

# Our Local Food System

## Mount Barker Workshop report - December 2021



This project is led by the following organisations:



### First Nations Acknowledgement

Mount Barker District Council acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land encompassing the Council district and surrounding region, including the Peramangk and Kaurna Nations.

## **Project Background**

In 2020, an emerging group called the Food Systems Network was successful in obtaining a grant from the Local Government Associations Research and Development Scheme for a project called **Local government: Enabling resilient food systems in South Australia.**

The project aims to engage local government, communities and stakeholders to build the resilience of local food systems in the face of climate change risks.

A consultancy team, Ethical Fields in association with Sustain and Collaborative Futures, were successful in their tender to work with us on the project.

One of the key goals is to offer a guide for local governments to understand their role in enabling local food systems. All the resources developed will contribute to building the capacity of local government staff, elected members and communities to value local food systems, remove barriers and support climate-resilient initiatives.

To develop this guide, and to help each Council with future strategy, local workshops are being held for people to join us to explore what a healthy and sustainable food system looks like. How can it drive climate change action? How can it support local jobs? How can it reduce food waste? And, how can it connect us as diverse communities?



## What is a local food system?

A local food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of an area. It incorporates everything that gets our food from paddock to plate.

Figure 1 shows the components of a food system, highlighted in the Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030.



*Figure 1 – food system components*

### **Local context**

The Mount Barker district is changing very quickly with rapid population growth introducing new residents, businesses and visitors to the region, bringing new challenges and opportunities into focus. Globally there has been significant change with social and political disruption and conflict, trade disputes and escalation of the climate and environmental crises. There are many issues and concerns within our community that remain unresolved and require significantly more attention and effort, including:

- the changing climate and environmental pressures
- increasing waste including the high percentage of food waste
- integration and consideration of nature in development and agriculture
- social inclusion and access to affordable, nutritious food for some in the community
- limited local employment options and the high proportion of young people that leave the district after graduating from high school and university
- the rising cost of living.

Many of these issues impact, and are impacted by the food system. Further, climate shocks and stressors such as bushfires and COVID-19 have shown us the need to strengthen the resilience of our local food

system and reduce dependence on more distant sources of food and ensuring access to affordable, nutritious food for all.

### **Agriculture and the economy**

In 2015-16, the total value of agricultural output in the Mount Barker District was \$70m with livestock (35%), vegetables (33%) and 'other fruit' (14%) the largest commodities (ABS, 2015-2016). The agriculture sector is losing jobs but there is potential to support farming through supporting access to local markets, sector education and access to new products and services as well as value adding and diversification through tourism and farm gate sales.

### **Waste**

Most Adelaide councils now provide food waste recycling, but participation/diversion remains low. Food waste typically comprises a significant proportion of the residual bin contents (approx. 50%) and therefore remains the largest opportunity to reduce waste landfill through diversion to the organics stream for recycling. Global food waste, according to Oz Harvest, is responsible for approximately 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Uneaten food disposed of in the general waste system is estimated at 7% (based on bin audits at other Councils).

### **Food security**

The proportion of food insecure Australians seeking food relief at least once a week throughout COVID has more than doubled since 2019 from 15% to 31% (Foodbank Hunger Report 2020). Three in ten Australians experiencing food insecurity had not gone hungry before the pandemic.

These are all reasons why this conversation is so important and timely.



### **Workshop content**

Mount Barker was the second of four local councils to host an 'Our Local Food Systems' workshop as part of the project, following the first workshop at Onkaparinga Council. The workshop was attended by 35 people from the community and supported by the project consultants and staff from participating

Councils and Green Adelaide. The workshop included ‘visioning’, ‘back-casting’ and ‘rich picture’ activities designed to inform strategies and actions to support the food systems of the district. Workshops have since been held at Alexandrina and Marion Councils. Note that the content of the workshop as presented in the visioning, back-casting and rich picture exercises does not necessarily reflect the views or policy positions of Council, but rather is a reflection of community views that it would like to see considered by Council and others.

### **Visioning – What we heard was important?**

The visioning activity invited participants to tell us their vision for food systems in the region. Key themes were then grouped and scored according to priority. The top 4 priority areas that emerged were:

- Land use planning
- Food Culture
- Community education and engagement
- Circular economy – reducing waste

Figure 2 depicts the key words and themes emerging from the visioning activity in a word cloud. All the themes from this activity and the key points raised, are listed in Appendix 1.



*Figure 2 – Mount Barker food systems word cloud*

### **Back casting – what actions could we take?**

Back casting is the process of working backwards from the future to reach your identified desirable outcome rather than forwards from the future. When working from the present, people are often blinded by their present difficulties and limitations. However, working backwards from the future produces a huge spectrum of options people had not previously thought about. The themes from the visioning exercise – Land Use Planning, Food Culture, Community Education and Engagement and Circular Economy/reducing waste - were used as the topics for back-casting with the results set in the diagrams below.

# Community Education and Engagement



# Landuse Planning



## Food Culture



## Reducing waste/circular economy



### Rich Picture

Rich picture mapping is a creative way to explore and define a situation or place through diagrams, drawings and simple text to create a mental model. At the workshop, 4 groups created rich pictures aligning with key themes of the Community Plan 2020-2035 including Nature Connection and Regenerative Agriculture, Climate Action, Jobs in Local Food Systems and Community health, Connection and Wellbeing.

Text and key messages from the rich picture activity are listed in appendix 2. Artist, Deb Twining, was engaged to work with participants in the creative activity and after the workshop Deb produced an impression of the key themes and messages from the day, reimagined under the themes of the visioning exercise.



Figure 3 – Sustainable Food Systems – rich picture art work by Deb Twining

**Summary of workshop outcomes**

**Roles and Responsibilities**

It was clear from the workshop that there is a role for everyone to play in building a healthy and sustainable food system in the Mount Barker region; from individuals as consumers, home gardeners, and as community group members to special interest groups, food sector businesses and advocacy groups, education institutions and Council.

**Council role**

Whilst there is much to do to support local food systems, there are a number of existing policies and actions of Council that already support the type of local food system that was envisaged through this workshop. These include:

- Support for the Adelaide Hills Farmers Market
- Roadside verge policy
- Community Gardens policy and support for community gardens
- Procurement policy that encourages local food purchasing



- Township planning and working with local communities to incorporate consideration of food, for example in main street improvements and development and management of open space.
- Planning policy aimed at supporting rural industries, food production and associated uses
- Reuse of wastewater for local food production
- Food safety regulation and enforcement
- Green and food waste programs, e.g. the green bin kerbside program, kitchen caddies and Gawler street food waste trial
- Support for local food initiatives for economic development

At the conclusion of this project, a guide will be developed to support Local Government to understand their role in enabling local food systems.

### **Individual and Community role**

Individuals can become a food citizen where they consciously make decisions about what and where they eat and become active in food system activities.

Community groups and organisations can help to create resilient local food systems by undertaking food system activities such as community gardens, cooking programs, food education and other opportunities mentioned in our key vision themes.

There are already many projects and actions that occur throughout the district and region that align with the visions, themes and actions discussed at the workshop. A key next step is to begin to raise awareness of these projects through mapping and the collation of this information. This will be an opportunity to take stock, celebrate the existing work and further identify potential opportunities to strengthen the local food system.

### **Summary and Next steps**

The Our Local Food Systems workshop series was designed as a first step to better understand the local food system, to start the process of mapping our food systems and to begin to develop potential strategies, actions and communities of interest that can help realise the vision of a more sustainable, resilient and health-supporting food system. The conversation therefore has really only just begun and the steering group will be working through potential further collaboration, new partnerships and learning through the end of 2021 and into 2022. Workshop participants will be notified of future developments and ways to participate and contribute further.

## Appendix 1 – Visioning activity – themes and key points

Vision theme	Key points:
<b>Biodiversity (10 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecosystem services from native environment</li> <li>• Native biodiversity for healthy farms</li> </ul>
<b>Soil health and regeneration (17 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regenerative farming systems               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holistic</li> <li>- Biodynamic</li> <li>- Carbon storage</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Non synthetic- organic food</li> <li>• Soil health and regeneration</li> <li>• Soil health / biodiversity</li> <li>• Soil understanding and appreciation</li> </ul>
<b>Food security (17 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community supported gardens</li> <li>• Equity of food access</li> <li>• Edible landscapes</li> <li>• Community gardens accessible to all</li> <li>• Everyone having access to affordable and nutritional food</li> <li>• Grow free stalls/swap</li> <li>• Pop up food market/stalls</li> <li>• Stored resources produce</li> <li>• Shops to donate food to food rescue organisations</li> <li>• Pubs/hotels cooking excess food to donate and redistribute</li> </ul>
<b>Community food democracies (10 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food ethics – no one goes without food</li> <li>• Community supported agriculture</li> <li>• Support for farmers market shops</li> <li>• Farmers markets are central to food consumerism</li> </ul>
<b>Health (9 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food is our health – the way food is grown is our health</li> <li>• Remembering lost practices of food and health</li> </ul>
<b>Networks and platforms (10 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole food system across all social forms</li> <li>• Local food collectives / co-ops</li> <li>• Buy-in from businesses around green actions/initiatives, e.g. green caffeine</li> <li>• Facilitate purpose focussed groups and activities</li> <li>• We need connections and communications</li> <li>• Endorsement and encouragement for green businesses, e.g. from Council</li> <li>• Sharing recycling systems</li> <li>• Resource sharing networks – food, land, tools, labour</li> <li>• Sustainability ratings system for customers to easily know how to support businesses prioritising sustainability/community</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping Council share vision of residents</li> </ul>
<b>Community education and engagement (24 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate workshops</li> <li>• Young people spending time working in agriculture</li> <li>• Programs at schools on food growing at household level</li> <li>• Small scale food production (household level) knowledge and resources</li> <li>• Get involved – learn through experience</li> <li>• Education about importance of food production – all levels, local and global</li> <li>• Informed public about food systems</li> <li>• A green-corps type team to maintain public food systems</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Appreciation of local food heritage and substance</li> </ul>
<b>Food cultures including decolonisation (25 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value food</li> <li>• Food culture and seasonality</li> <li>• Seasonal and local</li> <li>• Local markets</li> <li>• Food security and accessibility to be front of mind, apolitical and not trade driven</li> <li>• Locally produced, suitable food</li> <li>• Indigenous food, indigenous food sovereignty</li> <li>• Native food sources</li> <li>• Integration – how we connect with the arts, social, economics</li> </ul>
<b>Multi actor leadership and governance (10 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food systems officer/coordinator (staff/investment)</li> <li>• Councillor advocates/ambassadors for regenerative food</li> <li>• Food Policy Council</li> <li>• Stakeholders having representation input into food policy</li> <li>• Ripple effect – start small, ripple out</li> <li>• One conversation at a time</li> <li>• Bottom/ground up</li> <li>• Community culture if vision and contribution )bottom-up)</li> </ul>
<b>Circular economy/reducing waste (18 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce waste</li> <li>• Reduce packaging</li> <li>• Compostable packaging</li> <li>• Waste apathy</li> <li>• Compost toilets</li> <li>• Composting toilets – reconnect the nutrient cycle</li> </ul>
<b>Land use planning (20 votes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land for food and biodiversity</li> <li>• Sourcing/using land for food and biodiversity</li> <li>• Gardens on nature strips</li> <li>• Preservation of fertile farmland</li> <li>• Urban design</li> <li>• Fruit trees in new developments</li> </ul>

- Local government open and supportive development processes (open conversations – person in the role is important)
- Retaining land for growing
- Edible landscapes on public land
- Landuse change and loss of good soils
- Swapping food excess
- More focus on community gardens
- Community gardens
- Planning regulations allocated minimum food production areas
- Embed a fruit tree quota in new developments
- Green spaces
- Sustainable buildings are mainstream and easy to build

## Appendix 2 – the ‘Rich Picture’

<b>Nature connection and regenerative agriculture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeds of a better future</li> <li>• Collective action – Hills Biodiversity/ Landscape board/BioR/Council/Trees for Life/ Goolwa to Wellington LAP</li> <li>• Productivity in nature helps productivity in food systems</li> <li>• Farmers talking to farmers</li> <li>• Goal to have 30% native vegetation across the region</li> <li>• Biodiversity hotspot</li> <li>• Young people disconnected with nature</li> <li>• Vegetation on roadsides</li> </ul>
<b>Climate action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperature falling not rising</li> <li>• Housing – not great currently – need to be better in the future</li> <li>• Community gardens and regenerative farming</li> <li>• Revegetation and canopy cover. Connecting biodiversity with farming</li> <li>• Yarning and learning – community conversations</li> <li>• Human centred transport systems that are low emissions (fewer cars)</li> <li>• Communities coming together for a shared cause – hands reaching out and connecting – festival of climate action</li> <li>• Using the wisdom and knowledge of First Nations people</li> <li>• Thinking globally, acting locally</li> </ul>
<b>Jobs in local food systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through experience / sharing workload</li> <li>• Coffee processing</li> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Consumer (choices/pressure)</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Uber eats</li> <li>• Family business</li> <li>• Neighbourhood</li> <li>• Primary production / Selling online / cooking / markets /Market food box</li> </ul>
<b>Community health, connection and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adelaide hills farmers market</li> <li>• Time poor vs healthy communities</li> <li>• Connecting with producer / sharing food connecting / fresh quality local food /</li> <li>• Mount barker community centre food pantry / excess produce</li> <li>• Learning and talking about food systems / a talk of food matters</li> <li>• Supporting local producers</li> <li>• School kitchen gardens – kids learning, growing and cooking and educating parents</li> <li>• Farms generate work, employ young people, basic skills, farm machinery creates work for mechanics. All contributes to people earning a living, contributes to individual and community wellbeing</li> <li>• Supporting local producers, e.g. Fleurieu milk</li> <li>• Mount Barker food bowl includes diverse produce, eg kale, potatoes, corn apples, olives, etc. However for optimal nutrition perhaps we also need nutrients from food that cannot be grown here, eg tropical</li> <li>• People meeting together at the local café, getting together, sharing ideas/information, connecting</li> <li>• Millers Corner ecologically sustainable and intergenerational living / community at the centre/ natural materials and sustainable design</li> </ul>

- Community centre and library relocated / food pantry helping people in need / library holding workshops eg beekeeping, food fermentation / sharing knowledge, resources and centralised community hub
- Community market – a shared meeting place – sharing fresh, quality food e.g. Adelaide Hills farmers market
- Shared kitchens in other parts of the world. Can produce food. Energy efficient – one large oven heated for communal bread making. Shared roles – start fire and keep it going
- People come to live in Mount Barker for beautiful environment but fence themselves in to small, individual blocks disconnected from the place they came from. Look out at nature rather than be in it.
- People don't know me even though we've been here for many years. People always in a hurry leaving Mount Barker for work elsewhere. We connect more with Strath for business because local businesses cater more for lifestyle blocks needs, not productive olive grove
- Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden – school program teaching children how to grow and cook food.
- Fast food shops coming to Mount Barker – threat to local producers. Time poor people will opt for fast food. However for healthy people, healthy communities we need people to support and opt for local food
- Flow of information between individuals and organisations (big silos) sharing and recognising the worth of each other, what they can each bring to the common cause, eg “connected communities” and “resilient food systems”