loddon Campaspe will replicate this research methodology to also explore the price of fruits and vegetables across Winter, Spring and Summer, so that data is available across all seasons. It is expected that there will be additional produce items that are cheaper when grown locally during Summer as that is the optimal time of year to grow produce in our climate. Results for each season will be released as they're made available.

Furthermore, Healthy Loddon Campaspe will continue to promote the benefits of locally grown produce via its Support Our Own. Choose Locally Grown. campaign. The campaign will continue to work with local growers, retailers and farmers markets to promote locally grown produce to the community.

Questions?

Contact Healthy Loddon Campaspe
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www.healthyloddoncampaspe.au



Produce cost basket comparison - Autumn 2023

All locally grown produce purchased from Farmers' Market



All non-locally grown produce purchased from large supermarket

