



# Flourish

Regional Food System Framework

Loddon Campaspe region 2024

# Framework Statement

Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) recognises that food is fundamental to health and central to life in the Loddon Campaspe region. Over 90% of land here is dedicated to agriculture, making food vital to our communities and livelihoods.

As a regional prevention initiative, HLC is committed to working in partnership to create a vibrant and sustainable regional food system.

Transforming our food system is no small task and is a shared responsibility that requires broad, collaborative, and innovative approaches. Food is everyone's business.

*Flourish* provides a strategic framework to guide food system decisions and actions to secure the future of food in our region. A future where everyone has enough to eat and is well-nourished, where landscapes are healthy, farming contributes to biodiversity and secures rewarding livelihoods, and where communities can reconnect with food in their neighbourhoods.

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



# Background

Our food system is the interconnected web of people and their activities involved in food production, processing, distribution, marketing, consumption, and waste and resource recovery across the Loddon Campaspe region.

With over 90% of land in the region dedicated to farming, agriculture plays a significant role in our food system. The region has over 44,000 agricultural businesses, primarily in the Loddon and Campaspe Shires. Agriculture is a significant economic driver, generating over \$1.6 billion from industries such as dairy, meat, poultry, and grains. The food processing sector also enhances our economy, contributing an additional \$2.7 billion, mainly through the processing of meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables.

While a large amount of food is produced in the region, that food does not necessarily reach local communities, nor ensure that our communities are well-nourished. Food insecurity is a major challenge for our vulnerable community members. Although Australia is a high-income country, food insecurity is a real issue for many including those on low and middle incomes.

The 2019 Active Living Census found that one in 10 households in the region are food insecure, which is 50% higher than the state average, and in some areas this increases to one in five households not having enough food to eat. Only half of the region's adult residents consume the recommended two servings of fruit a day, which drops to one in eight consuming five or more daily servings of vegetables. Two in three adults in the region are an unhealthy

weight, which is significantly higher than the average for Victoria.

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. What we eat is heavily influenced by the circumstances of our everyday lives. Taking a systems approach helps us see that health is not a matter of individual choice but is shaped by how we collectively organise our food system, and that the health of people and the natural world are fundamentally intertwined.

Our food system is made up of 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

**66** I believe the biggest food-related issue in our community is the "disconnection from where food is produced and lack of awareness of the impact of our large-scale food system on the environment and human health"

– Flourish community engagement survey respondent

decisions determine whether our food system is vibrant and pulses with life by assuring food security and regenerating landscapes or contributes to the poor health of our communities and landscapes. Food insecurity, environmental degradation, and climate change (amongst other complex issues) show that decisions we've made about our food system have contributed to significant challenges.

This highlights the need for a new approach that connects our food system with local communities, while considering the environment and the effects of climate change.

Flourish has been developed to provide a strategic framework to guide and influence the decisions and activities of our food system actors, including the six local governments in the Loddon Campaspe region, food system workers, residents and other stakeholders, to promote health, equity, and resilience for all.

*Flourish* is a tool to guide the transformation of our region's food system so that we can all flourish together. It asks us to imagine a food future that





is more desirable to live in. A future designed by and for communities and Country, where everyone has enough to eat and is well-nourished, where landscapes are healthy, farming contributes to biodiversity and secures rewarding livelihoods, and where communities can reconnect with food in their neighbourhoods.





# **The Food System**

### Food systems are defined as:

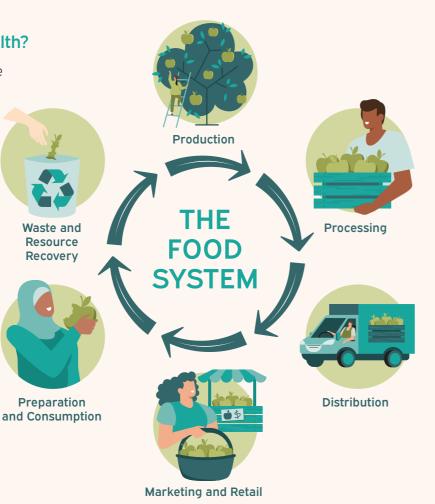
"The entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments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

### How do food systems affect health?

The food we have access to and choose to eat has a big impact on our health and the health of the planet. Eating lots of fresh and simple foods like vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, and nuts, and having a balanced amount of poultry fish, dairy, and eggs, while cutting down on red meat, is good for our health. Eating this way also helps reduce pollution, saves important resources like water and land, and keeps our environment healthy. Accessing healthy foods is not easy for everyone, especially in areas where there is heavy promotion and availability of ultra-processed and fast foods. This is a result of how our food system is organised.

The most valuable aspects of our food system are "the people who are involved in production and the land that grows our food."

- Flourish community engagement survey respondent

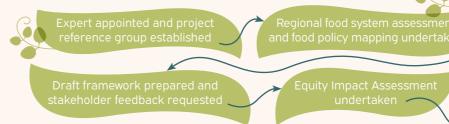


# **About Flourish**

*Flourish* was developed through a collaborative process led by a food systems expert and a group of regional stakeholders. The 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 has been further refined through two rounds of stakeholder feedback.

*Flourish* is a framework for everyone involved in the food system in the Loddon Campaspe region. This includes local farmers, food producers, distributors, retailers, and food service providers, all of whom play vital roles in the creation and distribution of food. *Flourish* also has a strong focus on local government, policymakers responsible for shaping food system regulations, health professionals advocating for nutritional health, and environmental specialists focusing on sustainable practices. By bringing these diverse groups together, *Flourish* aspires to transform

### Framework development process



our region's food system so that we can all flourish together – our communities and the ecosystems on which we depend.

### The role of Healthy Loddon Campaspe

HLC, supported by funding from the Victorian State Government, is dedicated to improving health outcomes in Victoria's Loddon Campaspe region. Covering the six

local government areas of Campaspe Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, City of Greater Bendigo, Loddon Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire, and Mount Alexander Shire, HLC aims to influence both local and regional systems for better health, with the development of *Flourish* showcasing this effort. Recognising that building a healthy, equitable and resilient food system is a shared responsibility, HLC acknowledges its role in driving change, though we cannot do this alone.

Key actions for HLC include establishing a governance structure for *Flourish*, supporting implementation of the framework, and evaluating the processes and outcomes to ensure the framework's success and positive impact on our region's health and wellbeing.



Flourish Framework confirm





# Flourish Framework Summary

### Vision

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



### Values

### **HEALTHY**

Improving the health of individuals, communities, and landscapes.

### EQUITABLE

Including a broad range of views in food system transformation.

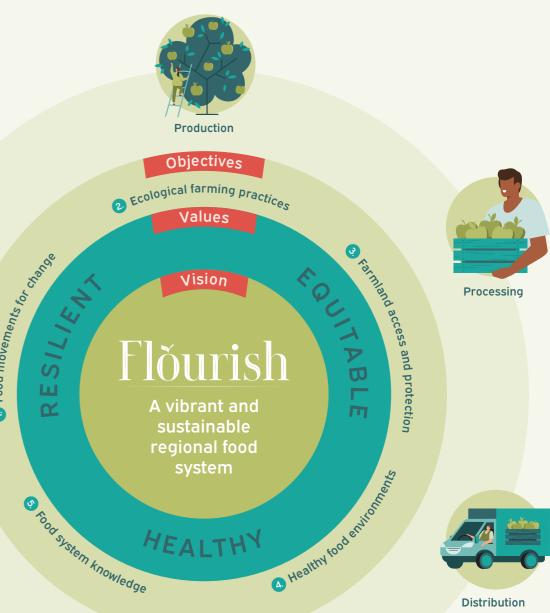
### RESILIENT

Encouraging responsiveness and openness to change.

### 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.







Food movements for change

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**M** 

Preparation and Consumption

Waste and

Resource

Recovery

Marketing and Retail



# Flourish Framework

*Flourish* has one shared vision, three values, five interconnected objectives, multiple emerging strategies, and is supported by a range of existing policies, investments and initiatives. New opportunities are emerging from the conversations started through the generation of *Flourish* and to showcase exemplary work already underway across the region a case study is included under each objective.

### Vision

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

### Values

### **HEALTHY**

## Improving the health of individuals, communities, and landscapes.

*Flourish* emphasises the interconnected health of individuals, communities, and the environment, recognising that each supports the others' ability to thrive. The framework seeks to repair and enhance the relationship between people and food, people and their surroundings, and people within the community, aiming to restore the beneficial links that have been weakened or lost over time.

### EQUITABLE

### Including a broad range of views in food system transformation.

*Flourish* is committed to fairness in the transformation of the food system, ensuring that it serves everyone rather than a select few. By incorporating a wide range of perspectives in decision-making processes, *Flourish* strives to

distribute the food system's benefits more evenly. It focuses on fostering a regional food movement, enhancing community participation in decisionmaking, and improving access to land for new farmers, especially those from vulnerable communities.

### RESILIENT

# Encouraging responsiveness and openness to change.

*Flourish* values the food system's ability to adapt and respond to challenges, such as natural disasters or economic shifts. Beyond merely surviving such events, resilience in the *Flourish* context includes the capacity for transformative change to meet evolving needs. The initiative supports diversifying food production and distribution methods, including ecological farming practices and the development of values-led food networks, to build a food system that is not only robust in the face of adversity but also capable of evolving as needed.

Together, these values guide *Flourish* in its goal to create a food system that is healthy for people and the environment, equitable for all members of the community, and resilient enough to withstand and grow from challenges.



Within the next 10 years I hope "that everyone understands the importance of healthy food to provide good health."

Flourish community engagement survey respondent



# Food movements for change

**Objective one:** Build food movements across the region to generate change.

### **Overview**

This objective focuses on creating a powerful collective movement to drive significant changes in the food system across the Loddon Campaspe region. The foundation of this objective is food sovereignty, a principle emphasising the right of people to have a say in how their food is produced, distributed, and consumed.

This approach aims to ensure that a wide range of voices, particularly those of local communities, Indigenous peoples, and future generations, are heard and prioritised in making decisions that deeply affect their health, environment, and heritage. Engaging actors within the food system encourages us to collectively implement policies and activities that will lead to a more equitable, sustainable, and community-focused food system.

This includes efforts to make decision-making processes more inclusive, to advocate for policies that reflect the collective will and best interests of the entire community, and to foster a regional food system that is resilient and responsive to the needs of all its members.

#### Suggested approaches:

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

#### 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, 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.



# **Ecological farming practices**



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

#### **Overview**

This objective aims to enhance the health of landscapes in the Loddon Campaspe region through broader adoption of agroecological farming principles and practices. These practices are designed to make farming more sustainable and less harmful to the environment, helping to combat climate change and support the creation of robust, healthy food systems.

With climate change expected to intensify environmental challenges such as extreme weather events, adopting ecological farming is seen as a crucial move towards agricultural biodiversity and landscape health. This approach not only addresses immediate concerns related to farming sustainability and food security but also contributes to a long-term vision for a resilient and environmentally friendly agricultural system.

#### Suggested approaches:

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



### 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.

### **Celebrating the Six Seasons** of Sustainability

"We bene<mark>fit from living close</mark> to where food is grown Seeing where our food comes from is something many take for granted." gagement survey respondent

# Farmland access and protection

**Objective three:** Improve farmland access and protection to diversify our food system from the ground up.

#### **Overview**

3.

This objective centres on enhancing the accessibility and protection of farmland to foster a more diverse and resilient food system from the ground up. By advocating for farming models that align with ecological principles, this objective seeks to secure the food system against challenges such as land consolidation, urban expansion, and rising land costs, which often hinder new and historically vulnerable farmers, including First Nations peoples, women, and youth, from entering the agricultural sector.

Through innovative land access solutions, we aim to dismantle these barriers, ensuring that a broader range of individuals can contribute to and benefit from a sustainable, inclusive agricultural landscape.

### Suggested approaches:

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

Any discussion on land access must also acknowledge 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. Since settlement, Indigenous Peoples have been dispossessed 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.

HARCOURT

### Case Study

Katie and Hugh Finlay 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 organise multiple lessees 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 coop 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

# Healthy food environments

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

#### **Overview**

This objective is focused on transforming community food environments to emphasise the availability and promotion of healthy, seasonal, and culturally relevant foods through values-led regional food chains. Recognising that our dietary choices are heavily influenced by the options available in our immediate surroundings, this objective seeks to counteract the dominant influence of commercial interests that often prioritise profit over public health.

By nurturing and supporting regional food networks that offer viable opportunities for small and medium-sized farms and their associated businesses, we aim to ensure that communities have better access to food that not only nourishes but also respects cultural traditions and supports local economies. This approach advocates for a shift towards a more healthy, sustainable, and inclusive food system.

#### Suggested approaches:

- 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).
- Increase the procurement of healthy, seasonal, and culturally appropriate foods from regional food chains in public settings such as hospitals and schools.
- Improve uptake of urban and peri-urban agriculture and community food growing, such as community and school kitchen gardens.
- Support programs that enable low-income residents to access healthy and culturally appropriate foods from regional food chains.



#### **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; Cafe for a Day; and local Growers Markets at Peppergreen Farm, the Old Church on the Hill and Long Gully Neigbourhood 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 come from, encourage them to grow more themselves and to buy more food grown locally.

#### Foodshare:

www.bendigofoodshare.org.au/growcooksharefoodhub/

Within the next 10 years I hope "that we can localise our food growing capacity and create a strong sense of place, resilience and local solutions to complex problems."

Flourish community engagement survey r





Normalisation of locally-grown produce in retail stores from small greengrocers to large-scale supermarkets" is what I hope for our region's food system in the next 10 years.

Did you know that by choosing

ocally grown fruit and veggie

# Food system knowledge

**Objective five:** Grow food system knowledge to reconnect people with healthy food.

### **Overview**

5.

This objective aims to enhance understanding of the food system among individuals, enabling them to make healthier food choices and fostering a stronger connection between communities and their food sources. Recognising that knowledge is power, this objective seeks to empower individuals by educating them on the entire food system cycle – from how food is grown and distributed to how it is prepared.

By demystifying the food system, people are more likely to feel capable of making changes that benefit their health, as well as the health of their communities and the environment. This initiative intends to bridge the gap between consumers and their food, ensuring that individuals are not only informed but also engaged and motivated to support and advocate for a sustainable and healthy food system.

### Suggested approaches:

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



### 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.







The governance of *Flourish* involves a collaborative effort to transform our region's food system, focusing on community and environmental wellbeing. Recognising the complexity of this task, a taskforce will be established to guide the stewardship and implementation of Flourish.

This taskforce will be formed through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process, attracting local and regional experts and stakeholders with diverse knowledge and experience.

Their collective expertise will be pivotal in driving Flourish forward and ensuring broad participation in nurturing a vibrant food system.

Several existing networks and initiatives within the region, already contributing to food system improvement, will play crucial roles in aligning with Flourish's objectives. These groups will be instrumental in supporting localised action planning and the practical implementation of Flourish strategies.

# Implementation and Evaluation

*Flourish* will be brought to life through detailed, place-based action plans. These plans are designed to respect and respond to the unique characteristics and needs of each local government area within the region. By adopting a localised approach, Flourish aims to be as relevant and impactful as possible, directly addressing the specific challenges and opportunities present in different areas.

The evaluation of *Flourish* will be designed to ensure the framework effectively meets its goals through a comprehensive evaluation plan including regular assessments, progress measurement, and

transparent reporting. Periodic reviews will identify both successes and areas for improvement, ensuring *Flourish* adapts to new challenges and remains aligned with its objectives. The impact of *Flourish's* actions will be measured and the findings will be communicated to the governance group, stakeholders, and the wider community, ensuring accountability and facilitating ongoing dialogue about the framework's progress and impact. This approach underscores Flourish's commitment to transparency and continuous improvement in its mission to transform our region's food system.

Loddon Campaspe regional food system

# **Snapshot**



of land is dedicated

to agricultural production

**Over 44.000** 

Agriculture contributes over

6 billion

mainly from the production of

1 IN 10 households ran out of

food in a twelve-month period.

1 IN 7 households (ALC, 2019).

2 of 6 LGA's do not have

Alexander Shires.

multinational fast-food outlets.

These are Loddon and Mount

In some areas this increased to

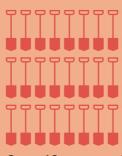
dairy, meat, poultry, and grains.

to our regional economy,

agricultural businesses.

Over 15 farmers and growers markets.

Bendigo and the region have been recognised by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as a City of Gastronomy.



Over 40 community gardens.

adults are overweight or obese.

People are most interested in growing food because they want to grow healthy, fresh food, live more sustainably and positively impact climate change.

32 Stephanie Alexander **School Kitchen** Gardens plus scores of other independent kindergarten and school kitchen gardens.





19% of females and 7% of males meet the vegetable consumption guidelines.

46.7% of males and 49.3% of females meet the fruit consumption guidelines.

People who eat the recommended amount of fruit and veg were more likely to also report better general health, healthier weight, and greater life satisfaction.

### 2016 LGA's have free organic waste collection.

### **ALL LGA's**

are active members of the **Central Victorian Greenhouse** Alliance which has been delivering innovative regional projects and advocacy for emissions reduction for more than 20 years.

> Bendigo Foodshare sourced 746,113 kilograms of food valued at \$5.6million, which was redirected to food relief for Central Victorians through 85 local partner organisations.

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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.

### Acknowledgements

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- Healthy Loddon Campaspe key stakeholder organisations and groups

**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.

This framework has been derived from a detailed background document developed by Healthy Loddon Campaspe and our stakeholders. To read this document, visit www.healthyloddoncampaspe.au/flourish.

- Healthy Loddon Campaspe Regional Food System Framework Reference Group members:
- Bridget Bentley, Bendigo Foodshare
- Cath O'Leary, Bendigo Loddon Prevention &
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