

SUSTAIN the Australian food network

Central Goldfields  
**FOOD  
SYSTEMS  
ROADMAP**



## Authorship and acknowledgements

This report was authored by Sustain: the Australian Food Network, with support from Central Goldfields Shire Council officers.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Central Goldfields Shire Council acknowledges and extends appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land that we are on. 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 People. 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. We recognise the insight and wisdom shared in DJAARA's Dhelkunya Dja (Healing Country) Plan and the way that it will inform sustainable food systems now, and in the future.



Sustain acknowledges that we work on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri, Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin nation. We respectfully acknowledge the custodianship of the Wurundjeri, Woi Wurrung and Bunurong elders, recognising that they and their ancestors

stewarded these lands and their diverse creatures sustainably for tens of thousands of years. We respectfully acknowledge that sovereignty over these lands was never ceded, and that the processes of historical truth-telling and a duly negotiated treaty are essential for justice for First Nations peoples. The path to a better food system for all Australians must begin with the principles of care, respect, justice, healing and regeneration.

## ABOUT SUSTAIN



Sustain is a think-and-do network with a mission to create food systems that nourish people and nurture the planet. We know that transitioning to a healthier, more sustainable and equitable food system requires good policy and practice, underpinned by a strong evidence base and inspiring examples that empower communities and governments to work collectively towards a better food future for all.

We believe in the necessity to understand the interconnectedness and mutual interdependence of all elements of food and agricultural systems and their interrelationship with other systems, including education, health, economy, culture and politics. We ground our work in a principled commitment to the human right to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

As **connectors**, we facilitate events, networks and communities of practice for sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration amongst diverse food system actors.

As **researchers**, we translate and share our food systems knowledge to build an evidence base for effective food policy and action.

As **policy experts**, we understand the critical issues facing local government and their communities. Our holistic approach aims to cut across the institutional and departmental silos that hinder cohesive and integrated food policy implementation.

As **practitioners**, we design and deliver community food projects (including our two urban farms) that experiment with new approaches to food system transformation and model the change we want to see. Our projects aim to demonstrate in the here and now that, yes, a better future is within our grasp.



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# 01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A VISION FOR THE  
CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS  
FOOD SYSTEM



# WELCOME TO THE CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS FOOD SYSTEM

Our local food system's success directly impacts our health, wellbeing, environment, and economy. There is a strong desire within the community to improve the local food system, supported by engaged citizens, small-scale producers, local businesses and a rich tradition of home gardening.

We know there are challenges. Most food produced locally can't be sold locally, and there is limited access to fresh, healthy produce.

The Central Goldfields Food Systems Roadmap aims to highlight ways we can address these challenges by enhancing local food sustainability and security, building on existing strengths and creating a more resilient and connected community.



# HOW HAS THIS ROADMAP BEEN DEVELOPED?

We spoke to retailers, farmers, health workers, community gardeners, disability support workers, community members, businesses, and Council staff.

Community members and leaders organised their own Kitchen Table Talks to discuss the issues most important to them. We spoke to people one on one, in larger groups, and set up listening posts at markets and festivals to hear from many people at the same time.

This Roadmap reflects those conversations and, we hope, is the starting point for many more.

**“Paddock to plate, production, growing, resale, how people prepare their food or understand how to prepare it, how they access it, and the variety of food they can access.”**

Response from a community member on “What is a food system to you?”

# YOUR VISION

**By talking with the community, we came to understand three main goals that community members want to achieve for the Central Goldfields food system, reflecting a shared vision:**

## HEALTHY EATING

A community where everyone has access to healthy, quality meals. Our goal is to ensure that everybody has at least one good meal a day, and that no one is left hungry, with everyone having affordable access to nutritious produce.



## SOCIAL CONNECTION

Food is more than just sustenance; it's a way to bring us together. The social aspects of the local food system are important and a goal of using food to help to foster and strengthen community bonds.



## EQUITY

A community where everyone can cheaply and easily buy quality local produce—food that isn't covered in chemicals or poorly stored, but fresh and wholesome. This means long-term, sustainable food programs that don't rely on temporary funding.



**“An egalitarian community is the goal”**

Community engagement- interview



## WHAT YOU TOLD US

The community outlined its vision, key messages, and ideas for how the food system could work better for everyone. The main themes were used to guide the way we developed the recommendations in the Roadmap.

## FOOD IS SOCIAL IN THE CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS

In all our conversations, the focus was clear: social and community issues are at the heart of the food system in the Central Goldfields. When people talked about issues in the food system, they spoke about the community members affected. When they spoke about solutions, it involved bringing different parts of the community together.

Enhancing social cohesion and connectedness through the food system emerged as a key priority in the Shire.

**“The social connections are just as important as the food itself.”**

Community engagement- KTT



**“Everyone looks at farmers right away because they’re farmers, but I think you’re perhaps better off focusing on residential, on people growing more veggies in their backyard- that would be a much easier way to do it”**

Community engagement- interview

## WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION AT A SMALL SCALE

We discussed the differences between large-scale industrial agriculture operating in the Shire and local, homegrown food. Unlike urban areas, many community members already have gardens and space for growing, and often have surplus produce, which could be shared if programs and infrastructure were better coordinated. While industrial food production in the region is largely influenced by macroeconomic factors that cannot be mitigated by decision making at a municipal level, local opportunities are plentiful.

Connecting with small-scale, low-volume farmers, while encouraging more home growers and gradually involving larger players, was highlighted across stakeholders as a way forward.

## SHARING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FOOD

There is a wealth of local knowledge about food production, preparation, and nutrition in the Shire, but it’s unevenly distributed. Some people know a lot and have many skills, while others have not had the opportunity to learn. We need to design programs that bridge this gap and ensure everyone has access to food system knowledge.

**“I’ve got skills and knowledge in a range of areas that are informally learnt: foraging edible weeds, companion planting, improving fruit tree production, grafting and growing plants from cuttings, planning gardens around microclimates, no-dig gardening, drought-resilient drip watering”**

Community engagement- interview

## DIFFERENT GROUPS HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS

Different groups in the community have unique needs. New parents deserve healthy and nutritious meals and are open to messages about better nutrition for their children, setting the course for a lifetime of healthy eating. Older adults are often happy with their current food preferences, but are at a higher risk of social isolation- community meals may be a good way for them to stay connected.

For more vulnerable community members, or those recently struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, the focus should be on food security, ensuring local services are healthy, coordinated, and free from stigma. Different cohorts have been considered throughout the Roadmap, rather than assuming one idea is good for everyone.



## SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS FACE REGULATORY CHALLENGES

We found that some small-scale food producers find regulations, particularly related to food safety, as a barrier to establishing viable commercial operations. For this reason, we heard that some businesses operate outside of formal regulations due to the perceived burden and financial costs. It is important to consider how to assist small-scale food businesses to overcome these barriers, so they can contribute to enhancing the food system for everyone.

“The social connections are just as important as the food itself.”

Community engagement- KTT

## WHAT WE THINK CAN BE DONE NEXT

Based on information gathered and community input, we've come up with these five key recommendations to improve the food system in Central Goldfields. They are designed to work together to meet the community's goals, but each one can also stand alone to make a difference.

More detail about each recommendation can be found in Section 5 (page 53).



Recommendations		Action assessment		
		Quick win	Step up	Ambitious
<b>1</b>	<b>Enhance local food systems governance to achieve the Roadmap goals</b>			
1.1	Seek funding for a dedicated resource to support Food Systems development and Roadmap implementation.		🌱	
1.2	Formalise governance of the Central Goldfields Food Network and engage community leaders	🏆		
1.3	Promote collaboration among local food businesses, including through existing platforms like the Committee of Maryborough	🏆		
<b>2</b>	<b>Foster small-scale local growing to support a community-owned shared food enterprise</b>			
2.1	Encourage home food production	🏆		
2.2	Establish a permanent home for existing Community Gardens then expand the model		🌱	
2.3	Conduct a community food assets and infrastructure audit		🌱	
2.4	Conduct a feasibility study for a local shared food cooperative		🌱	
<b>3</b>	<b>Community food education programs meeting different needs for different cohorts</b>			
3.1	Teach practical skills for growing produce at home	🏆		
3.2	Promote and educate on nutrition and healthy eating	🏆		
3.3	Provide social opportunities based around food for older residents		🌱	
3.4	Integrate nutrition education with home gardening to promote a holistic approach to health		🌱	
<b>4</b>	<b>Explore options to create healthy and diverse food retail in Central Goldfields</b>			
4.1	Map what kinds of food is being produced locally to understand local supply		🌱	
4.2	Promote existing initiatives, such as the Produce Box, which provide an affordable alternative to major retailers and work to expand their reach	🏆		
4.3	Work with local supermarkets to promote the sale of healthy food/ reduce sale of unhealthy foods		🌱	
4.4	Investigate ways to establish local greengrocer or discount store			🚧
4.5	Conduct a feasibility study to establish a local seasonal market			🚧
<b>5</b>	<b>Activate broader regional partnerships in developing the local food system</b>			
5.1	Reduce the perception that barriers are prohibitive	🏆		
5.2	Reduce costs and time involved by encouraging partnerships and collaborations		🌱	
5.3	Reduce barriers through policy and legislative change/ reduce sale of unhealthy foods			🚧



# 02 INTRODUCTION

## SETTING THE SCENE BACKGROUND

Food plays an essential role in supporting the health of communities and our environment, and the Central Goldfields region is no exception. The circular journey our food takes—from paddock to plate and back again—connects people from all walks of life, across industries, ages, and communities. Our food system encompasses the pathways, people and processes involved in feeding our community. Strengthening it has direct benefits for our health and wellbeing, the environment, and the local economy.

Central Goldfields Shire Council, in partnership with VicHealth, is working to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in the Shire. A key focus of this work is healthy eating. However, we know that children and young people don't always get to choose what they eat, or what their family buys at the supermarket. One of the best ways to improve the food system for children and young people is to make it better for everyone.

The Central Goldfields Food Systems Roadmap aims to lay out a pathway to enhance the local food system through actionable, community-based solutions. By building community knowledge and engagement with food production, the Roadmap will help create a resilient, connected and healthy community in Central Goldfields over the next decade.

***This report consolidates extensive community engagement and analysis of the current food system in the Central Goldfields. From this process we developed five main recommendations with interlinking actions that build on each other. While each recommendation can stand alone to make a positive impact, implementing all five will help achieve the overarching goals of the Food Systems Roadmap and the vision of the community.***



## AIMS, PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

The Food Systems Roadmap aims to create a shared understanding of the Central Goldfields food system, food sustainability, food accessibility and food security across Council, local services, community organisations and residents. It will guide coordinated and collective action to build on existing strengths and address key challenges facing the Central Goldfields community.

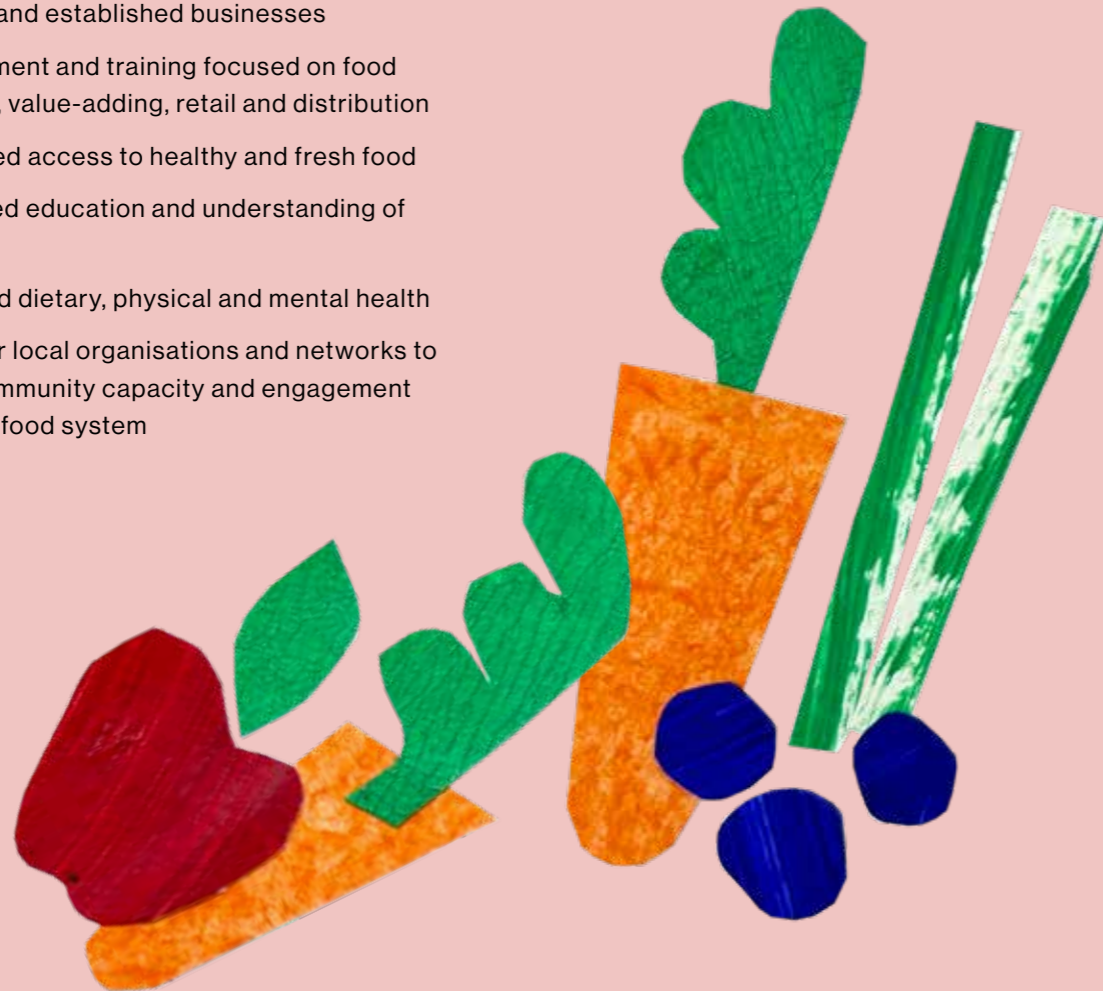
The Roadmap's purpose is to enable Council and community to work together to build a strong, healthy, sustainable and resilient regional food system, including:

- Dignified food security for all residents
- Celebration of diverse food cultures and traditions
- Increased local economic activity and support for new and established businesses
- Employment and training focused on food growing, value-adding, retail and distribution
- Expanded access to healthy and fresh food
- Increased education and understanding of nutrition
- Improved dietary, physical and mental health
- Stronger local organisations and networks to build community capacity and engagement with the food system

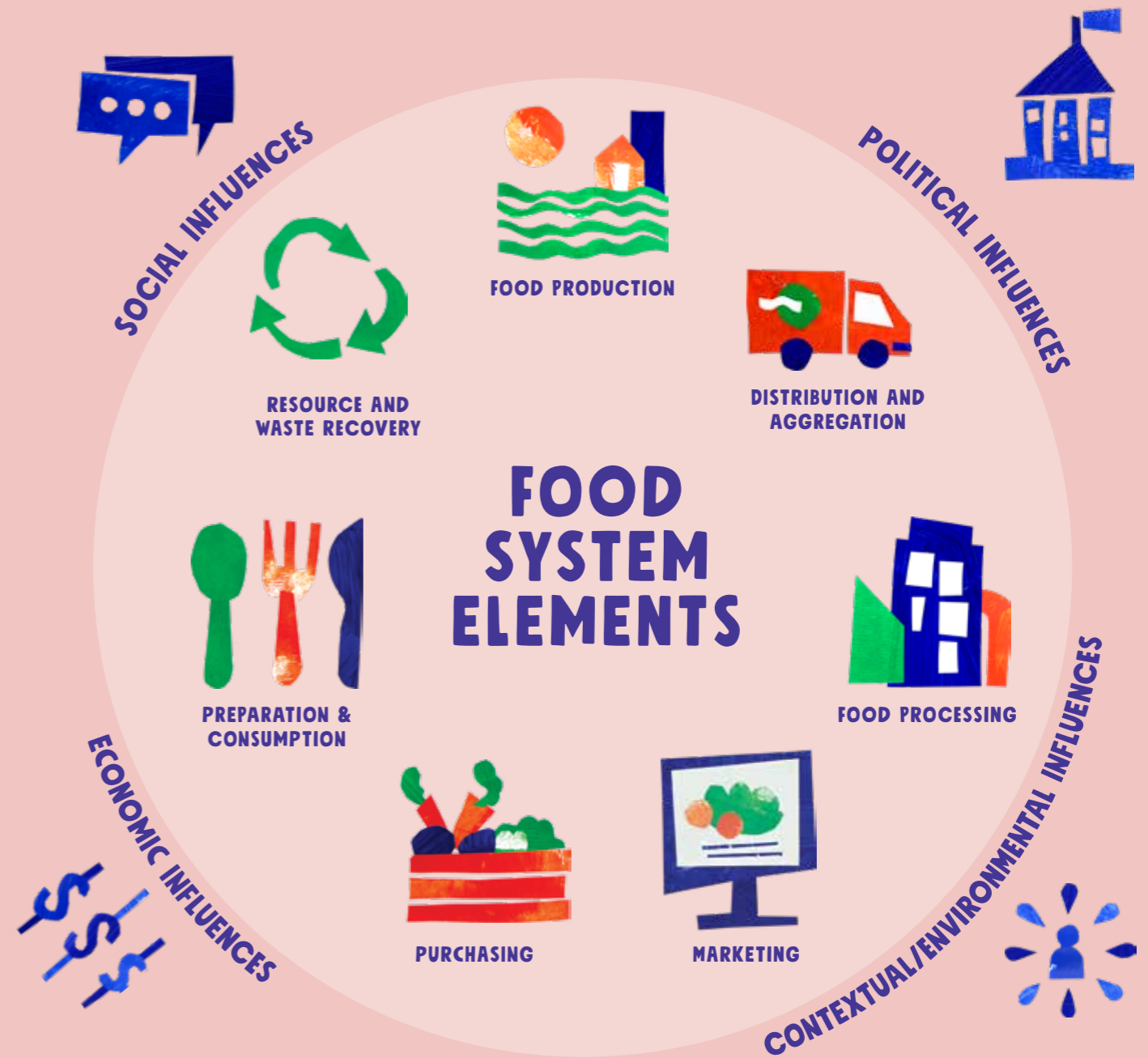
## WHAT IS A FOOD SYSTEM?

The 'food system' is everything involved in bringing food from farm to fork: the network of people, processes and interactions involved in growing, processing, distribution, sale and disposal of food on-farm, in retail settings, and at home. It is not a linear supply chain from farm to plate. Rather, it is a complex web of relationships that connects everything and everyone - from soil microbes, plants and animals to health, education and political systems, retail and digital food environments, and the everyday food practices and cultures of nourishment and celebration.

This concept is illustrated in Figure 1, depicting the interconnected elements of a thriving food system, which we will refer to throughout the Roadmap.



### FIGURE 1. FOOD SYSTEM MAP



## WHY DOES A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM MATTER?

In a local food system, the focus is on producing and consuming more food locally while working together for the benefit of both people and the environment. Some of the benefits of this approach include:

- Growing and sharing food helps improve both physical and mental health while strengthening connections within the community.
- When food comes from nearby, it takes less energy to reach the community, which means a smaller carbon footprint.
- Producing food locally allows for a wider range of foods through sharing knowledge, diverse seeds, and cooking experiences.
- Families who grow their own food tend to waste less because they understand the effort behind it. In a local system, food waste can even become useful for growing more food through composting.
- Buying local food from local businesses keeps more money circulating within the community, boosting the local economy.
- Greater control over the use of harmful chemicals relative to conventional production processes growing food at a much larger scale, leading to fresher, more nutritious, and tastier produce.
- Local food systems help green community spaces and encourage communities to care for the land and conserve natural resources.

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council is well placed to contribute to locally relevant, integrated and long-lasting strategies to strengthen the local food system, and to work with key partner organisations to increase access to healthy food in our community. This Roadmap forms part of Council's broader strategic planning, and aligns with other important initiatives like the Climate Action Plan 2022-2030, Flourish Regional Food System Framework 2024, and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025.



### Council can positively influence the food system, particularly in the following areas:

- Public spaces and facilities – ensure healthy food and drink options are available for staff, visitors and in public spaces and facilities managed by local government.
- Regulation and planning – support local food production through the local planning scheme and assist food businesses with regulatory compliance.
- Waste education and recycling – educate the community to avoid, reduce and recycle waste.
- Community development – support community groups and organisations to increase community capacity and individual skills to grow and prepare foods.
- Facilitate partnerships – develop strong relationships with key stakeholders, organisations and government to strengthen the local food system.
- Data and evidence – gather information to support decision-making on the local food system and associated challenges.
- Education and information – provide information and support development of skills through communication tools and educators.

## THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Individuals, community groups, businesses and other organisations influence the operations and impacts of the local food system in many important ways. The daily choices of individuals, and people making decisions within organisations, workplaces, educational settings and sports clubs, all contribute to bringing about change at a local level. Because of this, addressing challenges in our food system requires a collaborative effort, working together to make a difference.

There are multiple projects and many passionate people working across the Shire to tackle challenges of food security, healthy eating, and sustainable food production. Forums such as the Central Goldfields Food Network provide a platform to discuss and coordinate solutions. Initiatives like Healthy Loddon Campaspe and the Network's Issues and Opportunities Paper 2024 are important steps in highlighting the challenges facing the local food system and advocating for more resources to address them.



# ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

## MARYBOROUGH

**AGE**  
MEDIAN AGE  
**52**

**CULTURE**  
NON-ENGLISH  
SPEAKING  
HOUSEHOLDS  
**4.1%**

**ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDERS**  
**2.3%**

**EDUCATION**  
COMPLETED  
YEAR 12  
**45%**

**ATTAINED A  
BACHELOR DEGREE  
OR HIGHER**  
**7.4%**



**ECONOMY**  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
RATE\*  
**5.9%**

**LABOUR FORCE  
PARTICIPATION\***  
**43.3%**

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
DISADVANTAGE (SEIFA)  
SECOND-HIGHEST  
RATES OF  
DISADVANTAGE IN  
VICTORIA<sup>2</sup>**

**MEDIAN WEEKLY  
INCOMES IN CENTRAL  
GOLDFIELDS\***

**PERSONAL**  
**\$503**

**FAMILY**  
**\$1,260**

**HOUSEHOLD**  
**\$904**

## VICTORIA

**AGE**  
MEDIAN AGE  
**38**

**CULTURE**  
NON-ENGLISH  
SPEAKING  
HOUSEHOLDS  
**30.2%**

**ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDERS**  
**3.8%**

**EDUCATION**  
COMPLETED  
YEAR 12  
**63.8%**

**ATTAINED A  
BACHELOR DEGREE  
OR HIGHER**  
**24.3%**



**ECONOMY**  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
RATE\*  
**5%**

**LABOUR FORCE  
PARTICIPATION\***  
**62.4%**

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
DISADVANTAGE (SEIFA)**  
**NA**

**MEDIAN WEEKLY  
INCOMES IN CENTRAL  
GOLDFIELDS\***

**PERSONAL**  
**\$803**

**FAMILY**  
**\$2,136**

**HOUSEHOLD**  
**\$1,759**

\*PERCENTAGE OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION (15 YEARS AND ABOVE).

Central Goldfields is a resilient community, that has fostered strong grassroots actions to promote healthy eating and address structural barriers to accessing fresh and nutritious foods. Located between the regional centres of Bendigo and Ballarat, the Shire has approximately 13,500 residents, the majority of whom live between the largest township of Maryborough and surrounding smaller communities (such as Carisbrook, Talbot, and Dunolly).

Despite strong community connections, residents face deep-rooted challenges that can make it difficult for individuals to achieve high standards of health and lifestyles.<sup>1</sup>

## HEALTH

Heart disease prevalence is higher in Central Goldfields at 6.9%, compared to the state average of 3.9%. Diabetes affects 7.6% of the population in Central Goldfields, nearly double the state average of 3.7%. Mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression, have a prevalence rate of 13.9% in Central Goldfields, compared to the state average of 8.8%.<sup>3</sup>

Key findings from the 2019 Active Living Census for Central Goldfields Shire reveal insights into the community's health and lifestyle:

- 69% of adults are overweight or obese and 51% of adults meet the guidelines for physical activity.
- 85% of people use open spaces in Central Goldfields, with 62% of them utilising these spaces for exercise and fitness
- 70% of 3- to 17-year-olds eat the recommended amount of fruit each day, while only 44% of adults do.
- 14% of 3- to 17-year-olds eat the recommended amount of vegetables, compared to 11% of adults.
- 13% of 3- to 17-year-olds consume sugary drinks daily, with 16% of adults doing the same.<sup>4</sup>

The Victorian Public Health Survey (2020) included a single-item measure of food insecurity, measured by the question, 'In the last 12 months, have you run out of money to buy food?', with a much higher percentage of agreement in the Central Goldfield's LGA (13.2%) compared to the rest of Victoria (5.9%), however this data comes from a small sample so should be interpreted with caution.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes on the data

There are several factors related to the specific local context of Central Goldfields which may influence this data, including:

Central Goldfields' role in the broader region as a service hub for older people contributes to its disproportionately aged population, potentially skewing demographic, economic, and health statistics.

Limited local opportunities to access higher education also contribute to high numbers of young people leaving the Shire, which may further affect economic and education data.



# 03 THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

## CURRENT FOOD SYSTEM OVERVIEW



## STRENGTHS

### MANY HOME GARDENERS AND LOTS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TO SHARE

### STRONG ESTABLISHED NETWORKS AND PROGRAMS

- The Central Goldfields Food Network (CGFN) is already established
- Community garden initiative integrated with local kindergarten
- Initiatives like the Aboriginal Interpretative Garden at the Central Goldfields Art Gallery
- Meals on Wheels and subsidised food programs in aged care supported by various service providers

### LOCAL BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

- Local businesses already engaged in zero-waste and independent healthy eating offerings

### RETAIL AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

- Maryborough serves as a mini regional supermarket hub attracting people from surrounding areas
- Local food retailing employment is relatively high due to the presence of supermarkets

## CHALLENGES

### LIMITED ACCESS TO LOCAL FRESH, HEALTHY PRODUCE

- Limited access to fresh produce with few greengrocers and farmers markets
- Higher costs of fresh produce compared to other areas, and scarcity of organic options
- High availability of fast food and limited healthy lunch options like sushi

### ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

- Supermarket competition makes it difficult for local food initiatives to thrive
- Lack of local processing and storage facilities for agricultural products, relying on external processing and reducing local availability (noting that most food produced industrially in the area could not be consumed by the community)

### VULNERABILITY AND INEQUALITY

- Young couples and long-term unemployed individuals face significant food security challenges
- Talbot Farmers' Market and other local options are not affordable for everyone
- Quality of local housing and kitchen facilities limits the capacity for healthy home-cooking
- Many residents live in caravans or mobile units with limited refrigeration and storage capabilities

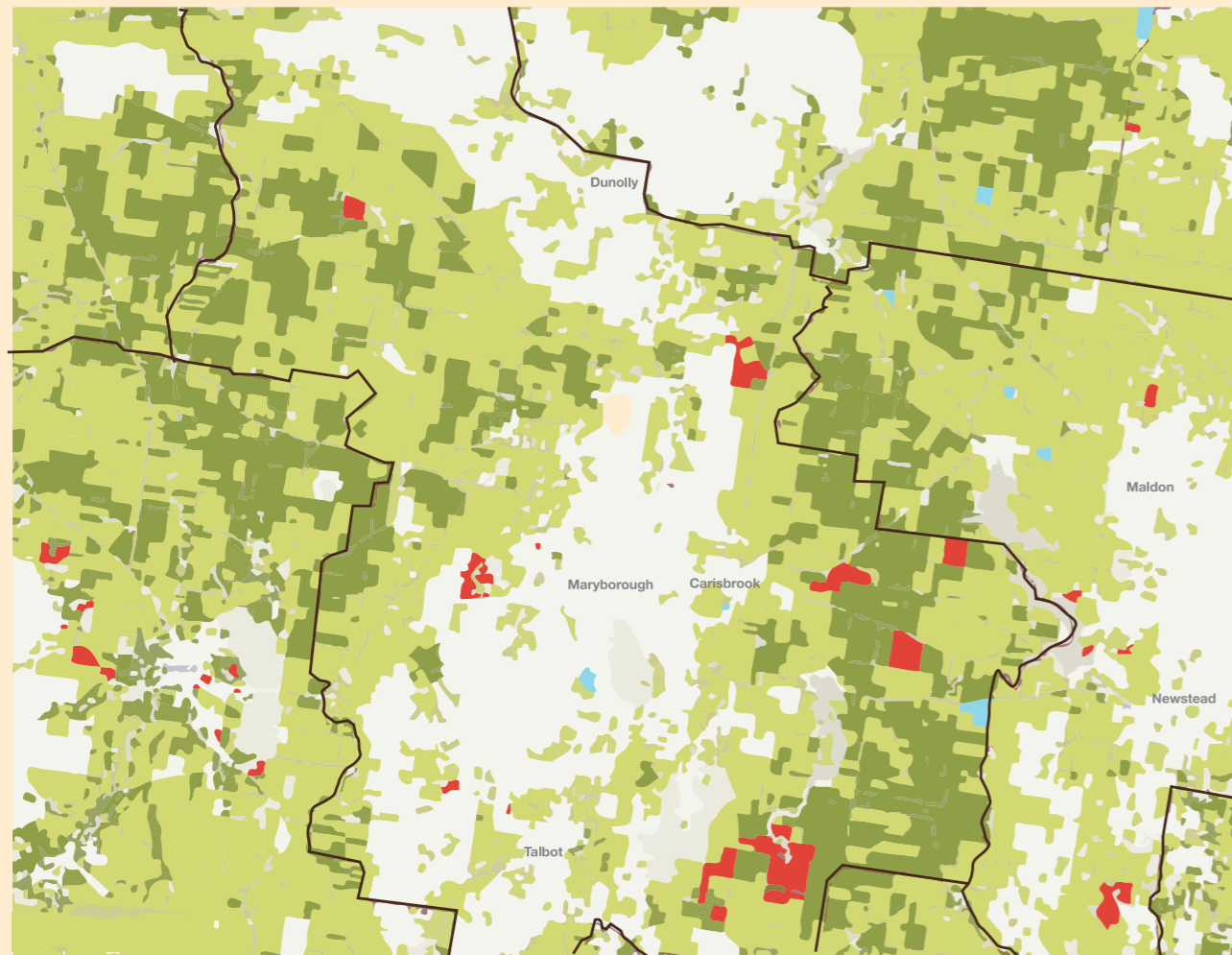
### NON-LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

- Large-scale agriculture in the region primarily serves national or international markets, not local ones
- Absence of alternative fresh food grocers and a reliance on supermarkets
- Local producers often operate on a small scale, with limited integration into the broader food system

## PRODUCTION, PROCESSING, AND DISTRIBUTION

Agriculture in Central Goldfields is made up of both large-scale industrial production for international and national markets, and smaller, local specialty farming operations. Most large farms in the region focus on high-volume production of livestock or crops such as grains, which are then transported to distant locations for processing and sale. For instance, sheep are sent to the livestock exchange in Ballarat, grain to freight networks via Dunolly and Smeaton, and wool to Geelong. Some products, such as hay, are exported internationally, highlighting the global reach of local farming outputs. However, very little of the produce from these large-scale farms is sold locally, largely due to the prohibitive cost and scale required for local processing and distribution.





Source: DTV Public Portal- Land Use Area with outline of Central Goldfields Shire in black

## FIGURE 2. REGISTERED AGRICULTURAL LAND USE IN CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS SHIRE



The diversity of crops grown in the region includes canola, oats, wheat, barley, and some legumes, yet the volume of production is geared towards bulk commodity markets. This focus on high-volume crops reflects the broader economic pressures faced by farmers, who must navigate fluctuating market prices driven by global demand. The emphasis on monoculture and bulk commodity production limits the potential for local diversification and resilience.

Farmers generally rely on external facilities for processing and storage, such as GrainCorp in Dunolly, where wheat and oats can be warehoused prior to sale and processing. Historical local processing plants have shut down due to challenges related to scale and economic viability, necessitating the transportation of products to external facilities. Limited small-scale processing exists for local specialty products like honey and meat for farmers' markets. The reliance on external infrastructure creates a gap in capabilities to process the grain produced locally, making it difficult to maintain a truly local food system.

Transport infrastructure in the region, including roads and storage facilities, is seen as outdated and not equipped to handle a high volume of modern agricultural traffic. Further along the supply chain, the region hosts manufacturing companies such as Edlyn Foods and True Foods, which manufacture packaged foods.

Local production also includes hobby farms and specialty producers who sell at farmers' markets. These operations are much smaller in scale than industrial producers, focusing on products like honey. Community agriculture initiatives like the Dunolly Community Garden, integrated with local kindergartens, are micro-producers that promote sustainability and healthy eating at the community level.

## RETAIL AND CONSUMPTION

Maryborough serves as a mini regional hub, with four supermarkets (IGA, ALDI, Coles, and Woolworths) attracting people from surrounding areas. However, supermarket food quality is perceived as less fresh and lower quality than greengrocers and other types of food retailers, of which there are limited options in the Shire. There are monthly markets in the Shire, such as Talbot Farmers Market and Carisbrook Town Hall market, which offer fresh food direct from producers. The Produce Box is a local service delivering fresh produce to local residents, providing a convenient and relatively affordable option for fresh produce.

The community faces a high availability of fast food and a lack of healthy options, interacting with a food culture inclination towards convenience foods like McDonald's, KFC, and Subway. Schools, kindergartens, and aged care services provide meals, with programs like Smiles for Miles promoting healthy eating among children. However, there are many skilled and informed community members seeking to change consumption behaviours.

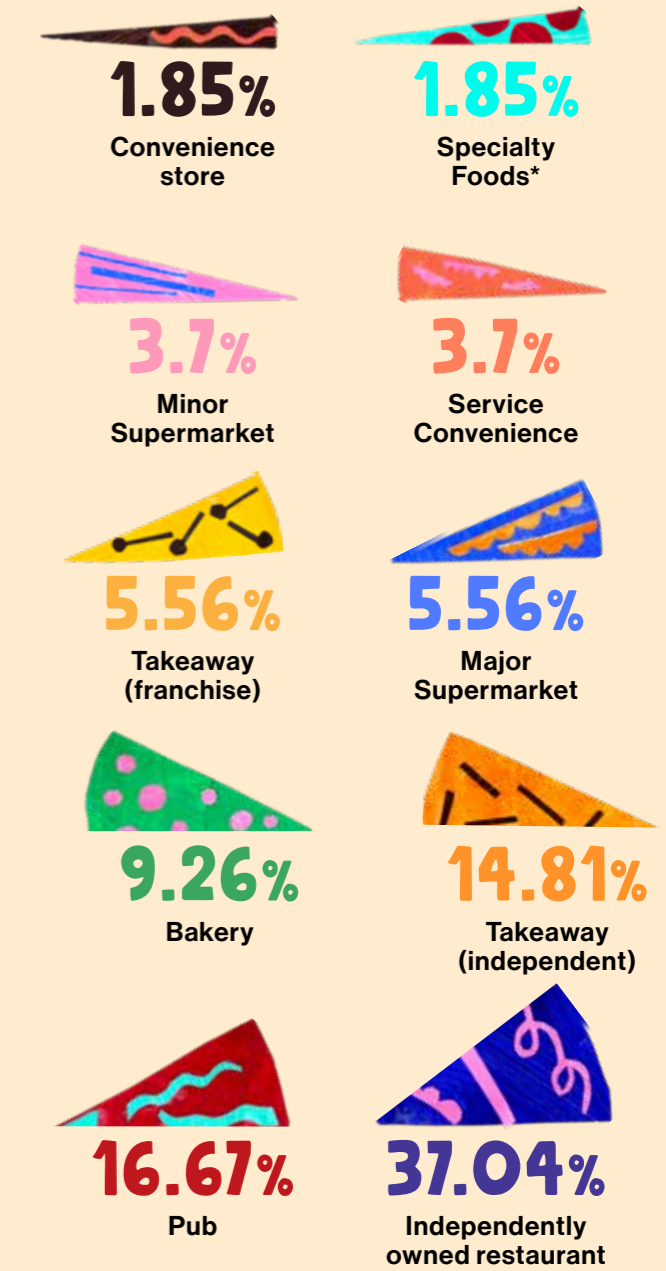
Understanding the food environment context is vital for healthy eating in the Central Goldfields, as ABS data (2021) indicates 5.6% of households at the LGA level have no car, meaning food sources will be dependent on outlets within walkable distance.

Analysis of healthy food outlets was conducted by Deakin University's GLOBE (Global Centre for Preventative Health and Nutrition) research centre, based on a register of food premises supplied by Council in April 2022. GLOBE data uses standard methodologies to classify outlets as providing healthy or unhealthy foods. Classification was based on standard GLOBE categories, although the results outlined below require further validated through research, fieldwork, and consultation. For example, preliminary validation efforts revealed more liquor stores than were listed in the register.

Using standard classification methods, outlets classified with a healthiness score of >5+ are considered healthy. Of the outlets presented in Figure 3 (illustrating types of food outlets in the LGA), only Minor Supermarkets, Major Supermarket and Specialty Core fit into the healthy category (6 outlets, or 11% of the total number listed).



### FIGURE 3. FOOD RETAIL OUTLETS IN CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS, BY TYPE



\*Stores mainly engaged in the sale of a limited line of specialised gourmet food. Needham, C., 2020. Australian Food Monitoring Tool, Australian Food Environment Dashboard, [www.foodenvironmentdashboard.com.au/food-retail/](http://www.foodenvironmentdashboard.com.au/food-retail/)



## WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

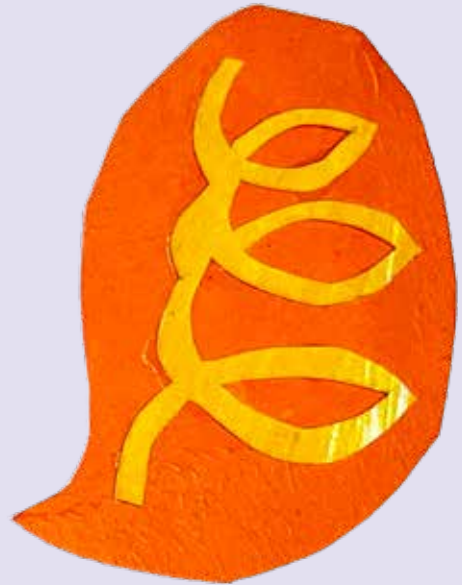
Initiatives like community gardens and local programs aim to reduce food waste through education and redistribution. Some local programs and households engage in composting organic waste, and the Council runs a comprehensive waste reduction program.

The quality of some local housing and kitchen facilities impacts the ability to cook and store healthy food at home, for example, residents who live in caravans or mobile units with limited refrigeration. As described above, there is a lack of local grain storage and processing facilities due to limited commercial viability. The region also lacks sufficient distribution and storage infrastructure to meet demand for food relief, particularly in terms of fresh and refrigerated products.





# 04 HEARING FROM COMMUNITY



## WHO WE SPOKE TO

We started by setting up a project control group including Council representatives (youth work, sustainability, community engagement health promotion, waste), Sustain, Central Goldfields Food Network representatives, Landcare, and representatives from the business community (retail and manufacturing).

The following sectors were identified as priorities to cover in our consultation process to develop the roadmap. This list was based on prioritising those consulted less frequently, who are harder to reach, or whose perspectives are essential for understanding the food system's strengths and challenges.

- Retail
- Manufacturing
- Agriculture
- Waste / resource management and recovery
- Aged care
- Food relief
- Community gardens
- Broader community





# FARMING

**ELEMENTS: AGRICULTURE (INDUSTRIAL AND COMMUNITY); LAND, SOIL, AND WATER; BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM (BIODIVERSITY, CLIMATE CHANGE, LAND USE, WASTE/COMPOST).**

Stakeholders from the farming community in the Central Goldfields told us that their practices are greatly influenced by seasonal cycles and weather conditions. Harvest and seeding periods are particularly intense, demanding long hours and quick action to avoid crop loss from adverse weather. In contrast, winter is a time for maintenance tasks like repairing fences and applying fertilisers. These logistical demands, combined with the need for external processing, create a challenging environment for farmers to participate in additional community-focussed agriculture.

They also mentioned regulatory pressures, with the implementation of carbon credit systems and the need to adopt sustainable practices adding to their workload. Mixed farming operations, especially, find it complex to measure and manage carbon emissions, particularly in animal farming where factors like feed types and animal health significantly affect emission rates. The shift towards mosaic burning practices, aimed at reducing environmental impact and complying with regulations, further complicates the farming landscape.

Soil quality in the Central Goldfields is generally poor, a legacy of historical land use for mining rather than agriculture. This has led to difficulties in maintaining productive farmland.



## FARMING IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- Farmer incubator program – initiatives supporting aspiring farmers with skills development and access to land e.g. Pop-up Garlic Farmers program in Melbourne
- Support farmers to sell locally by subsidising fuel costs to cover transport of produce from farm to market
- Subsidise farmers for direct sale to public

Community growers told us that community-based food growing in the Central Goldfields holds promise but also faces some significant hurdles. One of the main concerns is the need for secure places to grow and reliable water access for community gardens. They shared a success story about the community garden integrating with a local kindergarten, which provided value for education and food for the community. However, these projects need ongoing support and resources to thrive.

**“Home growers selling produce are unsure of regulations. Are regulations different for cooked food vs uncooked grown produce?”**

Community engagement- KTT



## OTHER ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

- The need for better storage and refrigeration to keep food fresh on shared food relief tables, especially during summer months
- The need for long-term investment in green spaces and community food system elements, such as communal fruit orchards
- The opportunity for edible trees on verges, potentially in partnership with Council's Parks department, Landcare, youth groups and community gardens
- The need for more secure water supply and water capture methods for home and community gardeners

**“Water is always an issue in our area, so it’s important to teach people about more self-watering systems e.g. wicking beds, bathtub growing models.”**

Community engagement- interview

Businesses expressed interest in waste reduction solutions and more effective waste management practices, which could be tied into Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requirements. Businesses like Whiskey June are already aiming for zero-waste operations. The broader community, including groups like Street Harvest, are also encouraging community participation in reducing food waste and sharing surplus produce.



# SOCIAL

**ELEMENTS: SOCIAL SYSTEM, FOOD CULTURE, EDUCATION AND FOOD LITERACY, MEDIA, COMMUNITY FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE.**

The social aspects of the food system in Central Goldfields were a strong theme across all discussions, pinpointing social solutions to local food system development as important for community well-being. Across KTTs, interview, and public consultation, the community framed food systems issues and solutions as largely social phenomena.

**“Without church as a social focal point, there is no natural alternative gathering space for everyone... sports clubs make up for this a bit but not fully”**

Community engagement- KTT



Different parts of the community pointed out social connection and isolation issues when discussing the food system, particularly for older adults. Older adults in the community face several barriers to healthy eating, including affordability, with food being the place where household budgets are tightened, alongside challenges with transport and disability access and a lack of knowledge about affordable healthy options. Our engagement also suggested that preference and behaviour change in older adults is harder to achieve.

Despite efforts from carers, attracting attendance for educational workshops for older adults is difficult. Isolation and the cessation of social outing groups during COVID-19 left many older adults without social meal options, and there is a lack of community gardening programs for older adults. For this cohort, simple shared community meals with hidden nutritious ingredients might work better than formal education aimed at behaviour change.

The Mill House Neighbourhood House (Mill House) has demonstrated two successful models for addressing these challenges – firstly through the Food With Friends program, which involves collaborative and supported cooking classes for community members followed by a shared meal – and through the Friday Feast, a free community lunch offering a two-course meal every Friday. Each of these programs ties food literacy and nutrition to opportunities for social connection, and they maintain robust ongoing attendance. The learnings from these programs could help to inform other models across the Shire in using social connections to promote healthy eating and food education.

## IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

- Transport support for community members to attend fresh food markets
- Make existing community kitchen facilities available for community hire to support community meals initiatives and clarify availability and rates
- Secure sustained funding for long term impact for community food initiatives
- Incorporate First Nations knowledge and perspectives
- Community cooking classes and meal planning workshops
- Provide education about food growing in a rapidly changing climate
- Life skills workshops on healthy eating
- Increase reliable, accessible (i.e. not just social media) sources of local information
- Starting nutrition education with new parents, ingraining nutrition habits from the start of life
- Explore potential of education and care settings (kindergartens, schools, daycare) as hubs for food-related activities (e.g. veggie garden and chickens at Maryborough Early Childhood).
- Establish community gardening programs aimed at older residents
- More accessible playgrounds and indoor activity spaces for children



**“Schools have to be the place, but everything gets piled onto them.”**

Community engagement- KTT

Regional programs like the Grow Cook Share food hub, Cooking for Change, hosted by Bendigo Foodshare, and the VicHealth funded regional food hubs were given as examples of the type of initiatives the community would like to see replicated and supported. These initiatives could play a role in both supporting local growers and promoting food security. Successful local programs in the past have lacked sustained financial support, with the community expressing a desire for more long-term investment.

Feedback also highlighted interest in improved governance and more engagement at the execution level of community projects, though engaging volunteers, both young and old, remains a challenge.

**“Social connection and isolation are major issues- community members who don’t want to admit they need help or aren’t able to get out of the house because of mobility issues, other restrictions”**

Community engagement- KTT

**“People are terrified of volunteering and committing. Is it that an actual building that would help? In a way we have too many buildings, it’s more the volunteers we need.”**

Community engagement- interview

Starting nutrition education with new parents, ingraining nutrition habits from the start of life, was suggested as a positive and effective way to build healthier habits throughout the lifespan of residents.

**“I want to work on nutrition with very young children, to build their exposure from the start.”**

Community engagement- interview



Public social spaces for young people were linked to their food choices, with people pointing out that kids hang out around fast-food places like McDonald's and KFC because there are few other social gathering options for young people, especially when the weather is poor.



## **THE IMPORTANT ROLE SPORTS CLUBS COULD PLAY IN IMPROVING NUTRITION IN THE SHIRE WAS HIGHLIGHTED IN TERMS OF:**

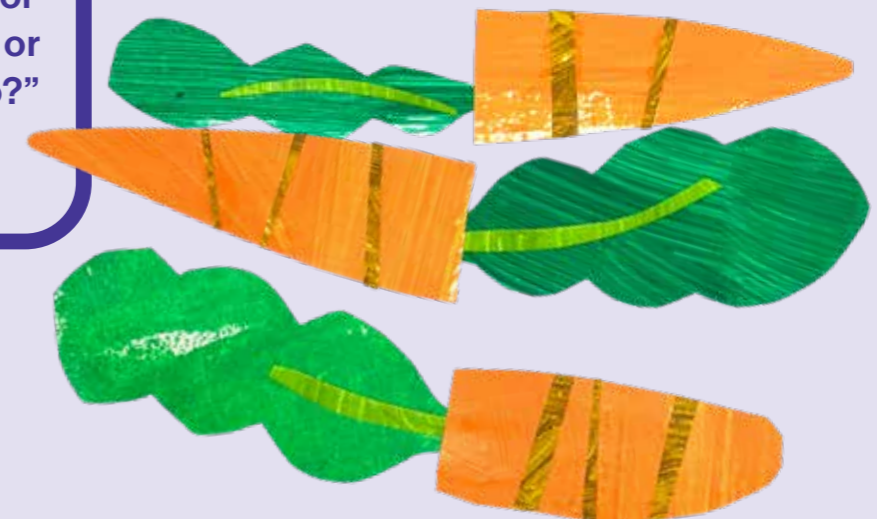
- Opportunities for intervention to promote healthy eating options (like the Maryborough Netball Club has done)
- A need to better understand demand for unhealthy options as treats, and how sports teams might rely on sales of unhealthy food to survive financially

**“Footy clubs provide a lot of food for families throughout the week, there’s a clear opportunity to intervene there”**

Community engagement- interview

**“Freedom swing at Princes Park has been out of use for a long time, when it’s cold or raining, where can kids go?”**

Community engagement- Public consultation



# HEALTH

**ELEMENTS: PREVENTION (INFRASTRUCTURE, WELLNESS) AND CARE (HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, AGED CARE, YOUTH HEALTH, DISABILITY SERVICES)**

Our engagement covered different angles of health and healthcare as it relates to the local food system. We spoke to community members and health care providers about their concerns and opportunities. Successful past health initiatives like the Healthy Loddon Campaspe Initiative were cited as successful but lacking long-term support.



## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Are food additives in ultra-processed foods causing or contributing to allergies and reducing food quality?

Older adults lack knowledge about affordable, nutritious alternatives like chickpeas and nuts

There are affordability issues with Meals on Wheels at \$10.50 per meal

Diets among the elderly are now very basic – many now rely on canned soup

Cooking classes for older adults have been poorly attended

Many NDIS clients lack funding for consistent meal preparation support



## IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

Seek private funding opportunities, such as food companies, for healthy eating programs to reduce reliance on public funding

Greater access to speech pathology to help with swallowing and food aversion in kids

Support social outing groups for older adults – these are essential for nutrition and social interaction

More funding for disability support services to achieve good nutrition outcomes for people living with disabilities



At the Maryborough Community House, access to dietitians is typically through health services to address an immediate health problem. However, there's a lack of long-term behaviour change support and a greater need for preventative community education from nutrition professionals. Private funding opportunities, such as those from food companies, were suggested as an option to help spread healthy eating messages without leaning on public funding. Concerns were raised about the link between gut health and mental health, particularly for teenagers, and the impact of food additives on neurodivergence and behavioural issues.

**“There is a greater need for community education, preventative approach.”**  
Community engagement- interview

Feedback from CGSC Children and Families indicated that many pregnant young women are surprised to find they need to travel to give birth because they are not within a healthy weight range, and there are few local resources to help new and young parents understand healthy eating and cooking. The Goldfields Family Centre's move to a daycare model was partly driven by the need to ensure kids receive healthy meals during the day. Finally, a farmer pointed out the reality of long workdays during harvest, often leading to poor eating habits like grabbing a bag of chips and a beer after a long day for single farmers.

**“There aren't many resources locally for new or young parents to understand how to eat and cook healthy”**  
Community engagement- interview

# ECONOMIC

## ELEMENTS: FOOD WHOLESALERS, FOOD COMPANIES, RETAIL, SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Maryborough has a robust retail environment with four major supermarkets, making it a regional shopping hub. This has drawn people from surrounding areas like Castlemaine, where local supermarket prices are higher. The retail sector's strength has been a significant boon for the local economy, providing employment and drawing in shoppers from a wider area.

It also presents an opportunity to create leverage for broader social benefits. The Mill House Café initiative harnesses the strength of the food retail sector in a social enterprise program, providing training and support to community members in hospitality skills as part of the café's operations, to assist them in building employment pathways.



## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Supermarket dominance offers convenience but creates dependency on pre-prepared meals

Supermarket dominance squeezes local farmers, producers and food businesses

There is a lack of diversity of fresh produce and ingredients in the supermarkets

The absence of local produce markets and the high cost of food are barriers to healthy eating

Food businesses experience challenges in sourcing local fresh produce in bulk



“The supermarkets compete, it’s cheaper and easier, you don’t even need to get out of your car anymore, it’s chopped up for you and half cooked”

Community engagement- interview

Maryborough's relatively low socioeconomic status affects food choices, with tight budgets often resulting in poor dietary habits. The promotion of unhealthy foods in local retail, such as displays of fairy floss and sweets, were also mentioned as contributing to poor eating habits. The need for healthy to-go meals was identified as a significant gap in Central Goldfields.



“We could speak directly with our local (supermarket) owner about providing healthier food”

Community engagement- interview

## IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION:



More support for local food businesses to reduce dependence on supermarkets

Explore viability of a local discount “Not Quite Right” market, to provide seconds as a more affordable grocery option

There is a need to invest in local businesses and infrastructure to cushion against global shocks

Explore the opportunity to revive a local farmers' market based on previous experience with the Maryborough Farmers Market

“There should be a local NQR (Not Quite Right) market to provide factory seconds and discount groceries.”

Community engagement- Public consultation





# POLITICAL

## ELEMENTS: POLICY AND REGULATIONS, INFORMATION AND DATA, GOVERNANCE

Home gardeners and small businesses have faced regulatory issues when it comes to selling home-produced food. Regulations require food to be produced in commercial kitchens, which has been a barrier, e.g., those making pickles at home cannot sell them due to regulations. However, there have been successful collaborations, such as the partnership between the kindergarten and the community garden. There is potential for the Council and the Central Goldfields Food Network to help connect various community entities, like primary schools and aged care facilities, to streamline and support these initiatives.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Regulatory frameworks place barriers on home and small-scale producers and businesses

There is confusion about the regulatory implications of the difference between selling cooked vs fresh produce

The decentralised community leadership in Central Goldfields presents challenges



“When we had a shop and restaurant we weren’t allowed to sell food we grew.”

Community engagement- KTT

Farmers shared their worries about the numerous rules and regulations they must comply with, especially with the impact of EU regulations on markets such as canola. While some farmers engage with community initiatives, these are often hobby or boutique small producers rather than large-scale operations.

It is necessary to work through barriers like child safety and governance to co-locate services and activities. CGSC Children and Families noted that while child safety is a significant concern, it’s manageable with the right strategies.

## IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

Council and Central Goldfields Food Network to help connect community groups together e.g. schools and aged care facilities

Strengthen community involvement in governance of local food systems and food security initiatives – identify and engage with community leaders

Strengthen coordination and networking among local food system and food security groups, initiatives, businesses and projects Clarify and simplify regulations about the sale of home / small-scale food growing / processing

Make public land available for edible gardening to support food security

Work with the Committee for Maryborough to better support local food businesses



“Committee For Maryborough is thinking of developing a business and events directory, maybe food could be a category”

Community engagement- KTT

# FOOD SECURITY

**ELEMENTS: AVAILABILITY, ACCESS, UTILISATION, AGENCY, SUSTAINABILITY, STABILITY**

Food security came up often during consultation, justifying its own section in these findings. Food relief providers asked for more data and mapping to better understand existing services and local food programs, with would help with improving coordination between services. Assessing and utilising community assets for food storage and distribution, and forming partnerships with local businesses, schools, and other community groups could also enhance these efforts. Establishing a governance structure to initiatives and ensure community involvement was also highlighted.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

There is a lack of coordination and information sharing in the food relief sector

Though stigma associated with accessing food relief services has reduced, more needs to be done to tackle this key issue

Community gardens experience severe challenges due to short-term funding



During one public consultation, someone suggested that the availability of food support services in Central Goldfields is not as robust as in other regional centres like Bendigo and Ballarat. Stigma around accessing community pantries and services remains a barrier, and the quality of local housing and rental stock limits people's capacity to cook healthy meals at home.

Another participant working the disability support sector noted that they see a continuous need for nutritious cooked meals in the community, with some community members requiring food assistance several times each week. They suggested a mobile food bus, or similar service that could provide hot meals to different parts of the Shire, could help to alleviate this need. Many of those needing support were living on the Disability Support Pension.

Feedback from the Maryborough Community House highlighted that if a person has nothing in their cupboard, trying to cook from scratch based on a recipe that requires buying everything can be very costly. They suggested that government support for new parents should include food assistance.

People can access food relief at the Community House three times before being referred to other services for longer-term support. The House collects minimal information to reduce the stigma of accessing relief and has storage cupboards for food donations from Bendigo Foodshare, reinforced by volunteers. The Mill House's 'Mill House Market' also provides a free market for local residents to access fresh produce and key grocery items.

Initiatives such as share tables of produce and Dunolly's Community Meals (which utilises produce from the share table) are popular but face funding shortages. There is a desire to make these initiatives sustainable in the long term.

A local disability service provider mentioned that some participants board and thus have limited capacity to cook at home, relying on ready-to-eat meals. The high cost of living and rent means people often use up their budget just to survive, leaving little for nutritious food.

## IDEAS FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

Investigate initiatives like Street Harvests, community gardens, and cooking classes as ways to support community food security

There is a need for more data and mapping to better coordinate food security services

Mapping should include storage and other facilities in various settings, i.e. creation of a community food infrastructure map

Establish more accessible locations for the Sharing Trolley initiative and expand its scope to allow local gardeners to drop off excess produce

Advocate for more funding for community gardens and grassroots initiatives





# 05 RECOMMENDATIONS

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Taking together all the information presented above, including analysis of the Central Goldfields current food system, policy review, and extensive community engagement, we have developed the following recommendations.

We have developed five main recommendations with interlinking actions that build on each other. Implementing all five recommendations would achieve the goals of the Food Systems Roadmap and the vision of the community, but each recommendation is intended to provide its own pathway to an improved local food system.



## RECOMMENDATION 1: ENHANCE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE TO ACHIEVE THE ROADMAP GOALS

### 1. SEEK FUNDING FOR A DEDICATED RESOURCE TO SUPPORT FOOD SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT AND ROADMAP IMPLEMENTATION

Having a central role to provide a touchpoint for different levels of community coordination, as well as implement recommendations, will assist in achieving the Roadmap. Presumably this role would also hold responsibility for policy following endorsement of the Roadmap, such as the development of a strategy or action plan.

#### ACTION

Seek funding for a dedicated resource.

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Allocate the food systems portfolio to a single role to ensure focused attention.



### 1.2. FORMALISE GOVERNANCE OF THE CGFN (CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS FOOD NETWORK) AND ENGAGE COMMUNITY LEADERS

Central Goldfields enjoys a significant strength in already having an established Food Network. Handing leadership to the community, broadening its profile, and resourcing the Network effectively will create a key partner for implementation of the Roadmap. Suggested activities for strengthening the Network include:

- Identify and engage local community leaders to maintain momentum and drive initiatives.
- Leverage relationships built from the CGFN Issues and Opportunities Paper and this Roadmap, which have united community members and leaders interested in ongoing discussions.
- Organise a kickoff forum that brings together stakeholders engaged throughout this process, such as community gardens, health organisations, CGFN, businesses, and farmers to collaborate and share ideas for achieving the Roadmap recommendations.
- Utilise existing community events, like the Goldfields Festival, to promote the Roadmap's agenda, focusing on healthy eating and local food systems.
- During public consultations, continue to engage the community through questions such as "What's your favourite thing to cook?" and specify the use of local ingredients to foster community involvement and interest in the Food Network.
- Recognise the challenges in engaging broadacre agriculture due to time constraints and instead, focus on connecting with smaller scale, low production volume farmers.

#### ACTION

Formalise governance of the CGFN and actively engage community leaders to ensure sustainability.

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Use the Roadmap to bring decentralised local leaders together more frequently

### 1.3. PROMOTE COLLABORATION AMONG LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES, INCLUDING THROUGH EXISTING PLATFORMS LIKE THE COMMITTEE OF MARYBOROUGH

Taken directly from consultation with food businesses, we recommend strengthening ways for businesses to discuss, collaborate, and support the local food system initiatives effectively. One avenue is to further connect local food businesses via the Committee of Maryborough to facilitate communication and collaboration.

#### ACTION

Work with Committee of Maryborough on ways to strengthen collaboration of local food businesses in supporting local food initiatives

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Bring food businesses into CGFN meetings.



## RECOMMENDATION 2: FOSTER SMALL-SCALE LOCAL GROWING TO SUPPORT A COMMUNITY- OWNED SHARED FOOD ENTERPRISE

A community-owned shared food enterprise, or cooperative, pulls together multiple aims of the roadmap and draws on strengths identified through engagement, while recognising resource constraints faced by Council. The initiative would encourage community engagement in local food systems, address food security concerns, and work within realistic parameters (e.g., likelihood of involvement by large scale industrial agriculture)

The steps towards achieving this recommendation are outlined below, involving: establishing a permanent community garden space, creating opportunities for small growers to sell produce, harnessing existing community food infrastructure, and community education (addressed in Recommendation 3). This initiative will help address challenges identified by addressing regulatory barriers, lowering costs, and leveraging existing partnerships.

### 2.1. ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE INCREASED HOME FOOD PRODUCTION

Develop and implement a comprehensive program to encourage and enable increased home food production. This program should focus on providing education, distributing home growing kits, sharing local knowledge, and involving children in gardening activities.

One example of how this could work is from Bendigo Foodshare, who run 'growing drives' encouraging home growers and schools and community gardens to grow staple crops for donations by giving out seed stock e.g. seed potatoes. The resulting produce and seeds can then stay in the community as ongoing resource. One example is the Axedale community garden, who have continued to grow stock from seed potatoes provided by Foodshare to support the community there.

### ACTIONS

- Launch workshops and online tutorials (linked to Recommendation 3) that teach residents how to start and maintain home gardens.
- Provide resources on sustainable gardening practices, seasonal planting guides, and tips for maximising small spaces. Resources and online webinars are already available through the Council-funded Melbourne metropolitan program, My Smart Garden.
- Distribute home growing kits to households, including seeds, soil, and basic tools needed to start a garden.
- Partner with local nurseries and gardening stores to offer discounted or free supplies.
- Create a community platform (online or physical) where experienced gardeners can share tips, advice, and success stories.
- Organise neighbourhood gardening clubs to facilitate knowledge exchange.
- Integrate gardening activities into school curriculums and after-school programs to teach children about food production and sustainability.
- Encourage families to involve children in home gardening by providing kid-friendly gardening kits and resources.

### INTERIM MEASURE

Pilot a small-scale version of the program to gauge interest and gather feedback. This pilot can include a limited distribution of home growing kits, educational workshops, and establishing informal communication between members (e.g., WhatsApp group). Use the lessons gained from this pilot to refine and expand the program across the entire region.

### 2.2. ESTABLISH A PERMANENT HOME FOR EXISTING COMMUNITY GARDENS THEN EXPAND THE MODEL

Community gardens will be a crucial partner in carrying forward the Roadmap and linking different sections of the community in a physical space. Secure tenancy will be essential prior to handing over any programming responsibilities to the group.

### ACTIONS

- Secure permanent locations for community gardens in Central Goldfields to provide stable and sustainable spaces for local food production, education, and community engagement.
- Increase the number of community gardens in additional areas such as Dunolly, Carisbrook, and Bealiba.
- Implement a system where garden workers receive a share of the produce, with excess going to share tables and eventually to cooperatives.
- Coordinate and schedule regular programs and workshops across Dunolly, Maryborough, and Talbot to share knowledge and skills.
- Replicate at other locations like Cal Gully Kindergarten.
- Integrate education initiatives (linked to Recommendation 3) into these programs to enhance community learning about gardening and sustainability.

### INTERIM MEASURES

Boost the visibility and accessibility of information about existing garden in Talbot, ensuring that community members are aware of and can engage with local gardening efforts.



### 2.3. CONDUCT A COMMUNITY FOOD ASSETS AUDIT TO IDENTIFY AND PUBLICLY LIST AVAILABLE RESOURCES

#### ACTION

Perform an audit of community food assets to identify and publicly list available resources. The results of the audit will identify spaces such as churches, empty buildings, and registered kitchens that may be used for community meals and food infrastructure. Steps include:

- Perform a thorough assessment of all available community food assets, including churches, empty buildings, and public land as potential sites that could be scoped for community food growing and other initiatives.
- Identify and document the availability and access to registered kitchens that can be used for community purposes.
- Partner with local organisations to activate identified spaces for community meals and other food-related activities.
- Identify public spaces for youth to begin explore ways to involve them in community food initiatives.
- Identify gaps in storage infrastructure for food and work on solutions to fill these gaps, ensuring that food can be stored safely and efficiently for community use.
- Identify public land suitable for growing food and partner with local organisations, such as Community House, to cultivate these spaces.
- Develop community gardens and other food-growing initiatives on this land to increase local food production and community engagement.

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Create and define 'community food assets and infrastructure' template with input from Community Gardens and CGFN.

### 2.4. CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A LOCAL SHARED FOOD COOPERATIVE

The steps above could run parallel to commissioning a feasibility study into establishing a local shared food cooperative. This could involve home growers selling excess produce, community gardens produce, and small-scale farmers.

One option discussed was the 'Grow a Row' concept. 'Grow a Row, Pick a Branch' is a program run by Bendigo Foodshare which has a simple objective - to involve the community in positive action towards building food security in our region, through the simple acts of growing, harvesting and sharing food.

It does this by encouraging backyard, community and school gardens, as well as local farms to grow an extra plant or row of plants, or to donate any extra produce they might have to Bendigo Foodshare to share with people who are less fortunate in the community. Some school food gardening programs in Greater Bendigo have been involved over several years, which helps teachers give an extra purpose to the school garden program by giving back to those less fortunate in the community. Some schools and groups in Central Goldfields have also been involved in these programs in the past.

One possible way to expand on this idea could be to ask farmers to donate excess produce, or to grow an extra paddock, but this option has not been previously explored. Feedback from farmers in consultation was that this would likely not be financially viable, and an inefficient way to. However, Grow a Row could be pitched to regenerative farmer groups with the possibility to opt-in once operations were scaled, slowly bringing in larger producers rather than trying to establish industrial capacity immediately.

#### ACTION

Initiate a feasibility study to explore the best model for a local food cooperative in Central Goldfields, focusing on partnerships, economic viability, and overcoming regulatory barriers.

#### STEPS TO IMPLEMENT

##### Scope potential partners

- Identify and engage potential partners, including home growers, community gardens, small-scale producers, and regenerative farmer groups.
- Encourage the use of existing garden spaces for local food production.
- Promote the expansion of existing initiatives like the Produce Box.
- Explore partnerships with the Talbot Farmer's Market, encouraging members to contribute volunteer time.

##### Investigate regulatory barriers

- Research and address regulatory barriers involved in selling versus donating food from community gardens.
- Ensure compliance with local health and safety regulations to facilitate smooth operation of the cooperative.

##### Establish the best model for economic viability

- Engage with organisations like the Prom Coast Collective to learn from their experiences and challenges in establishing a financially viable cooperative model
- Explore the feasibility of veggie box subscriptions to provide a steady income stream for the cooperative.
- Consider a social enterprise model to balance economic sustainability with community benefits.
- Develop a business plan outlining the cooperative's structure, revenue streams, and operational costs.



## RECOMMENDATION 3: COMMUNITY FOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS MEETING DIFFERENT NEEDS FOR DIFFERENT COHORTS

Education, including home gardening and nutrition, was identified through consultation as a priority for improving healthy eating in the Shire. All education should be approached with a positive rather than punitive tone, and specifying material benefits (to health and spending) will encourage participation.

### 3.1. TEACH PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR GROWING PRODUCE AT HOME (LINKED TO 2.1)

#### ACTION

Teach practical skills for growing produce at home, with local experts such as community gardeners conducting workshops covering various aspects of home gardening, including propagation, pest control, and natural gardening techniques.

- This will need to be accompanied by realistic guidance on necessary purchases (fertiliser, trellises, tools) and create sample budgets to illustrate initial setup costs and potential yields.
- Simultaneously, educate on the cost-saving benefits of home gardening, highlighting potential savings in fresh produce per year.

### 3.2. PROMOTE AND EDUCATE ON NUTRITION AND HEALTHY EATING

Acknowledging that behaviour change is difficult and a long-term endeavour, aim education at incremental progress and positive reinforcement, including the health benefits of a varied diet and the long-term value of healthy eating habits.

A priority cohort for targeted education should be new and/or young parents. This education could focus on prenatal nutrition, infant nutrition, and budget-friendly cooking for new mothers and families.

#### ACTION

Explore partnership opportunities with organisations like The Nest to deliver education programs targeting prenatal and infancy nutrition.

Cooking classes gradually introducing new ingredients and nutrition information would be an interactive and hands on way of engaging the community across multiple cohorts, though parents and workers may not have the time or energy to attend.

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Short, informal, online, and regularly scheduled drop-in sessions may be a better way to engage with time-poor members of the community.

### 3.3. PROVIDE SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES BASED AROUND FOOD FOR OLDER RESIDENTS

Community consultation and engagement indicated that direct education on e.g., nutrition information will be less effective for older adults, so tailored programs centring conviviality and including a meal will be a way to engage this cohort without the stigma of food relief or providing information that does not match food preferences or budgets.

#### ACTION

Work with existing community centres and hubs to design and deliver a program of social meals and gatherings to connect older residents, reduce social isolation, improve dietary quality and strengthen community.

### 3.4. INTEGRATE NUTRITION EDUCATION WITH HOME GARDENING TO PROMOTE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH

#### ACTION

Engage local experts such as community gardeners, for their expertise in promoting fruit and vegetable gardening, and utilise Community House resources to organise integrated growing and cooking classes.

- Promote sustainable gardening practices, such as self-watering systems, to ensure long-term viability and environmental benefits.

#### INTERIM MEASURE

Connect with perinatal health programs to include education on infant and young child nutrition.



## RECOMMENDATION 4: EXPLORE OPTIONS TO CREATE HEALTHY AND DIVERSE FOOD RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

### 4.1. MAP WHAT KINDS OF FOOD IS BEING PRODUCED LOCALLY TO UNDERSTAND LOCAL SUPPLY

#### ACTION

Develop a map and database of what kinds of food is produced within the municipality to understand local supply, as well as capacity to supply local markets.

### 4.2. PROMOTE EXISTING INITIATIVES, SUCH AS THE PRODUCE BOX, WHICH PROVIDE AN AFFORDABLE ALTERNATIVE TO MAJOR RETAILERS AND WORK TO EXPAND THEIR REACH

#### ACTION

Encourage uptake via promotional activity of The Produce Box as an affordable delivery service for fresh produce, and look at ways to expand this model.

### 4.3. WORK WITH LOCAL SUPERMARKETS TO PROMOTE THE SALE OF HEALTHY FOOD/ REDUCE SALE OF UNHEALTHY FOODS

#### ACTION

Engage with local supermarkets, including the IGA, on evidence-based ways they could promote healthy food purchases and disincentivise promotion of unhealthy foods.

### 4.4. INVESTIGATE WAYS TO ESTABLISH A LOCAL GREENGROCER OR DISCOUNT STORE

#### ACTION

Investigate ways that local institutions could support the establishment of a local greengrocer or discount store as more affordable options to purchase groceries.

### 4.5. CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY TO ESTABLISH A LOCAL SEASONAL MARKET

The desire for a revival of local farmers markets was a recurring theme throughout public engagement, however these markets need to be viable for businesses and offer seasonal produce at competitive prices. The previous Maryborough Farmers Market was highlighted as a successful model that could be revisited. Produce from the Shire that could be sold at the market potentially includes fruits, vegetables, preserves, honey, bread, and baked goods.

#### ACTION

Conduct a feasibility study looking at the commercial viability of a local seasonal market in Central Goldfields, from the perspective of different stakeholders including producers, distributors and potential consumers. This process should include mapping existing market options and understanding more about the previous Maryborough Farmers Market.





## RECOMMENDATION 5: ACTIVATE BROADER REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPING THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

The Flourish Framework provides an incentive and collaborative goals for regional projects outside of the Central Goldfields Shire. Throughout consultation, prohibitive costs and regulatory barriers to food production - or at least those perceived as prohibitive - mean players operate outside the system (we had heard of potentially unregistered meat processing, worm farming, and fruit tree production in the region) Sharing costs through partnerships with other Shires may bring some of these players in. We outline some big-picture ways to achieve this.

The insight and wisdom shared in DJAARA's Dhelkunya Dja (Healing Country) Plan should also guide regional partnership opportunities, acknowledging the critical role of sustainable food systems in meeting the goals and aspirations by the Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples to care for Country.

### 5.1. REDUCE THE PERCEPTION THAT BARRIERS ARE PROHIBITIVE

#### ACTION

Offer support services to help food producers understand and meet regulatory requirements, such as help and assistance navigating bureaucracy.

### 5.2. REDUCE ACTUAL COSTS AND TIME INVOLVED BY ENCOURAGING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

#### ACTION

Encourage collaboration to obtaining licenses and permits that share the load, including reaching out to organisations in Ballarat and Bendigo.

### 5.3. REDUCE ACTUAL BARRIERS THROUGH POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

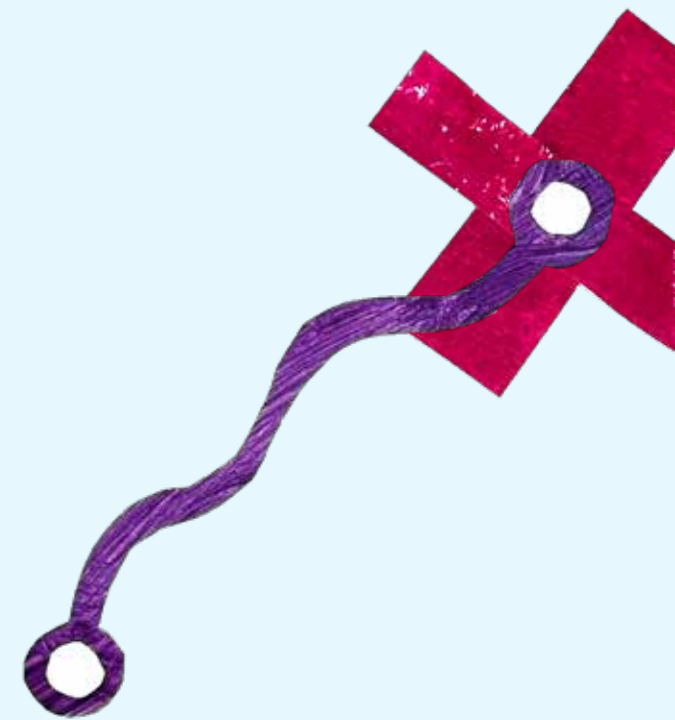
#### ACTION

Advocate for policy and legislative changes that reduce actual regulatory barriers, including working with State policymakers to streamline processes and reduce the financial and time burdens associated with food production regulations.





# 06 WHERE TO FROM HERE?



While the challenges facing the Central Goldfields food system are real, the breadth of the existing work, expertise, and passion evident in the Roadmap consultations demonstrate the community's significant strengths and willingness to support change. There is a clear appetite and energy to make a difference in this space, and many people are already working towards the community's vision for a healthy, and equitable food system.

This Roadmap highlights opportunities in three key areas: collaboration, coordination, and advocacy.

The complexity of the local food system illustrates the need for collaborative action. The choices we make all contribute to growing the healthy, social, and equitable food system we want to see in the region. While some may have a more direct role to play than others, we will need to work together to achieve meaningful change.

The recommendations outlined in Section 5 highlight some key pathways and opportunities to begin this process. In recognition of the limited resources available for action in this space, they are designed to be flexible, able to be implemented individually or in combination, and in whichever sequence they can be resourced.

Many of the early stages of this work are already happening in the community - we are by no means starting from scratch. Better coordination of these efforts will help make the most of existing work and resources, reduce the load on individual stakeholders, and provide better outcomes for the community.

The Central Goldfields Food Network is one key forum for action moving forward. Although in its early stages, its role as a point of connection and coordination will be crucial as a basis for further work. The Food Network will be the leading forum to identify and prioritise Roadmap recommendations.

Finally, achieving the level of change necessary to address community needs will require ongoing advocacy for greater resources. This provides another incentive to increase coordination between partners, as the more united the community can be in advocating to government and other funders, the greater the likelihood of success.

This document provides an outline of the path forward- it is up to all partners in the community to work towards it together.



# A APPENDIX



## CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS POLICY CONTEXT

As the tier of government closest to the community, local government has a vitally important role to play in community health, wellbeing, and food security. To capture the Central Goldfields policy context relating to food systems, we have drawn on two tools: the Australian Local Food System Policy Database and the Local Food – EPI+ self-assessment tool .

### THERE ARE SEVERAL KEY POLICIES RELEVANT TO FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS:

**CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS  
CLIMATE ACTION PLAN  
2022-2030**

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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY 2020-2025**

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**TOURISM AND EVENTS  
STRATEGY 2020-2025**

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**WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**



The boxes below highlight existing goals, priorities, and opportunities identified in the above policies.

### GOALS AND OPPORTUNITIES RELEVANT TO FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

**Goals: 'Our food systems are equitable, healthy and sustainable', 'Our community composts and grows its own food' and 'Our land use industries are adaptive, innovative and sustainable'. Opportunities contained in the Climate Action Plan include:**

- Seek funding to deliver a community food festival or forum and support the creation of a local food coalition in partnership with Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners, businesses, community organisations and individuals.
- Introduce the State Government legislated four waste stream system to expand existing waste and recycling collection in the Shire (general waste, food and garden organics, co-mingled recycling, glass recycling).
- Increase promotion of Council's FOGO (food organics garden organics) kerbside collection.
- Edible food project identifying opportunities to transform unused land into community gardens/planter boxes/fruit trees.

### OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO FOOD SYSTEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Prepare an investment strategy for the food manufacturing industry, targeting businesses to establish in Maryborough to create a regional food cluster.
- The potential to grow the agriculture industry by improving supply chains, providing greater water security and stability of supply and harnessing value-add opportunities such as downstream processing, food manufacturing and diversified farming activities.
- Grow the intensive agricultural and horticultural industry. Undertake an assessment for the expansion of intensive agricultural and horticultural uses in the Shire, such as hydroponics. This should consider availability of water, power, gas and other services.
- Support agricultural activities in the Shire, particularly in addressing supply chain inefficiencies which may exist (e.g. road, transport infrastructure), as well as promoting market opportunities locally (e.g. supermarkets wholesalers, farmers markets), interstate and internationally.

### TOURISM AND EVENTS STRATEGY 2020-2025 FOOD SYSTEMS RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop a signature food and wine event (Villages on Show Festival) in conjunction with the other Goldfields Villages (as identified in the Goldfields Villages DMP). This could be a paddock-to-plate style long lunch developed in conjunction with Talbot Provedore and/or Talbot Farmers Market.
- Assisting the Talbot Farmers Market in the creation of aligned one off events or short events series such as a Winter in July Market, moonlight cinema (which could include local produce food offering from the Talbot Provedore), etc.
- Strengthen and facilitate diversification for the agribusiness and food processing sectors.
- Identify infrastructure upgrades to improve the visitor experience at events such as the Talbot Farmers Market.
- Identifying core products and narratives across arts and culture, history and heritage and food and wine that should be enhanced and promoted as part of the Goldfields Way Touring Concept is a key opportunity for Central Goldfields Shire.

- Investigate development of a Provedore Trail through Talbot, Maryborough and Dunolly which connects and promotes existing key operators and leverages from the recent designation of Bendigo as a UNESCO Creative City (and region) of Gastronomy.



### WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE WASTE COMPONENT OF THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

- Implement waste reduction strategies throughout Council operations (e.g. recycling and FOGO increased in Council offices and depots, compost from transfer stations used in Council garden maintenance, increased public place recycling bins).
- Proactively advocate and demonstrate support for legislation, policies, processes and practices that encourage increased waste reduction via the waste hierarchy and the circular economy (e.g. product stewardship, container deposit legislation).

### LOCAL FOOD EPI+ STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### Strengths:

- Strong 'collaboration between Council departments, robust procedures to identify and manage conflicts of interest, and active participation in relevant networks in efforts to create healthy, equitable and environmentally sustainable food systems, improve population nutrition and prevent diet-related diseases'.
- 'Support for a thriving, diverse and resilient agricultural sector where sustainable land management practices ensure natural resources are protected and enhanced, and sustainable farming is promoted'
- Accessibility of free drinking water
- Coordinated support for community initiatives, including the Food Systems Network
- The 'INFANT' program to support breastfeeding and healthy eating in first time parents.

#### Priority recommendations for improvements identified in the Local Food EPI+:

- Introduction of overarching goals for creating and maintaining healthy, equitable and environmentally sustainable food systems, improving population nutrition, and preventing diet-related diseases.
- Increase funding to support community-led initiatives and allocate ongoing budget to lead initiatives to support efforts for creating healthy, equitable and environmentally sustainable food systems, improving population nutrition, and preventing diet-related diseases.
- Develop and adopt specific targets for the proportion of food and beverage procured by Council (across all relevant operations) that is healthy and environmentally.
- Develop and implement programs that support provision of simple nutrition-related information at point of purchase.

<sup>5</sup> The Australian Local Food System Policy Database is a collection of policies from New South Wales (NSW) and Victorian local governments that relate to healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems, and is searchable by Council name and keyword search for relevant policy text.

The Local Food Systems Policy Index (Local food EPI+) self-assessment tool is funded by VicHealth and "designed to benchmark local governments on their implementation of policies to improve the healthiness, equitable and environmental sustainability of food systems to increase accountability and stimulate action".

# B APPENDIX

## YOUR FAVOURITE MEALS

AT PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS,  
WE ASKED PEOPLE IN THE  
SHIRE ABOUT THEIR FAVOURITE  
THINGS TO EAT.



MASHED SWEET POTATO  
WITH BUTTER



STRAWBERRIES



PUMPKIN RISOTTO (YUM!)



PUMPKIN SOUP, COOKED WITH  
RISOTTO RICE AND CHICKEN STOCK



BANANA IN PORRIDGE



TOMATO SOUP WITH OUR OWN  
(HOMEGROWN) TOMATOES



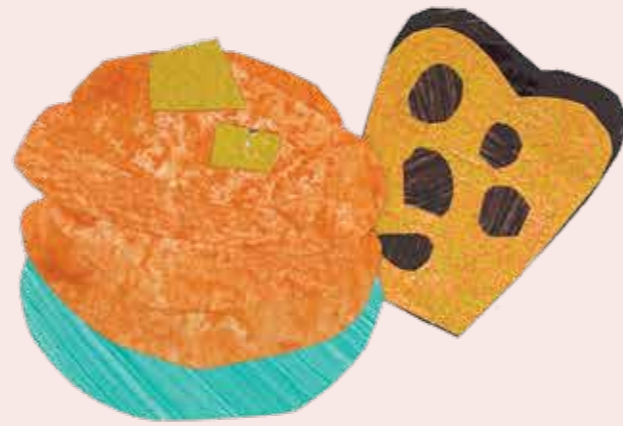
(STEWED) PLUMS IN PORRIDGE



COOKIES



**CHARGRILLED BROCCOLI  
SEASONED WITH LEMON JUICE,  
CAPERS, FETA / HALLOUMI, DILL**



**RAISIN BREAD  
AND PANCAKES**



**CHICKEN NUGGETS WITH  
SWEET & SOUR SAUCE**



**PORK WRAPPED SAUSAGE  
WITH PROSCIUTTO  
AND BAKED VEGGIES**



**STEAK, MASHED POTATO,  
BROCCOLI BAKED WITH MUSHROOMS,  
SAUTEED POTATO**



**APRICOT CHICKEN AND  
GOLDEN SYRUP DUMPLINGS  
FOR DESSERT**



**SUSTAIN** the Australian  
food network

