



Supporting a healthy, equitable
and sustainable food system

Strategic Summary

Working with the Traditional Owners

The story of this region is cyclical, moving from sustainability to disruption and destruction, then to rehabilitation and reconnection. The gold rush turned the landscape into 'Upside Down Country'. It destroyed the natural balance but also brought creative influences from all over the world which shaped our culture and food system. We are now collaborating to 'heal the landscape'.

Through the recent success of joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (for Gastronomy) in 2019, the City of Greater Bendigo (the City) will partner with the Traditional Owners of a large part of the region, the Dja Dja Wurrung, as well as government and non-government organisations, schools and the wider community to develop knowledge and understanding of sustainable land-use practices and the cultural life of the region through indigenous food plants. Central to this

will be the Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan which includes projects to restore Indigenous food and fibre plants as part of a broader ambition to heal the country and connect with the cultural heritage of this region.

This project will be led by the Dja Dja Wurrung with support from the City and other partners. The project will also include the development of a calendar detailing the six seasons of food and fibre plants, weather and animals that guided Traditional Owners in their reading of the landscape. The calendar will be used to guide planting and storytelling around the edible plants of the region and growing more sustainable and resilient sources of food – knowledge that will be shared with community organisations and gardens, schools, local businesses and the general public.

Extracts from Bendigo's application to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network 2019.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that the City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country.

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the land. We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Peoples.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Introduction

Food systems are complex and there are many ways to illustrate the relationships across and between their various components and processes. The food system includes all of the steps it takes to get food (and drink) on our plate. This includes how food and drinks are grown and produced, processed, packaged and distributed, marketed, sold, consumed and then disposed of. A local food system aims to create a more direct link between producers and consumers, through the food system stages. A strong local food system not only has health and environmental benefits, but also benefits local economies through job creation, greater investment in local businesses and increased farm viability.

Greater Bendigo's food system is shaped by and shapes, in turn, all aspects of our life. This includes the culture that informs our food and drink choices, to our environment that determines what can be grown, where and when; and the economic and political forces that shape access to food and drink.

Levels of food insecurity have increased over the past two decades, contributing to an increased prevalence of diet-related disease and placing a severe burden on our health system. Dietary risk factors (such as eating too many foods high in fat and sugar and not enough fruit and vegetables), combined with being overweight or obese is now the major contributor to the disease burden in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). In Greater Bendigo, rates of food insecurity (6.96%) and residents classed as either overweight or obese (60.3%) are higher than the Victorian state average (6.22% and 50.8% respectively).



Cultivating local food systems can significantly enhance the health and wellbeing of communities; improve the availability of and access to nutritious food; strengthen the local economy; and revitalise urban and natural environments. Looking at our entire food system also provides an opportunity to prepare for a changing climate. The latest 'State of the Climate' report from the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO (2018) confirms that we are experiencing hotter temperatures, fewer frosts, lower rainfall and extreme fire weather and floods due to human induced climate change. This will affect local food production, including which foods can be grown locally. Reducing emissions associated with food production, processing, storage and transportation has the potential to slow climate change. Taking action now will contribute to a resilient food system and community in the future.

Our Vision

Greater Bendigo's food system is healthy, equitable and sustainable and supports the local economy, culture and health and wellbeing of our communities.

Guiding Principles

- A healthy food system that promotes the health of people and enhances the natural environment
- An equitable food system that makes nutritious and culturally appropriate food accessible and affordable to everyone across our communities
- A sustainable food system that strengthens our local economy and builds the capacity and resilience of our communities

Objectives

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



How the Strategy was developed

The City of Greater Bendigo (the City) has led the development of this Strategy, with the support from an external Reference Group who provided impartial local food system advice and expertise. Community engagement activities took place across a three month period (March – June 2019). More than 1,000 people were engaged through a combination of methods including an online survey, stakeholder workshop, face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews, listening posts, engagement stalls, focus groups and community sessions.

The following groups and organisations were engaged throughout this process:

- Six schools including engagement with teachers, parents and students in both low and high socio-economic areas
- Over 700 people through community listening posts, engagements stalls and community activities
- Almost 300 responses to the online survey
- 60 people attended a food system stakeholder workshop, with each element of the food system represented
- Eight presentations and discussions at relevant committee meetings
- 11 farmers / producers via a telephone interview, online surveys and workshops
- Representatives from 73 organisations and businesses via the online survey
- 20 community groups via the online survey and face-to-face meetings
- Representatives from 23 hospitals and health services
- Seven food distributors / emergency food relief agencies
- 20 food service providers / food retailers

- Representatives from six sporting facilities and clubs
- 60 City staff at a project 'drop in session'
- Four multicultural and Indigenous groups at group sessions and meetings

Geographic scope

This Strategy covers the entire Greater Bendigo region. Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy provides strategic direction to guide the actions of the City, partner organisations and groups to strengthen and support our food system over the next 10 years (2020-2030).

What do we mean by the term 'food system'?



Key issues facing our local food system

Food Security

- Lack of healthy food options available; the unhealthy choice is currently the easy choice
- The percentage of food insecurity is higher than the Victorian state average
- An increasing demand on emergency food relief agencies
- Limited facilities to support fresh food rescue and distribution
- Some townships having limited access to regular fresh food
- Limited knowledge of the location of water fountains across the municipality
- Limited knowledge and skills of cooking with fresh produce

Growing and producing food

- Greater Bendigo's high level of soil contamination
- Unprotected agricultural and horticultural land
- Limited management of fruit fly locally
- Limited interest in agricultural sector careers, with an ageing demographic in this workforce
- Some regional products contributing to poor health outcomes
- Climate change – Greater Bendigo's climate is getting hotter and drier with less frost and rainfall
- Inadequate support and coordination for existing and new community gardens
- Inadequate skills in food growing, particularly related to our changing climate
- The cost of growing food, including the high cost of water

Distributing and selling food locally

- Limited support for small and medium food businesses
- Uncoordinated regional food distribution systems
- Greenhouse gas emissions from transporting food long distances
- Uncertainty regarding the rules and regulations for selling locally produced food (food grown in community gardens, backyards, urban agriculture) and utilisation in café/restaurant dishes
- Limited healthy snack and meal options available for resale through distribution companies
- Limited food traceability to identify where food comes from (particularly on locally-grown products)



Preparing and eating healthy, fresh food

- Low adherence to the Australian Dietary Guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption
- Limited access to healthy takeaway, meal and snack options
- Levels of overweight and obese residents is significantly higher than the Victorian state average
- Common perception that unhealthy food is cheaper than healthy food
- Poor food literacy and lack of knowledge of where food comes from
- Food safety regulations limit what can be sold (i.e. limited healthy BBQ options with the current permit required for a sausage sizzle)
- Lack of time to prepare fresh healthy food, and the convenience of takeaway or processed / ready to eat options
- There are no heavily promoted food precincts or trails in the region

Food waste

- There is a large amount of food that is wasted from workplace catering and events, food service providers and retail food outlets
- Bendigo Foodshare are currently at capacity (rescuing food that would otherwise go to landfill)
- Limited access to the City's organics collection for those residing outside Bendigo and Marong locations
- There is limited access to local Biomix compost that is created from the City's organics collection

What the community told us

What would make it easier for people to grow/produce food in Greater Bendigo?

The most common responses included:

- Education: basic food growing workshops; what to plant and when in our hot dry climate
- Increasing access to materials that will assist people to grow food
- Funding support for schools to set up kitchen garden programs
- Protecting agricultural and horticultural land
- Projects (i.e. seed library, urban agriculture)

What would help residents eat more healthy fresh food?

The most common responses included:

- Increasing healthy snack and takeaway options and limiting unhealthy options
- Education: teaching people how to cook with fresh produce (in Early Learning Centre's, schools and community settings), teaching kids about 'paddock-plate-paddock' food system cycle
- Growing your own food
- More food events celebrating fresh, local produce and our diverse food culture
- Making healthy food cheaper than unhealthy food
- Changing attitudes and behaviours of residents

What food system issue matters to you the most?

The most common responses included:

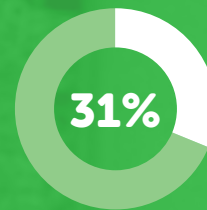
- Food waste
- Lack of healthy fast food / healthy snacks available
- Use of chemicals in food production
- Not enough access to locally produced food
- Food in unrecyclable packaging
- Seasonal eating
- Not knowing how to cook with fresh food

What are some changes you would like to see in our local food system?

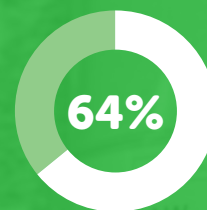
The most common responses included:

- More food grown locally – food grown in schools, community gardens
- More local produce been utilised locally – sold at Farmers Markets and local supermarkets, used in cafes and restaurants, cooked with in school kitchen garden programs
- Strengthen connections and relationships between farmers / producers, schools and the general community
- Less unhealthy fast food and more healthy options available
- More information and education on how to cook with fresh produce

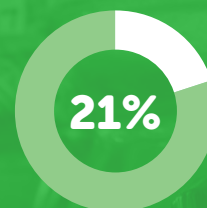
Key food growing data from the review of engagement activities included:



31% of survey respondents reported growing or producing food at home



64% of those that reported growing food at home grow their food directly into the ground (other popular methods included raised garden beds and pots)



21% of residents who reported growing food at home rely on this food to feed themselves and / or their family

Objectives and actions

Objective 1: Enable communities to access safe, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and drinks



Key Health and Wellbeing Plan progress measures

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Healthy and well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who consume sufficient fruit and vegetables • Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who consume sugar-sweetened beverages daily • Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who are overweight and obese • Proportion of adults, and adolescents with psychological distress |
| Safe and Secure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of adults and children who ran out of food and could not afford to buy more |

Key One Planet Living progress measures

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Local and Sustainable Food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round |
| Sustainable water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who consume 6-8 glasses of water a day |
| Culture and Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of adults who feel valued by society |
| Travel and Transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of households living within walking distance of an activity centre |
| Health and Happiness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who rate their health as very good or excellent |

What will we do?

The below lists some of the actions the City and our partners will take over the next 10 years. Please see Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy Action Plan 2020-2030 for the complete list of actions.

What we will do:

- Support the establishment of the Greater Bendigo Food Hub
- Support implementation of the Victorian Government's Healthy Choices Guidelines in sport and recreation settings and investigate expanding the Healthy Choices Guidelines to other settings
- Support settings through the healthy eating and oral health priority area of the Achievement Program
- Support the installation of water fountains in locations of need
- Investigate developing local planning policies that support food security
- Support fresh local produce to be rescued and distributed to educational, organisational and community settings

Objectives and actions

Objective 2: Strengthen and support a sustainable local food economy that enables the growth, production and sale of healthy food locally**Key Health and Wellbeing Plan progress measures**

- Healthy and Well
- Proportion of adults and adolescents with psychological distress

Key One Planet Living progress measures

- Local and Sustainable Food
- Proportion of farms using sustainable farming practices
 - Dollar value of local food economy
- Equity and Local Economy Products
- Produce and services sourced within a 50, 100, 200, 500 km radius

What will we do?

The below lists some of the actions the City and our partners will take over the next 10 years. Please see Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy Action Plan 2020-2030 for the complete list of actions.

What we will do:

- Create a 'local food brand' for the region that supports an increase in consumer awareness of where food comes from and may include:
 - an investigation into food traceability options for food retailers
 - 'buy local, eat local' campaign
 - 'local food hero' campaign
- Develop a local planning policy that protects horticultural and agricultural land across the whole municipality
- Support farmers to learn and use regenerative farming practices and plan for climate change
- Support the coordination of the creation of a network of linked food precincts across the region
- Establish a business mentoring program for small producers and growers

Objectives and actions

Objective 3: Support local food growing and producing, sourcing, cooking and sharing knowledge, skills and culture**Key Health and Wellbeing Plan progress measures**

- Healthy and well
- Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who consume sufficient fruit and vegetables
 - Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who consume sugar-sweetened beverages daily
 - Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who are overweight and obese

Key One Planet Living progress measures

- Local and Sustainable Food
- Percentage of people gardening for food at least once per month
- Health and Happiness
- Proportion of adults, adolescents and children who rate their health as very good or excellent
- Culture and Community
- Proportion of adults who feel valued by society
 - Proportion of community actively engaged in community groups/activities, projects and land management

What will we do?

The below lists some of the actions the City and our partners will take over the next 10 years. Please see Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy Action Plan 2020-2030 for the complete list of actions.

What we will do:

- Support schools and early learning centres to implement the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program (SAKGP) or equivalent
- Support for community gardens (network, information hub)
- Partner with Traditional Owners and relevant stakeholders to develop knowledge and understanding of sustainable land-use practices, language and the cultural life of the region through Indigenous food plants
- Develop a calendar, using Indigenous language, detailing the six seasons of food and fibre plants, weather and animals that guide Traditional Owners in their reading of the landscape
- Hold sustainable food festivals and events
- Support community kitchens and clubs to be established in region
- Activate the community food information portal

Objectives and actions

Objective 4: Reduce and divert food waste from landfill**Key One Planet Living progress measures**

Zero Waste

- Percentage of the Organics Collection collected and diverted from landfill
- Amount of the Organics compost (Biomix) redistributed to community groups and education settings within Greater Bendigo

What will we do?

The below lists some of the actions the City and our partners will take over the next 10 years. Please see Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy Action Plan 2020-2030 for the complete list of actions.

What we will do:

- Investigate the feasibility of expanding City of Greater Bendigo's household Organics Collection to reach more townships within the municipality
- Investigate how an increase in Biomix compost made from City of Greater Bendigo's Organics Waste can be re-distributed back into the Greater Bendigo Community
- Support the implementation of food waste educational opportunities for community members and professionals (i.e. composting workshops)
- Work with food retailers, food service providers and the community to reduce food waste (i.e. community campaign)
- Develop Guidelines for external facilitated events regarding food and waste (i.e. healthy, local content, minimising food waste, nude food)