



Flourish

Regional Food System Framework

Loddon Campaspe Regional Food System Framework

Background Document

Acknowledgement

Healthy Loddon Campaspe respectfully acknowledges that the Loddon Campaspe region encompasses the traditional lands and waters of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Wurundjeri, and Yorta Yorta people.

We pay our respects to them, their culture, and their Elders past, present and future.



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Background and Summary

In 2018, the Victorian State Government established Healthy Loddon Campaspe (formerly Healthy Heart of Victoria) to improve the health and wellbeing of communities across the Loddon Campaspe region. The initiative covers the six local government areas of the City of Greater Bendigo, Campaspe Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, Loddon Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire, and Mount Alexander Shire. Given food's integral role in promoting health and wellbeing, early in the initiative's development stakeholder engagement identified an opportunity to develop and resource a regional food system project. Flourish is the outcome of this work.

Food is central to life in Loddon Campaspe. Over 90% of the land here is dedicated to agriculture, making food vital to communities and livelihoods. Nevertheless, while we are very good at producing large amounts of food, that food does not necessarily reach our communities nor ensure that our communities are well-nourished. Households across our region experience food stress, and unhealthy dietary patterns are commonplace. Almost one in 10 homes in Loddon Campaspe are food insecure, 50% higher than the state average, and there are hot spots across the region where as many as one in five households do not have enough to eat. Moreover, food insecurity disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples and those who are unemployed or with very low household incomes.

What we eat is fundamental to our health. While we have known the importance and basic principles of healthy eating for a long time, knowledge isn't enough to ensure healthy food choices because what we eat is heavily influenced by the circumstances through which we go about everyday life. It is easy to lose sight of these broader circumstances, particularly our relationships with each other and the world we inhabit. The concept of food systems can help us take stock of these relationships and see how they connect in a complex web to form a whole. Food systems are defined as:

“The entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involves in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded” (1).



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Taking a systems approach encourages us to look critically and see the relationship behind food that are the root causes of our communities' most significant food-related health challenges. By promoting a shift in perspective, a systems lens helps us see that health is not a matter of individual free will but is shaped by how we collectively organise our food provisioning and, most importantly, that the health of people and the natural world are fundamentally intertwined. Humans are not separate and superior to the natural world but are part of it.

At the root of the issues related to food, including unhealthy dietary patterns and social disparities, lies a contradiction in how we organise our food systems. Food systems – the foundations of human life – have come to undermine the bases for all life. To create the abundance of food we may take for granted we have overdrawn and degraded ecosystems, including healthy soils, amenable climate, and the biodiversity necessary for producing food. Looking specifically at the two-way connection between food and climate change, global food systems contribute to a third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). However, the ability to produce food rests on relatively stable ecological conditions, and climate-driven food insecurity and supply instability are projected to increase with global warming.

Significantly, however, not all food systems contribute equally to ecosystem disruption and global warming. In Australia and other high-income countries, GHG emissions per person from food systems are significantly higher than elsewhere. Our food system results from the countless daily decisions about how to feed our families and communities and how to work the land to make that happen. The outcomes of these decisions determine whether our food system is vibrant and pulses with life by assuring food security and regenerating landscapes or contributes to our communities and landscapes becoming sick. Unfortunately, food insecurity, ecological degradation, and climate change (amongst other chronic issues) prove that decisions about our food system have gone awry.

Flourish is a plan for transforming our region's food system so that we can **all flourish together** – prioritising our communities and the ecosystems on which we depend. Flourish has one shared vision, three values, five interconnected objectives, and multiple emerging strategies and is supported by a range of existing policies, investments, and initiatives. Flourish provides a strategic pathway to guide the actions of the six local governments in Loddon Campaspe, farmers, food system workers, residents and other stakeholders.



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New initiatives are already emerging from the conversations started through the generation of Flourish. Activities include marketing of regionally grown and produced food, support for a regional roll-out of 'Grow It Local', and research to quantify the difference in economic cost between food grown and produced within the region and food brought in from elsewhere. Place-based planning is also in the pipeline to continue conversations at a local level and harness lived experiences to better understand what could be done differently by those most impacted by system redesign.

Healthy Loddon Campaspe has made this groundwork possible by creating space and opportunities for people to come together and practice reimagining and redesigning our food system. However, it is clear that transforming our region's food system to prioritise the needs of community and Country is no small task, nor is it something that can (or should) be achieved by only a small group of passionate individuals. Food is everyone's business. And so, from here, by committing to facilitate and guide the vision of Flourish, Healthy Loddon Campaspe welcomes forming new alliances with communities, stakeholders, and partner organisations so we can all take a role in building a vibrant food system full of life, that works for all.



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Introduction

In 2018, the Victorian State Government established Healthy Loddon Campaspe (formerly Healthy Heart of Victoria) to improve the health and wellbeing of communities across the Loddon Campaspe region. The initiative covers the six local government areas of the City of Greater Bendigo, Campaspe Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, Loddon Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire, and Mount Alexander Shire. Given food's integral role in promoting health and wellbeing, early in the initiative's development, stakeholder engagement identified an opportunity and strong support to develop and resource a regional food system project. The Loddon Campaspe Regional Food System Framework is the outcome of that work.

Why a Food Systems Framework?

Food is central to life in Loddon Campaspe. Over 90% of land here is dedicated to agriculture, making food vital to livelihoods and communities (2). Across the region there are over 44,000 agricultural businesses, most of which are in Loddon Shire and Campaspe Shire (Figure 1) (2). Agriculture contributes over \$1.6 to our regional economy, mainly from the production of dairy, meat, poultry, and grains (Figure 2) (3). We also have a buoyant food processing sector that adds a further \$2.7 billion to the economy, mostly from processing meat, dairy, fruit, and vegetables (4). Nevertheless, while we are very good at producing large amounts of food, that food does not necessarily reach our communities nor ensure that our communities are well-nourished.

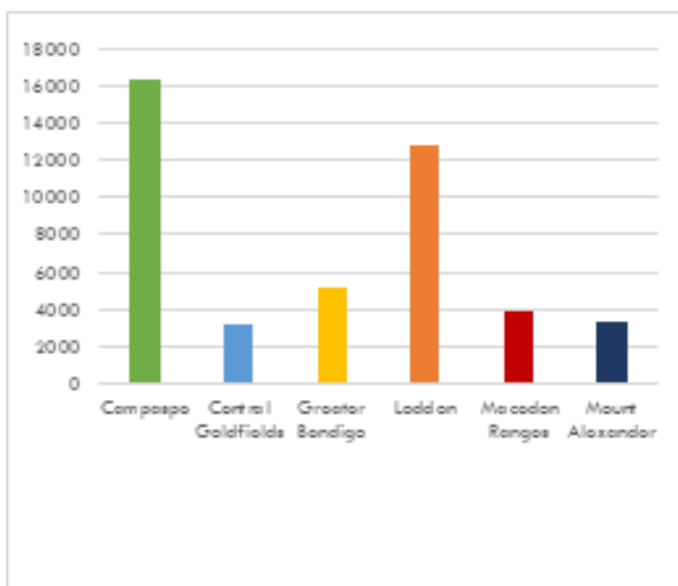


Figure 1. Number of Agricultural Businesses in Loddon Campaspe 2020-21, Total = 44,677 (2).

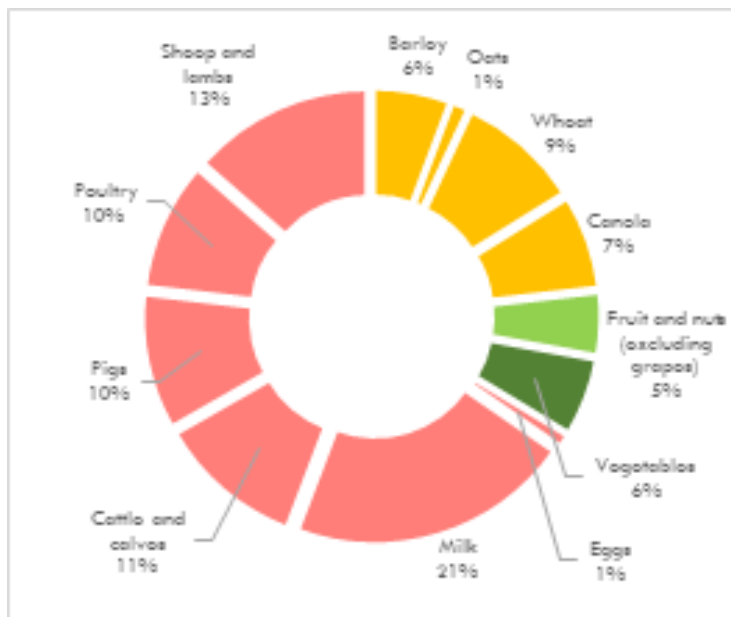


Figure 2. Share of Value of Agricultural Production in Loddon Campaspe 2020-21 (2).

Even in high-income countries like Australia, food insecurity is a real issue for many, including those on middle incomes (5). As a country and region, we produce more food than the national and regional populations can eat. While this is sometimes equated to national and regional food security, production metrics do not assure food security. Households across our region experience food stress, and unhealthy dietary patterns are commonplace.

The Healthy Heart of Victoria Active Living Census reveals that almost one in 10 households in Loddon Campaspe are food insecure, 50% higher than the state average, and there are vulnerable areas where as many as one in five households do not have enough to eat (6). Moreover, food insecurity disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples and those who are unemployed or with very low incomes (6).

What we eat is fundamental to our health. The introduction of ultra-processed and ‘fast’ foods and large amounts of foods sourced from animals is a relatively new phenomenon that has profound consequences for our health. Humans have evolved to eat a wide variety of unprocessed or minimally processed foods. Dietary patterns centred around a range of vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, moderate amounts of poultry, fish, dairy, and eggs, and small amounts of red meat are healthy and sustainable (7). However, these healthy and sustainable dietary patterns are out of reach for many in Loddon Campaspe. For instance, only half of adults meet the recommendations for two servings of fruit a day, which drops to only one in eight for five or more

daily servings of vegetables (6). Two in three adults in Loddon Campaspe are an unhealthy weight, which is a significantly higher proportion than the average for Victoria (6).

While we have known the importance and basic principles of healthy eating for a long time, knowledge isn't enough to ensure healthy food choices, because what we eat is heavily influenced by the circumstances through which we go about everyday life. It is easy to lose sight of these broader circumstances, including our relationships with each other and our world. But if we look more broadly to take in the bigger picture, we see that food connects us to ourselves and each other, through farming and the rest of nature – it is the fabric of life. More than just food – food is relationships made visible (and edible!). Health is only assured when the relationships between individuals, communities, and ecosystems are mutually supportive and beneficial.

The concept of food systems can help us take stock of these relationships and see how they connect in a complex web to form a whole. Food systems are defined as:

“The entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry, or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded” (1).

Taking a systems approach encourages us to look critically beyond food and see the relationships behind food that are the root causes of our communities' most significant food-related health challenges. By promoting a shift in perspective, a systems lens helps us see that health is not a matter of individual free will but is shaped by how we collectively organise food provisioning and, most importantly, that the health of people and the natural world are fundamentally intertwined. Humans are not separate (nor superior) from the natural world but part of it. Promoting health using a food systems approach encourages us to redesign the food system from the ground up to address root causes.

Food Systems and Collective Health

At the root of the issues attributed to food systems, including unhealthy dietary patterns and social inequities, is a contradiction in how food systems are organised. Food systems – the foundations of human life – have come to simultaneously undermine the bases for all life. To create the abundance of food we may take for granted, we have overdrawn and degraded ecosystem functions, including healthy soil, amenable climate, and biodiversity necessary for producing food.

For instance, looking more closely at food systems and climate change, global food systems contribute to a third (34%) of total anthropogenic GHG emissions (8). Most food-related GHG emissions relate to how we interact with land to produce food. For example, forests absorb twice as much carbon as they release and converting forests into pasture or cropland releases stored carbon dioxide. Deforestation for food production is a primary driver of GHG emissions. Another critical contributor to GHG emissions is farming (9). Cows and other ruminant animals release methane from belching. Nitrous oxide is also released from applying livestock manure and synthetic nitrogen-based fertilisers (10).

Significantly, however, not all food systems contribute equally to ecosystem disruption and global warming. In Australia and other high-income countries, GHG emissions per person from food systems are significantly higher than elsewhere (8). Notably, high-income countries produce proportionately more GHG emissions from the extensive networks between farm and fork, including transport, processing, packaging, retail, and waste (8). Projections estimate that limiting global temperature increases to achieve targets of 1.5 degrees Celsius is impossible (and 2 degrees Celsius very challenging) without deep and rapid reductions in food-related emissions (11).

Food systems are not only a leading contributor of GHG emissions but are also fundamentally impacted by a changing climate. Producing food requires relatively stable social and ecological conditions (e.g., sunlight, water, temperature), with most variation emerging slowly and predictably across seasons. Climate change is already disrupting conditions on land, stretching the capacity of crops to adapt, and testing the resilience of food systems. It is projected we will face increases in climate hazards in the near term, including an increase in food-, water- and vector- borne diseases, mental health challenges from increasing temperatures, trauma from extreme weather events, and loss of livelihoods and culture, flooding in coastal and other low-lying cities and regions and biodiversity loss (10). Aquatic ecosystems are also affected by GHG emissions, with ocean

warming and ocean acidification adversely affecting food production from fisheries and shellfish aquaculture (10). Consequently, climate-driven food insecurity and supply instability are projected to increase with global warming (10).

A vibrant regional food system is urgently needed as we head even deeper into the uncertainties that climate change ushers in. Flourish provides a strategic pathway towards this vision, guiding the coordinated activities of the six local governments in Loddon Campaspe, food system workers, residents, and other stakeholders, to promote health, justice, and resilience for all.



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The development of Flourish

Flourish was developed through a collaborative process led by food systems expert, Vanessa Clarkson, and a group of regional stakeholders. This process began with comprehensive activities to understand the local food system including an in-depth assessment based on international standards, a review of over 60 policy documents, and a survey of residents' experiences. This groundwork laid the foundation for a series of co-design workshops, where participants from across the region came together to identify key challenges and envision a future where these issues are addressed. The insights gained from these workshops were used to create the initial draft of Flourish, which was then further refined and finalised following two rounds of stakeholder feedback.

Framework development process:

1. Expert appointed and project reference group established.
2. Regional food system assessment and food policy mapping undertaken.
3. Stakeholder co-design workshops held and community engagement survey distributed.
4. Draft framework prepared and stakeholder feedback requested.
5. Equity Impact Assessment undertaken.
6. Background document completed and final Flourish Framework confirmed.

Policy Context

We conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise across relevant policy and strategy documentation at local, regional, state, and federal levels. Food policies and strategic goals are cross-referenced against Flourish's objectives to show where alignment exists.

Document Title	Objective				
	1	2	3	4	5
Campaspe Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25		■	■		
Loddon-Campaspe Integrated Transport Strategy 2015				■	
City of Greater Bendigo Social Justice Framework 2022-32	■				
Campaspe Economic Development Strategy 2014-19		■	■	■	■
Campaspe Council Plan 2021-25		■	■	■	■
Campaspe Environment Strategy 2018-22	■	■			■
Central Goldfields Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25					■

Central Goldfields Climate Action Plan 2022-30					
Central Goldfields Economic Development Strategy 2020-25					
Central Goldfields Council Plan 2021-25					
City of Greater Bendigo Food System Strategy 2020-30					
City of Greater Bendigo Council Plan (Mir Wimbul) 2021-25					
City of Greater Bendigo Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021-25					
City of Greater Bendigo Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2021-26					
City of Greater Bendigo Healthy Food and Catering Policy 2018					
Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy 2022-24					
Loddon Mallee Climate Ready Plan 2020-25					
Loddon Sustainable Agriculture Strategy 2019-24					
Loddon Dhelkunya Dja – Dja Dja Wurrung Country Plan 2014-24					
Loddon Waste Management Strategy 2020-30					
Loddon Community Vision 2031 and Council Plan 2021-25					
Loddon Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2019-24					
Loddon Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25					
Loddon Settlement Strategy 2019-34					
Macedon Ranges Council Plan 2021-31					
Macedon Ranges Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25					
Macedon Ranges Climate Action Plan 2017					
Macedon Ranges Cool Changes 2017					
Macedon Ranges Rural Land Use Strategy 2020 (draft)					
Mount Alexander Council Plan 2021-25					
Mount Alexander Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25					
Mount Alexander Environment Strategy 2015-20					
Plan Melbourne 2017-20					
Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan 2015-18					
Northern Victorian Food Opportunity Strategy 2018-22					
Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan 2014					



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Perspectives

We asked stakeholders and residents across Loddon Campaspe – what is your hope for the region’s food systems within the next ten years? Here are some of the answers:

- More small-scale farming and food growing as part of life
- Farmers are paid fairly, and communities have better access to local food
- Our farmers’ markets grow, we produce more local food, and people eat less processed and junk food
- Farming zones are celebrated as the gold of our locality and are protected from fragmentation, housing, and development
- We have a well-established community food-sharing network
- Kids see farming as a genuine choice for their future
- No one goes hungry
- Very high composting rates with very little going into the general waste stream
- That it’s practically self-sustaining
- Thriving local farmers’ markets in every town at least weekly
- Community solutions for dealing with our food waste
- A food system that is more about community and sharing
- A continuous food supply in disruptive times
- More people are growing their own food and sharing it through small-scale local enterprises or mutual aid
- Less reliance on food that has travelled hundreds of kilometres
- For small producers to collaborate effectively and to build their businesses into cooperative models where appropriate
- Government support to maintain the livelihoods of small producers
- More regenerative farmers of all types of food are financially sustainable and dotted across the landscape
- Kitchen gardens and cooking classes in schools to make food part of the curriculum
- More community gardens to offer homegrown produce to locals, hospitals, community kitchens, and kindergartens

Flourish – Loddon Campaspe Food System Framework

A Plan for Transforming Our Region’s Food System

Flourish is a plan for transforming our region’s food system so that we can **all flourish together** – our communities and the ecosystems on which we depend.

Flourish has one shared vision, three values, five interconnected objectives, and multiple emerging activities and is supported by a range of existing policies, investments, and initiatives.

Looking ahead to an increasingly uncertain future, Flourish provides a strategic pathway to guide the activities of the six local governments in Loddon Campaspe, food system workers, residents, and other stakeholders.

Vision

A vibrant and sustainable regional food system that puts community and Country at its heart to promote health, justice, and resilience for all.

Values

1. Healthy

Improving the health of individuals, communities, and landscapes.

We are increasingly aware of the disruptions to living systems that are signs that these systems are stressed, sick and functioning in ways that threaten the continuation of life as we know it. Examples include the increase in extreme weather events driven by a changing climate, the sixth mass extinction caused by habitat loss and degradation, and the public health crisis, impacting the quality and length of life of more and more people.

It is no coincidence that these signs of dysfunction and disease (dis-ease) increasingly appear across all areas of the living world – they show the fundamental interdependence between the health of people, communities, and ecosystems. These ties mean we do not attain health as individuals, sealed off from what is happening around us. Health is a collective process occurring only when all living systems function well together.

Many of the vital ties connecting living systems at personal, community, and ecosystem levels happen through food. Yet, these relations have become disrupted over time and are now the root cause of the stress and sickness that compromise our collective capacity to flourish. For example, the stressed relationships between farmers and eaters when food is

sold at a price insufficient to secure their livelihoods, or the disconnections between Indigenous Peoples and Country and the erosion of healthy traditional foodways disturbed through the forced establishment of settler-colonial relations.

Through Flourish, we aim to improve and restore health across multiple dimensions of our food system by building and restoring **mutually beneficial relationships**. These include (but are not limited to) the connections between food producers and landscapes to expand agroecological practices and the connections between people across the food system, particularly disadvantaged groups – those working to institute, advocate for, or access place-based food networks (sometimes called short food value chains or values-based territorial food networks).

2. Equitable

Including a broad range of views in food system transformation.

Our food system is organised to preference the interests of a few ahead of the majority – producing disparities in the means and conditions which all can flourish. Food systems in Australia have been this way since settlement; however, it is becoming increasingly apparent that sacrificing our food system’s personal, social, cultural, and ecological bases (as interconnected foundations) for the benefit of a few is unsustainable. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- Farm and food workers that are subject to greater job precarity and lower-than-average wages due to competitive pressures of the market,
- Indigenous Peoples who experience higher rates of food insecurity and diet-related ill-health, rural and regional communities with reduced access to healthy food, and
- Youth and future generations that are disproportionately impacted by ongoing ecological degradation and the release of warming greenhouse gases.

These disparities are not random but shaped by different histories, starting points, and marginalisation in decision-making.

We also recognise that justice is of equal importance in re-shaping our food system. While equity ensures that people, particularly historically and continuedly disadvantaged groups, get the support they need to improve their circumstances, justice directly addresses the systemic constraints that cause disparities. Justice, be it social, food, ecological, or climate (as interconnected issues), is about ensuring the **fair distribution of benefits** and is more

likely when the decisions that are made of where, when, and how to intervene and redesign food systems and of redressing past wrongs are arrived at through fair and democratic engagement.

Through Flourish, we aim to pursue equity, justice and fairly share the benefits of a flourishing food system by centering diverse voices, interests, and perspectives in decision-making processes and system redesign. This path includes galvanising a movement for food sovereignty, diversifying farming to promote biodiversity and mitigate and adapt to a changing climate, and broadening access to land for new farmers, particularly historically and continually disadvantaged groups.

3. Resilient

Encouraging responsiveness and openness to change.

Our food system preferences economies of scale that are achieved through organized ratio, specialization, and consolidation. While this logic promotes high outputs and low-cost, mass-produced food, those operating models of farms and food businesses that struggle to compete economically are diminished, and those that remain are constrained by market logic. Consequently, the downside to these trends is that they lessen the food system's **responsivity to changing circumstances** and openness to change. Often a system's flexibility or rigidity is referred to as resilience – and is narrowly presented as the capacity to maintain function and 'bounce back' during and after pressure from shocks and stresses. However, we perceive resilience more broadly – as the capacity of a system to be responsive to what circumstances demand – where the ability to transform is paramount.

Transformative resilience, diversity, and community go hand in hand because bringing people together with different backgrounds, perspectives, skills, and knowledge promotes social innovations, which are the seeds of transformation. Our emphasis on transformative resilience is critical because current circumstances dictate that maintaining the status quo for our food system is untenable.

Through Flourish, we aspire to build transformative resilience into our food system by diversifying how we produce and circulate food. We will do this by expanding and strengthening our local and regional networks and ensuring that we are inclusive – so that feedback on how things are working, from the perspective of those most impacted, is

centered in our work. We will also seek opportunities to diversify food production from the ground up – expanding biodiversity across and circulation of food within our region’s foodscape of gardens, neighbourhoods, and farms, as well as diversifying the people involved.

Objectives

1. Build food movements across the region to generate change.
2. Expand ecological farming principles and practices to improve the health of landscapes.
3. Improve farmland access and protection to diversify our food system from the ground up.
4. Re-design community food environments to prioritise healthy, seasonal, and culturally appropriate foods from values-led regional food chains.
5. Grow food system knowledge to reconnect people with healthy food.

Objective 1

Build food movements across the region to generate change.

Suggested Strategies

- A. Establish fair and inclusive decision-making pathways that prioritise diverse voices of community members in the design of food policies and activities.
- B. Collectively advocate for food policy reforms and innovations to all levels of government.
- C. Promote food system leadership opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Introduction

A primary function of food systems is ensuring that all community members have enough nutritious and culturally appropriate food to eat each day. This purpose is often framed as achieving food security, which is defined as:

“A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (1).

At least one in 10 households in our region experience food insecurity, and there are hot spots where as many as one in seven homes do not have enough to eat (6). Why is this the case, and how can we redesign our food system to ensure it fulfils its primary function, so hunger is not an issue? Food insecurity is not inevitable. However, food security as a desirable *outcome* says very little about the pathways needed to achieve it – in other words, the *how*. It also says nothing about the circumstances that mean food *insecurity* is a reality for many in our communities – in other words, the *why*. If we are to redesign our food system to keep food security front-of-mind – so that all residents in Loddon Campaspe (current and future generations) are well-nourished – we must get to the bottom of these questions to tackle the causes of food insecurity at their roots.

Challenges

- *Rebalancing and democratizing control over our food system*

Our food system results from the countless daily decisions about how to feed our families and communities and how to work the land to make that happen. The outcomes of these decisions determine whether our food system is vibrant and pulses with life through assuring food security

and regenerating landscapes. Or contributes to our communities and landscapes becoming sick. Unfortunately, food insecurity, ecological degradation, and climate change (amongst other chronic issues) prove that decisions about our food system have gone awry by prioritising other goals.

One of the main principles or logic that has come to guide decisions about our food system's organisation is productivism – the belief that the system's best design is one that promotes productivity and growth. Productivist logic has old roots stretching back as far as European colonialism. It was the early settlers, with different worldviews to Indigenous Peoples, that began the process of reorganizing the *relations* between communities and Country. While organising food systems according to this logic has enabled the production of greater amounts of food, this has not guaranteed that people are fed well or even fed, as statistics on food insecurity show. Productivism has also come at a high cost to the interconnected health of communities and landscapes.

Over time, the deeply entrenched logic of quantity over quality has also 'patterned' our food system so that a few operators now feed most of the population. For instance, two supermarket chains dominate Australia's food system, with a combined market share of 64.7% (12). Such concentration gives a handful of operators a disproportionate influence over the decisions that shape *our* food system is organised – and this is problematic because, ultimately, those decisions are made in their interests rather than ours and are guided by the same productivist logic that created and reinforces the current situation.

- *Shifting emphasis from only market-based solutions to including policy change*

A common approach to social change is to direct efforts towards educating people about the issues with their food-buying behaviour. For instance, marketing campaigns may promote buying more food locally from farmers' markets, urban farms, and community supported agriculture projects. Building food literacy and re-localising food provisioning is essential for transforming our food system. However, relying heavily on the logic of the market and individual action to address food insecurity, which requires lower food prices for food purchasers and higher food prices for farmers, farm and food workers (for livelihood security), creates an obvious tension not easily resolved.

Market-based solutions can often appeal only to those community members who can afford to access more expensive, sustainable, healthy foods – exacerbating inequalities further (13). Alternatively, the financial needs of farmers and farm and food workers are put ahead of those

struggling to put food on the table. Moreover, focusing most attention on individual buying behaviour and educating people on how to ‘buy better’ does not necessarily improve the conditions for farmers, farm and food workers, and the broader community in line with our health, justice, and resilience goals.

To transform our food system to benefit all will require challenging productivist logic with contrasting perspectives that put the interests of community and Country at the forefront. Farmers, farm and food workers, and communities ought to be able to affect change in the world beyond their role as food purchasers, with the opportunity to shape policy a right, not a privilege. Rebalancing control and democratising food system design and policy decisions is critical. In turn, this will depend on broad alliance building and establishing inclusive governance mechanisms that reflect diverse voices in system design and policymaking.

Opportunities

The critical challenge that Flourish aspires to address is building a food system determined by and for communities and Country. Transforming the Loddon Campaspe food system to address the foundational root causes of food insecurity rests on reorganising how decisions are made. Our approach is grounded in food sovereignty. As a guiding frame for these contrasting foundations, food sovereignty asserts peoples’ rights to healthy and culturally appropriate food from ecologically sensitive food provisioning practices (including gardening, farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering) and to produce food through assured access to farmland and infrastructure. Moreover, food sovereignty centres the people at the heart of the food system in policy decisions. Only when centered can these diverse voices defend and promote place-based interests and the inclusion of communities, Country, and future generations in policy decisions.

Case Study

The recently formed Central Goldfields Food Network brings together people with a passion for providing access to healthy, nutritious food, as well as improving food security and sustainability for people living in and around the Central Goldfields Shire. The network has been running for over 12 months and involves more than 30 organisations, including local schools, community houses, food relief organisations, community health providers, producers, environmental groups, and more.

Each member brings a unique perspective to the way food is produced, processed, transported, marketed, consumed, or disposed of in the Shire through their own relationship with food. So far,



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the network has conducted a series of community engagement workshops to inform the development of a local Issues and Opportunities Paper, collaborated with Sustain – The Australian Food Network in the development of a sustainable food systems roadmap, and is encouraging partnerships to improve local access to nutritious food.



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Objective 2

Expand ecological farming principles and practices to improve the health of landscapes.

Suggested Strategies

- A. Support producers who want to apply ecological farming principles on their farms, such as peer-to-peer learning opportunities, networking, and partnerships.
- B. Support pathways for First Nations peoples and their agrarian knowledges in farming.

Introduction

Over 90% of the land in Loddon Campaspe is dedicated to agricultural production (2). As the foundation of our region’s food system, the principles underpinning how this land is worked deeply shape our relationship with and the capacity of our surrounding ecosystems to sustain communities and non-human life now and into the future. Decades of development have transformed these relations, but not in an overly positive direction. While specialization has increased output, this has come at huge social and ecological costs, not least the simplification of agricultural landscapes, which weakens and erodes the foundations that we and future generations depend on. However, there are other ways (other agri- ‘cultures’) of producing food that do not entail stripping ecosystems of their vitality. Agroecology is a farming approach guided by ecological principles to strengthen relations within agroecosystems. Recent reports from international expert bodies promote adopting a holistic and place-based agroecological approach to the (re)design of food systems to redress the social and ecological costs associated with industrial agricultural practices (7,8,14).

Challenges

- *Redesigning agroecosystems for functional diversity*

Industrial agricultural practices are widespread and enable the mass production of vast amounts of low-cost food commodities – agriculture contributes significant gross value to the Australia economy - \$75 billion in 2020-21 (9). However, the downsides of uniform monocultural production (producing only one variety of one species) are that it significantly reduces the diversity of foods produced and eaten, degrades (sometimes irreversibly) agricultural landscapes, and is heavily reliant on external inputs such as pesticides and

fertilisers, in effort to restore some of the vital functions that diverse agroecosystems perform spontaneously:

“Continued reliance on these inputs to support productivity gains in agriculture is becoming decreasingly sustainable, both environmentally and economically. Continued gains in agricultural productivity, supported by artificial soil fertilization, appear to be masking ongoing and cumulative environmental degradation”.

Victorian State of the Environment Report (10)

Estimates suggest that over 7,000 species have fed humanity throughout history, starkly contrasting the 12 crops and five animal species supplying 75% of the world’s food energy today (11). The diminished variety of foods produced adversely affects social and ecological systems. For instance, many of these crops channel into the manufacture of ultra-processed foods, which, on average, make up 39% of the energy intake of Australian adults and significantly increase the risk of diet-related disease (15). Even when only minimally processed, no food can provide all essential nutrients, and foods interact with each other in multiple complex ways to meet the body’s needs. Diversity is integral to healthy dietary patterns, just as it is essential for healthy and resilient agroecosystems.

One of the most important reasons for maintaining, restoring and enhancing biodiversity in agroecosystems is that it is critical to building resilience. Through their interactions, different species perform functions such as recycling nutrients, regulating water cycles, and influencing the population levels of other organisms. Some species’ functions overlap, creating redundancies in the system. Redundancy is essentially like a buffer – it protects against functional disruption or failure by ensuring that when one species is affected due to changing conditions, others may perform the same role. Stripping diversity from agroecosystems weakens the complex web of relationships essential for resilience. And a changing climate will increasingly test the buffering capacity of agroecosystems.

Agroecology is an approach to (re)designing food systems that leans heavily on a deep appreciation for the centrality of relationships in healthy and resilient agroecosystems. There are three dimensions to agroecology – a science, a set of practices, and a social movement. As a science, agroecology stretches across multiple scientific disciplines, including ecology, agronomy, and soil science, in conjunction with other bodies of

knowledge, such as the traditional and practical know-how of local producers and Indigenous knowledges, to understand the relationships between species that are grown or reared for food and the broader ecosystem with which they interact:

“In agroecology, we move from a narrow concern with farming practices to the whole universe of interactions among crop plants, soil, soil organisms, insects, insect enemies, environmental conditions, and management actions and beyond that to the effects of farming systems on surrounding natural ecosystems. Expanding this to a global scale, we see agriculture as the most land-intensive human activity on the earth, which leads us to consider the overall effects of farming on the ability of the earth to support its populations of humans and other living things” (16).

Agroecological science informs principles that guide the development and enactment of place-based practices for ecologically sensitive food production. Agroecological principles include nutrient recycling, input reduction, soil health, animal health, biodiversity, synergy, economic diversification, co-creation of knowledge, social values and diets, fairness, connectivity, land governance, and participation (17). The reliance on principles rather than a standardized list of accredited practices is critical to designing agroecosystems uniquely attuned to ecological, social, and cultural contexts.

Agroecological techniques may include intercropping, crop rotations, mixed crop and livestock systems, composting, use of plants, insects, and birds to regulate pests. These practices weave together to diversify, enhance, and harness ecosystem functions and, as a result, negate or minimize the reliance on external inputs such as agrochemicals. As a social movement, agroecology complements the people-centred approach of food sovereignty and the vision of Flourish placing community and Country at the heart of decision-making, particularly by emphasizing the rights of historically and continually vulnerable groups to participate meaningfully.

Farmers are well-known for being experimenters and will explore changes to practices where they may bring benefit. However, a key challenge of an agroecological transition is that, over recent decades, innovation has been driven by the pursuit of higher yields and profit advantages (16). This is not to say that agroecological systems are less productive or profitable – research strongly challenges this assumption (18). Instead, agroecological

practices, such as no-till, mulching, and cover crops, have been used as tools that ‘bolt on’ to industrial practices. However, used in relative isolation to improve profitability by reducing reliance on costly external inputs (with the co-benefit of lessening the extent of ecosystem degradation), this approach largely retains the problems of working of large areas of single crop species and is insufficient to overcome the ecological problems common to monoculture systems (16,19).

Opportunities

In Australia, agroecology has not benefitted from an enabling policy context, investment, or research. It, therefore, has not been used on the ground at scales large enough to show its potential (14, 20). Nevertheless, while industrial food production dominates nationally, agroecological methods exist in our region. Moreover, just over the other side of Port Philip Bay, the Mornington Peninsula Shire adopted a 2022-2028 Food Economy and Agroecology Strategy in early 2023 – demonstrating emerging interest in place-based approaches to transform local and regional food systems in the state (21). In the coming years, our changing climate is expected to test the capacity of agroecosystems to respond to dynamic and uncertain pressures. The flexibility of our food system to respond creatively to shocks and stresses will hinge on its diversity from soil ecosystems upwards. The growing interest in agroecology presents a promising opportunity to scale out a plurality of place-based, ecologically sensitive food production practices across Loddon Campaspe.

Case Study

The Healthy Landscapes Program aims to help farmers identify and implement practical, regenerative land management practices to improve grazing productivity on their farm. The program’s elements include individual on-farm advice, webinars, workshops, field days, holistic grazing and grazing for small properties courses, and farmer discussion groups.

The program is assisting participants to be observant and manage responsively to changes in their natural landscapes, and both the Holistic Grazing Management short course (18 participants), and the Small Property Grazing Course (21 participants) have been sold out for 2023-24. The program is estimated to connect with 180 farmers over 2023-24. 1108 people have engaged with the program through the newsletter.

Objective 3

Improve farmland access and protection to diversify our food system from the ground up.

Suggested Strategies

- A. Advance innovative models to improve farmland access, such as community farms, land co-operatives and trusts.
- B. Advocate to protect farmland from urban sprawl to retain it for food production and conservation.

Introduction

Land is usually bought and sold as a commodity according to what use will derive the greatest economic return. Increasingly, absentee landlords are acquiring farmland – foreign and domestic investors with little or no interest in the day-to-day working of the land for food and seeking to make money through rent and rising property values. As well, residential development increasingly expands on the fringes of urban areas, driving up the cost of land and removing it from use for food production. But land is finite and immovable. These trends in land tenure (and others) concentrate and maintain farmland in the hands of a few and create substantial barriers for new farmers to access land, especially for disadvantaged groups. Yet, the right to access land to produce food within reasonable reach of markets and under conditions that make agrarian livelihoods viable is fundamental for producer autonomy and achieving food sovereignty. In this way, food and land sovereignty go together (22).

Challenges

- *Reducing disparities in farmland access*

There has been a trend for the number of farm businesses to reduce over time, as consolidation of landholdings and operations has increased the size of farms (9). Moreover, following the 2008 financial crisis, investments in farmland have increased considerably. Farmland is now an appealing asset for investors, with increasing numbers of foreign and domestic investment companies, large corporations, and banks replacing farmers as the owners (23,24). Farmland appeals to investors because, in addition to income from production, it generates returns from increasing property prices and rent – a process called financialisation. So, while according to the latest data, the majority of agricultural land in Australia and at least 95% in Victoria is owned by

Australians. On its own, this statistic paints a limited picture of farmland access (25). The reality is that consolidation and financialization have contributed to highly unequal land ownership and access patterns.

Any discussion on land access must also confront that regardless of who owns the land today and whether land is used for industrial agriculture or agroecological production systems, the sovereignty of that land was never ceded by Indigenous Peoples (26,27). Since settlement, Indigenous Peoples have been violently disposed of the extensive lands vital for food cultivation, hunting, fishing, and gathering with profound consequences, including the erosion and, in many cases, irretrievable loss of traditional foodways. Under ongoing settler-colonial relations, land is reduced to a commodity – an inanimate resource for extraction and exploitation rather than the vibrant ecosystems that humans are part of and dependent on for sustenance. As property, land is one of the main ways wealth is stored and amassed through income generation (e.g., rent), generating social inequalities (28).

The injustices associated with settler colonialism in Australian food systems are historical and ongoing. Today, while a significant amount of food production occurs on the First Nations Estate¹, most farm work is not undertaken by Indigenous-owned or operated enterprises, and most food production does not benefit Indigenous Peoples (29). In 2016, only 1% of Australia’s agricultural workforce identified as Indigenous, with most employed as laborers (53%), and only 1% of Australia’s bush food industry is owned or controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (30,31).

A significant proportion of farmland is passed on through inheritance, and those historically excluded from land ownership are granted few access points. Women, for instance, are often shut out of farming (32). In 2016, only 32% of Australia’s agricultural workforce was female (30). Women are unlikely to be the beneficiaries of intergenerational farm transfer, with only 10% inheriting the family farm (33). Land access is also a challenge for youth. In 2016, the proportion of young people (15 to 34 years) employed as a farmer or farm managers remained unchanged from 2011 at 13% (30).

¹ Defined as the areas of land over which Indigenous Peoples and communities have ownership, or management, or other contemporary legal rights.

New entrants to farming, particularly Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth, face significant barriers to accessing land for food production, particularly in peri-urban regions where farmland is especially expensive to purchase and increasingly so. In 2021, Victorian farmland values rose for the sixth consecutive year to reach record highs, with an increase in the median price per hectare of 30% to \$10,583 – the most significant annual increase recorded in the last 27 years (Figure 3) (34). Looking more closely at farmland prices in the Loddon Campaspe region, in 2021, growth in the median price per hectare was 25% to \$9,275 in Northern areas (which includes Bendigo, Campaspe, Loddon, and Mount Alexander) and 18% to \$13,363 in the South West (which includes Central Goldfields and Macedon Ranges (Table 1) (34).

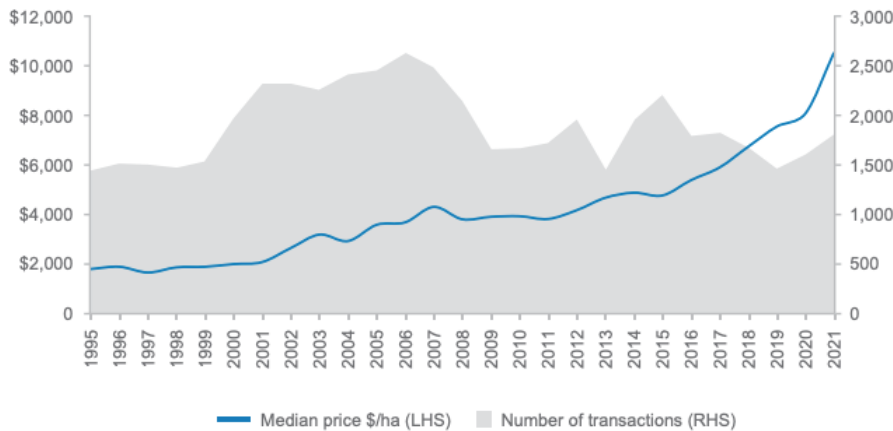


Figure 1. Victoria Farmland Values and Sales Transactions 1995-2021 (32)

	Median \$/ha			
	2021	5yr CAGR	10yr CAGR	20yr CAGR
Bendigo	\$10,564	22.0%	8.9%	10.2%
Campaspe	\$8,619	6.9%	11.1%	5.7%
Loddon	\$4,207	15.4%	10.0%	7.5%
Mount Alexander	\$13,329	10.0%	13.5%	11.9%
Northern	\$9,275	11.4%	9.8%	7.4%
Central Goldfields	\$9,541	27.2%	13.7%	9.8%
Macedon Ranges	\$16,308	7.3%	12.3%	5.9%
South West	\$13,363	18.4%	11.8%	9.7%

Table 1. Loddon Campaspe Farmland Values (32)

- *Protecting farmland from non-agricultural uses*

Melbourne is Australia's fastest-growing city. Projections calculate the city's population will grow from 4.5 million to almost 8 million by 2021 (36). In 2020, the population of the Loddon Campaspe region was almost 250,000 people (nearly half of whom live in the City of Greater Bendigo), which is projected to increase to 340,000 people by 2041 (37,38). More mouths to feed will put additional strain on food systems around Victoria to produce more food while simultaneously dealing with the challenge of residential development encroaching on farmland. Estimates suggest that around 16% of farmland located around Melbourne, including within Macedon Ranges Shire, could be lost if trends in urban sprawl continue (39).

Opportunities

Diversifying land access is essential to ensure favourable conditions that promote farming underpinned by agroecological principles and place-based food networks. Ongoing farmland consolidation, financialization, urban sprawl, and increasing property prices present significant barriers for new entrants to farming, especially for historically disadvantaged groups, maintaining historical disparities and impeding just transition pathways (39). On the other hand, similar trends elsewhere have prompted experimentation with structurally redistributive models of democratic land governance. Community farms, land cooperatives and trusts are examples of novel land access arrangements that operate through collective and community-based mechanisms and are more conducive to promoting food and land sovereignty. Such different ways of relating to land are founded on the principle that land is a resource for community wellbeing rather than private gain.

Case Study

Katie and Hugh set up the Harcourt Organic Farming Co-op (the co-op) in 2018 on their organic farm on Djaara country in central Victoria. The co-op aims to solve the dual problems of providing land access for landless farmers and creating an alternative succession plan for Katie and Hugh when they decided to step away from active farming.

The co-op started as a way to organize multiple leases – renting productive land on the same farm. Since starting, it has consisted of 5 different on-farm enterprises, with many iterations of structure and people within those enterprises. So far, they've included the existing orchard, a market garden,

a micro dairy, a fruit tree nursery, a bush food patch run by First Nations social enterprise Murnong Mummas, and an online fruit growing education business called Grow Great Fruit.

With a growing number of examples of land sharing across Australia, the co-op is notable for its durability and resilience. Co-op members have faced the harsh realities of small-scale farming, and learned how to work and look after the land together, following Djaara leadership for how to do that. They've learned that relationships are at the foundation of how they farm and work together. A grant from the World Wildlife Fund is helping to inform the co-op about ways to continue beyond the existing nine-year trial which ends in 2027. They've also produced a bunch of resources about small farm viability, land-sharing models, and whole farm planning which are available on their website: hofcoop.com.au.



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Objective 4

Re-design community food environments to prioritise healthy, seasonal, and culturally appropriate foods from values-led regional food chains.

Suggested Strategies

- A. Advocate for and support access to funding for values-led food chains, such as food hubs, community kitchens, and associated infrastructure (e.g. storage, processing, and transport).
- B. Increase the procurement of healthy, seasonal, and culturally appropriate foods from regional food chains in public settings such as hospitals and schools.
- C. Improve uptake of urban and peri-urban agriculture and community food growing, such as community and school kitchen gardens.
- D. Support programs that enable low-income residents to access healthy and culturally appropriate foods from regional food chains.

Introduction

On the journey from farm to fork, food often travels vast distances through a complex network of large intermediaries, such as processors, manufacturers, distributors/exporters, wholesalers, retailers, caterers, and other food outlets. Industrial food systems are organised in such a way because, due to the market's competitive nature, they necessarily pursue economic value, i.e., profits and growth ahead of other values, including social and ecological. However, as negative impacts are excluded from the purchase price of food (to keep costs as low as possible and maximise profits), circulating food according to a competitive logic has critical adverse consequences for people, ecosystems, and the food itself. Yet, the passage from farm to fork can be organised in different ways to create cooperative patterns of food circulation that benefit communities and Country.

Challenges

- *Reconfiguring food networks for values and proximity*

Although Loddon Campaspe is a highly productive agricultural region, most of the food produced here is destined for locations far from our producer base. Likewise, 'foods from nowhere' now dominate the dietary patterns of our community members. Many negative consequences arise

from these extended patterns of food circulation. Looking at farming practices, for instance, global supply chains require a year-round supply of large volumes of low-cost, uniform products, affecting the sorts of foods produced and the labour and land practices used. Making low-cost foods puts pressure on businesses to reduce costs. Examples include working more for less, sourcing low-cost labour (such as seasonal and migrant workers), buying more land and using more inputs (fertilisers and pesticides) or intensifying production practices (e.g., increasing stocking densities and reducing time to slaughter) to feed economies of scale, or selling-up and exiting the profession. Looking further along supply chains, many food commodities funnel into producing unhealthy ultra-processed and fast foods – all at a cost to people’s health.

In globalised, industrialised food systems, connectivity is reduced between people, between people and food, and between people and place. But in their efforts to counteract this disconnection, place-based food networks face many challenges. These include relatively higher prices (as the social and ecological costs of production are excluded from the purchase price of ‘conventional’ foods), reduced variety (due to a seasonal focus), lower quantities that require aggregation in food hubs to supply larger settings such as hospitals, and limited or lack of appropriate scale infrastructure and processing (40). Another major challenge of reconfiguring food networks is that there must be enough community demand to reimburse producers adequately. However, this relies on producers promoting themselves, often with limited resources and competing against conventional distribution models (41). Moreover, while it may be more obvious how re-embedding of food networks can be achieved in areas of our region that sit on the fringe of more densely populated urban areas, this will present distinct challenges for more rural producers and communities (42).

Opportunities

Re-embedding the circulation of food within the Loddon Campaspe region is not about abandoning exports and global trade in food altogether but ensuring that communities and Country are put first and foremost in decisions about how to organise our region’s food system. Place-based food networks can contribute here by promoting viable pathways for small- and medium-sized farms, their families, and related businesses, from direct selling at the farm gate, farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture, and urban agriculture initiatives that grow and circulate food in more densely populated areas, too food hubs that aggregate products from several producers to create veggie boxes or fulfil larger institutional orders. There are also non-market initiatives that

encourage more home and community gardening and food sharing among residents – making closer ties within food systems both physically in terms of distance and socially so that relations are grounded in trust, transparency, and reciprocity. Fortunately, the prevalence of place-based food networks has steadily grown in Australia, and Loddon Campaspe is already home to several good exemplars, such as the Grow Cook Share Food Hub (43). All said, there is much more work to do to institute place-based food networks in our region, particularly in engaging with disadvantaged groups and those most negatively impacted by current food system arrangements, including those experiencing food insecurity. We can also shift the sourcing and promotion of food in public settings to ensure that it prioritises healthy and locally produced food (44).

Case Study

Grow Cook Share Food Hub is an initiative led by Bendigo FoodShare and funded by VicHealth, that has been co-designed with the community to ensure an inclusive, accessible, and inspiring food hub.

They meet the community where they're at, in places where they feel safe, connected, and can access, such as schools, community houses and gardens, local businesses, at farmers and growers markets, and at their own urban farm, 'Golden Gums Farm'. Some of the programs operating out of the food hub include Grow a Row, Pick a Branch; Cooking for Change; Café for a Day, and local Growers Markets at Peppergreen Farm, the Old Church on the Hill and Long Gully Neighbourhood House. These programs are designed to build skills and experience in growing, cooking, sharing and selling food, with the aim to increase people's connection to where their food comes from, encouraging them to grow more themselves and to buy more food grown locally.

Objective 5

Grow food system knowledge to reconnect people with healthy food.

Suggested Strategies

- A. Provide food systems learning opportunities that empower people to grow, choose, prepare, cook, store, and compost healthy, seasonal, and culturally appropriate foods.
- B. Encourage availability and marketing of healthy foods.

Introduction

As human beings, we do not exist in isolation. Our surroundings play a formative role in shaping who we are, including our health and wellbeing. The foods accessible to us in our surroundings make up, what is often called, our local or community food environment. Comprised of all the social spaces outside of the home where people obtain food, local food environments include (but are not limited to) privately operated food retail and food service outlets such as supermarkets, small/independent grocery stores, farm gates, markets, restaurants, cafes, and publicly run settings, such as schools, hospitals, sports and recreation facilities, and community gardens. Our food practices are contingent on and shaped by the place-based patterns in the accessibility of different foods – and this is partly why our postcodes are a good predictor of the likelihood of experiencing ill health connected to what we eat, including diabetes and heart disease.

Challenges

- *Overcoming the harmful commercial determinants of health*

While our local food environments, the natural and built spaces where we live and interact with each other through food, are integral to shaping our health, we often overlook these spaces in favour of educating people to make healthier food choices. Promoting food literacy is essential. However, such human-centred models of behaviour change tend to isolate and individualise human actions and assume that there is a knowledge deficit that underlies what is perceived to be poor decision-making – often leading to stigma. Yet, as microcosms of the broader food system, local food environments tend to favour unhealthy, ultra-processed and fast foods. Because of this, despite ‘knowing better’, people can be disempowered, if not prevented, from acting on their knowledge because of the broader social conditions that shape their daily lives.

Commercial interests play a decisive role in determining the foods that are obtainable or promoted in local food environments. They affect, for instance, the choice of foods stocked on retailer shelves and their positioning and pricing. Or the food brands that sponsor community sports teams, facilities, events, and outdoor advertising – which often reinforce unhealthy eating norms. So, while food businesses can positively impact communities by providing employment, business practices can undermine this benefit when they generate adverse social effects. Factors arising from profit-driven entities and their practices that can influence health outcomes either positively or negatively are known as the commercial determinants of health.

Beyond a general tendency towards unhealthy local food environments, emerging evidence further supports that disparities exist in the quality of food environments across socioeconomic positions and locations. For instance, healthier food environments are more common in inner urban areas and areas of greater advantage (45,46). In contrast, accessing fresh foods can be a considerable challenge in rural areas, where food travels further and rural retailers prefer longer shelf-life foods (47). On average, incomes are also lower in rural and remote areas. When combined with higher food prices in these locations, this can present significant challenges to the affordability of healthy diets and create food stress (5).

Further to their direct impact on dietary patterns, other indirect commercial influences on health and wellbeing include promoting precarious work arrangements (e.g. the food delivery ‘gig’ economy), poor working conditions, and low wages. There are also broader adverse ecological impacts associated with food provisioning that can outweigh economic benefits (48,49). Despite these material impacts on communities, the results of business strategies are often overlooked or not explicit in frameworks on the social determinants of health (50).

Opportunities

The proliferation of unhealthy, ultra-processed and fast foods in communities and the structural factors that mean healthy, locally and regionally produced foods are more challenging to access can only be addressed through policies that redesign these spaces. At a local level, there is an opportunity for governments, led by community perspectives, to reimagine the spaces where people connect with food. Actions could include shaping physical access through place-based (urban and peri-urban) food production, zoning, permits, licenses, and fiscal measures to encourage healthy food outlets, and facilitating mobility through public transport. There is also an

opportunity to create inclusive spaces where communities can engage with each other through food by establishing and properly resourcing community food retail enterprises, community gardens and kitchens, school kitchen gardens, and farmers' markets.

Case Study

Support Our Own. Choose Locally Grown is a region-wide marketing campaign led by Healthy Loddon Campaspe that aims to enhance awareness and consumption of Loddon Campaspe-grown produce available at local food retailers and direct from local growers.

The campaign encourages the community to support fruit and vegetable growers across the Loddon Campaspe region. It also promotes the benefits of locally grown produce such as health, freshness, and affordability by highlighting what's in season and where it can be purchased.

The campaign commenced with a series of television adverts and online media featuring regional growers and retailers. Promotional materials displayed at local retailers, growers, Farmers Markets, online and via traditional communications channels, direct consumers to a dedicated webpage for a variety of resources including grower stories, recipes using local produce, and lists of what's in season and where to access it.



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Next Steps

Working together to bring Flourish to life

Flourish challenges us to imagine a food future that is more desirable to live in. A future where everyone has enough to eat and is well-nourished, where landscapes are regenerated, and farming contributes to especially vulnerable groups, can lead to the design of the spaces where they interact through food. This vibrant future is full of life, open to change, and responsive to what is needed in a rapidly warming world.

Using a food systems lens and participatory approach, issues that have long been seen as isolated problems are reframed as fundamentally intertwined – including that what we eat is profoundly shaped by what and how we grow and circulate food. A different way of looking at intractable issues and a shaper sense of their root causes, a systems lens also reveals other possibilities for seeding change.

New initiatives are already emerging from the conversations started through the generation of Flourish. Activities include marketing of regionally grown and produced food, support for a regional roll-out of ‘Grow It Local’, and research to quantify the difference in economic costs between food grown and produced within the region and food brought in from elsewhere. Place-based opportunities are also in the pipeline to continue conversations at a local level and harness lived experiences to better understand what could be done differently by those most impacted by system redesign.

Building on these new ideas and the exemplary work already underway in Loddon Campaspe, Flourish advances a holistic approach to addressing some of our communities’ biggest food-related health challenges. Healthy Loddon Campaspe has made this groundwork possible by creating space and opportunities for people to come together and practice reimagining and redesigning our food system. However, it is clear that transforming our region’s food system to prioritise the needs of community and Country is no small task, nor is it something that can (or should) be achieved by only a small group of passionate individuals. Food is everyone’s business. And so, from here, by committing to facilitate and guide the vision of Flourish, Healthy Loddon Campaspe welcomes forming new alliances with communities, stakeholders, and partner organisations so we can all take a role in building a vibrant food system full of life, that works for all.



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Glossary

Agroecology – the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of farming. More broadly, agroecology is understood as the ecology of food systems.

Biodiversity – the variety of life that exists on Earth, include the diversity of animals, plants and micro-organisms and the ecosystems that they operate in.

Community Supported Agriculture – a model for farming where community members subscribe to receive a regular box of produce or other farm goods and share the risks of farming.

Climate Change – the long-term shifts in the Earth’s temperatures and weather patterns due to natural or human activity.

Country – is a word with many meanings for First Nations peoples. Broadly, it is a term that refers to the lands, waters, and skies to which First Nations peoples are connected, the energy and space in between, and relationships.

Ecosystems – is a geographic area characterised by plants, animals, and other organisms, as well as weather and landscapes, which interact to create a dynamic web of life.

Environmental Degradation – is the process through which the natural world is in some way compromised, resulting in reduced biodiversity and health of the environment.

Food Security - Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Food Sovereignty – the right of peoples to nourishing and culturally appropriate food produced and distributed in ecologically sound and ethical ways, and their right to collectively determine their own food and agriculture systems.

Systems Approach – is an approach to problem-solving that looks at the subsystems forming the system. In this case, taking a food systems approach encourages us to consider the food system in its totality, accounting for all elements, their interactions and their outcomes.

Ultra-processed foods – foods manufactured with little or no whole foods, and with processed ingredients that are extracted from whole foods (i.e. sugars, fats, refined carbohydrates). Common

ultra-processed foods are soft drinks, biscuits, confectionary, and mass-produced packaged bread.

Values-led Food Chains – involve few steps between producer and eater and promote practices that align with the shared values in the Flourish Framework – health, equity, and resilience – sometimes called short food value chains or values-based territorial food networks. Examples include direct selling at the farm gate, farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture and urban agriculture initiatives that grow and circulate food in more densely populated areas, food hubs, and community food sharing.



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