



Food Systems

Wodonga Food Security Scan

May 2014

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Executive Summary

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” (Food and Agriculture Organization, World Summit on Food Security 2009)

Food security is an important issue for local governments to consider. As such the Victorian Local Governance Association developed the Municipal Food Security Scan; a tool for assessing food security in local government areas. From June-December 2013, City of Wodonga (COW) and Gateway Community Health (GCH) used this tool to gather food security data for Wodonga.

COW and GCH had already established a Healthy Together Wodonga team - one of 14 Healthy Together Communities created across Victoria as part of Healthy Food Connect and the Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise (VHEE). The VHEE encompasses a range of initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of Victorians through food.

To undertake the food security scan, HTW formed a project reference group and appointed a project officer. During a four month period the project officer consulted over 50 stakeholders and reviewed some 50 reports to obtain the requisite raw data for the scan. This information was summarised in an issues and recommendations paper, which was discussed and refined during two stakeholder meetings.

The issues highlighted by Wodonga's Food Security Scan fell into five themes; health and wellbeing, local food economy, physical access, economic access and COW's policy environment.

The overarching **vision** developed over the course of the project was:

That all residents will eat fresh, locally produced food, particularly vegetables and fruit, to make them healthy, nurture the landscape and invigorate the local economy.

The main **Health and Wellbeing** issues in relation to food security include the high percentage of overweight and obese residents in Wodonga, high prevalence of type 2 diabetes, low breast-feeding rates, low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption, mismatch between individuals' real and perceived health status and unhealthy food choices and/or suboptimal cooking skills of some residents.

Priority recommendations to address these issues are to:

- Update, reprint and distribute the 'Food for \$50' brochure, to encourage increased rates of fresh vegetable and fruit consumption and promote balanced meals.
- Encourage community centres, neighbourhood houses, church and community groups to showcase healthy, affordable and easy recipes to all participants.
- Consider social marketing strategies to improve rates of vegetable consumption.
- Introduce/continue the Healthy Together Wodonga achievement program in schools and preschools.
- Introduce the Healthy Eating and Food Literacy program in secondary schools.
- Develop a Welcome Kit to provide new culturally and linguistically diverse residents with better information and access to healthy food.

The theme of the **local food economy** includes issues such as lack of data on volumes and types of food produced and manufactured in Wodonga, tracts of arable land lying fallow, regulatory and financial barriers facing local producers, retail dominance of supermarkets and their reluctance to source or promote local food, suboptimal demand for local food and threats to future food supplies (such as climate change and peak oil). Priority recommendations to address these issues are to:

- Establish a consortium with a focus on growing the local food economy.
- Lobby (at state and federal level) for initiatives that encourage consumers to purchase and preference local produce.
- Advocate for a food co-op within Wodonga's CBA and/or encourage new fresh food enterprises e.g. fruit barrows, farm gate sales.
- Encourage more local producers to sell their produce at the Hume Murray Farmers Market.
- Develop a working group to establish a landlinks/landshare 'match-making' service to increase supply of locally grown food.

The theme of **physical access** to food includes limited use of public transport by Wodonga residents, absence of a bus route to the Whitebox Rise supermarket, limited use of cycling or walking for grocery-shopping purposes, existence of two 'food deserts', inconvenient location of Wodonga's largest fruit and vegetable retailer, high ratio of takeaway outlets to supermarkets and greengrocers (3:1), limited success in engaging takeaway stores to provide healthier options, unhealthy food provision at workplaces, and multiple barriers to productive backyard gardening. Priority recommendations to address these issues are to:

- Provide training on the Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (F-SPUD) Framework for Council planners through a Food Systems Forum, with potential to develop an F-SPUD working group.
- Introduce a behaviour change program to encourage greater use of public and non-motorised transport and discourage use of cars.
- Introduce a 'reward program' that will improve healthy food options provided by take-away outlets.
- Provide the Healthy Catering Policy Template and other tools/kits to workplaces, food outlets etc.
- Work with convenience stores to encourage them to offer fresh produce.
- Advocate for the introduction of selected streetscape measures from the F-SPUD framework.
- Investigate levels of productive gardening skills amongst Wodonga residents (as such data may help attract funding for programs to build productive gardening skills).
- Investigate the feasibility of implementing the 'Every home a farm' project, to increase access to home grown fruit and vegetables.
- Advocate that North East Water review watering restrictions on productive garden beds.
- Investigate water donating i.e. large commercial building capturing rain water to support community and home vegetable gardens.

The theme of **economic access** to food includes the rising numbers of residents obtaining emergency food relief, outdated data on the incidence of food insecurity in Wodonga, cost of healthy food, lack of written information about emergency food relief options, food waste by residents and supermarkets and the somewhat prohibitive cost of home delivery by Wodonga's largest fruit and vegetable retailer (Arnolds). Priority recommendations to address these issues are to:

- Support FoodShare's accredited training program for emergency food recipients.
- Obtain the most recent food insecurity data set from Victorian Government.
- Improve quality of data being gathered by local emergency relief agencies.
- Develop an emergency food relief booklet.

It is worth noting that some of the recommendations specified for one particular theme may impact positively on other themes. For example, developing a food co-op to stimulate the local food economy would also see improved access to healthy food and increased fruit and vegetable consumption, hence impacting positively on health and well-being also.

Finally, food security in relation to the above themes is inconsistently and/or under-referenced in the **COW policy environment**, including the Wodonga Council Plan, the Municipal Strategic Statement and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan. In addition, plans to develop a COW Food Security Strategic Plan were placed on hold due to resourcing issues. The priority recommendation to address these issues is to:

- Review existing COW policies to determine the adequacy of their references to food security and advocate for appropriate inclusions.

Conclusion

Food security in Wodonga is a broad and complex issue that defies detailed description in a single document. This report attempts to outline the main issues and recommendations of the local food systems, as evident at this point in time. It is a working document open to review and update; a reference tool for the many groups, organisations and COW departments committed to improving the region's food security.

Introduction

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is a peak body for local governments, councillors and community leaders to build their capacity to work together for progressive social change. One of the VLGA's key goals has been to assist communities to improve local area food security and local food systems. In doing so they developed the Municipal Food Security Scan; a tool to improve understanding of local food security issues that would facilitate a shared understanding of food systems in particular locales. In July 2013, Gateway Community Health in conjunction with City of Wodonga commenced this process.

Food security is an important issue for local governments to consider. It is an essential component of whole of population support for physical and mental health and wellbeing. 'Local government authorities have a responsibility to ensure that their communities are able to function effectively and to create an environment in which people not only survive but thrive' (VicHealth 2005).

There are various definitions of food security and many approaches to addressing food related issues in our communities. A definition used by VicHealth and the Albury-Wodonga Regional Food Alliance (AWRFA) is as follows:

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Although this definition has currency, a recent Canadian document noted many groups have added to such definitions, introducing concepts of local self-reliance, protection of human dignity in food access, the need for food system reform, environmental sustainability, cultural considerations, and the importance of engaging communities in tackling these issues (Evaluating Outcomes of Community Food Actions: A Guide, 2012). Many of these concepts were raised and incorporated in Wodonga's Municipal Food Security Scan.

Indeed the vision developed for Wodonga region's food system reflects this broader interpretation of food security:

Our vision is that all Wodonga residents will eat fresh, locally produced food, particularly vegetables and fruit, to make them healthy, nurture the landscape and invigorate the local economy.

This vision is also consistent with the ideals of the Healthy Food Connect model (an initiative of the Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise), developed to address local food system change across Victoria, particularly in 14 locally-led Healthy Together Communities. Healthy Together Wodonga (HTW) is one such Community and comprises a team of seven staff from COW and Gateway Community Health who are rolling out the Healthy Food Connect model over a three year period.

Healthy Food Connect (HFC) aims to:

- Create supportive environments to make healthy food choices the easy choices
- Improve access to a healthy food supply across all community groups and organisations (including vulnerable population groups)
- Influence policy and develop programs to strengthen community action

All HFC initiatives will consider ways to increase healthy food access (and decrease unhealthy food access) and have a priority focus on fruit and vegetables (Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource, 2014).

Acronyms

AWRFA	Albury-Wodonga Regional Food Alliance
CBA	Central Business Area
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COW	City of Wodonga (i.e. council)
F-SPUD	Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design
HEFL	Healthy Eating and Food Literacy (secondary school program)
HMFM	Hume Murray Farmers Market
HTW	Healthy Together Wodonga (comprising team of approximately eight staff from City of Wodonga and Gateway Community Health)
LGA	Local Government Areas
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
MSS	Municipal Strategic Statement
NEC	National Environment Centre
SEIFA	Socio-economic indexes for areas
VHFB	Victorian Healthy Food Basket
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association

City of Wodonga

Wodonga is located in North East Victoria, strategically placed between Melbourne and Sydney on the Hume Highway. It is situated on the Murray River with surrounding hills, agricultural valleys and historic towns. Wodonga has close ties to Albury, its 'twin' city just over the border in NSW.

The city's residential base is more than 37,000 but services a total population of 170,000. Wodonga is one of Victoria's fastest growing provincial cities. The age group forecast to have the largest proportional increase is 75-79 year olds. Yet the city also has a young population and is anticipated to experience growth in the number of people aged up to 25 years.

Wodonga consists of 13 centres and continues to experience significant growth, particularly in residential developments in the Leneva Valley and Baranduda. These developments are set in a semi-rural environment, surrounded by foothills and mountains.

As an urban municipality, agriculture has not been the major source of economic output for Wodonga. The direction set by the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation many years ago was that Wodonga be developed for urban growth, not farming. Indeed the draft Hume Regional Growth Plan states: 'In the Upper Hume sub-region, major urban growth and development will be focused in Wodonga'.). It was anticipated that city-dwellers would be attracted to Wodonga for the lifestyle, hence an emphasis on lower density rather than higher density developments (although there is now a pocket of higher density development in Whitebox Rise).

Wodonga comprises a total area of 433 square km or 43,330 hectares. Approximately 59% of this is classified as 'productive', with the vast majority rainfed pasture (i.e. predominantly dairy and beef cattle). Wodonga has 400 rural farming and non-farming (lifestyle) properties which range in size from under a hectare to over 1265 ha. Wodonga's soil quality is not considered particularly high, with the exception of richer soils on the flood plains of the Kiewa and Murray Rivers.

City of Wodonga owns 3,500 hectares of environmental land, 2,500 hectares of which is native vegetation, habitat corridors and hillsides.

Methodology

This project was conducted using the approach described in the VLGA Municipal Food Security Scanning II Work Book.

Raw data was gathered by a project officer (Lizette Salmon) between June-October 2013. More than 50 stakeholders (primary sources of information) were consulted and 50 reports (secondary sources) reviewed to obtain the raw data (collated in a separate document). This information was summarised in an issues paper in consultation with members of the project reference group; Penny Wilson (GCH Health Promotions Coordinator – Food Systems), Claire Taylor (COW Healthy Together Wodonga Team Leader) and Arno Parolini (COW Healthy Together Wodonga Research and Evaluation Officer).

Two stakeholder meetings were conducted (22 October and 3 December 2013) to obtain feedback on the issues paper and to discuss and prioritise recommendations. The stakeholder meetings were attended by 16 participants on each occasion (representing a total of 22 individuals), including representatives from City of Wodonga (staff from several departments including those responsible for Environmental Health, Environment and Planning), Gateway Community Health, Hume Murray Farmers Market, the National Environment Centre, a local Neighbourhood House and local emergency food relief organisations.

Initially the data was collated, discussed and reported according to the VLGA's five environmental dimensions i.e. health and wellbeing, natural environment, built environment, economic environment and socio-cultural environment. However this format led to duplication of recommendations i.e. identical recommendations were proposed across more than one dimension. In November 2013 the project reference group therefore decided to group the issues by themes i.e. health and wellbeing, local food economy, physical access, economic access and COW policy environment.



A third stakeholder meeting was held in May 2014 to obtain feedback on the first draft of this report.

One of the methodological challenges of this project was the expectation that Wodonga be investigated as an isolated entity. Wodonga has such strong links to Albury and surrounding towns that maintaining such a distinction was difficult. LGAs have defined boundaries, but the flows of people, food and finances in this region are not so neatly circumscribed.

Another major methodological challenge was the breadth and complexity of the issue under consideration. It has not been possible to encapsulate all aspects of this locale's food system in a single document. This report attempts to outline the main issues and recommendations of the local food systems, as evident at this point in time. It is a working document open to review and update; a reference tool for the many groups, organisations and COW departments committed to improving the region's food security.

Findings

Health and Wellbeing

Good nutrition and eating a wide variety of healthy foods is a vital component of healthy lifestyles and contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of our community (Department of Health 2012 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource 2014).

Why people make the food choices they do is complex and includes individual and lifestyle behaviours as well as environmental factors such as where we live, learn, work and play (Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource 2014).

Factors associated with eating a poor diet (such as eating too many foods high in fat and sugar and not enough fruit and vegetables) contributes to approximately 16% of the burden of chronic disease - double of any other lifestyle factor (Department of Human Services 2005 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource 2014).

Health and wellbeing variables in relation to food security include incidence of food-related diseases (such as obesity and type 2 diabetes), rates of breast-feeding, levels of fruit and vegetable consumption, self-reported health status, food choices and food preparation skills. Underlying social determinants of health and wellbeing were also considered.

Amongst Wodonga residents some of the socio-demographic factors with potential adverse impacts on health and wellbeing include:

- Education levels - 61% of Wodonga residents have not completed Year 12 education, compared with 48% of the Victorian population (ABS 2011 Census of Population and Housing).
- Socio-economic levels - Wodonga's Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) score of 975 is below the national and state average, suggesting relatively high disadvantage within the local government area.
- Unemployment levels - Wodonga's unemployment was 6.7 per cent in the September 2012 quarter. While above the state average, it is still lower than many regional centres in Victoria.
- Lone person households - although the most common household type is 'couple with children', Wodonga's household structure has experienced a large increase in numbers of lone person households. By 2011, this group accounted for more than 25 per cent of all households in Wodonga.

Sources: COW Social Profile - Preliminary version 2013 & Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-12, selected preliminary survey findings.

Health and wellbeing issues in Wodonga

High percentage of overweight and obese residents in Wodonga

- 59.5% of Wodonga residents are overweight and obese; a figure significantly above the Victorian average of 49.8% (Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-12 - Selected preliminary survey findings). Specifically:
- 50.1% males overweight (not including obese)
- 18.3% males obese
- 27.8% females overweight (not including obese)
- 23.3% females obese - significantly above the Vic state average of 17.2%

High prevalence of type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is Wodonga's disease of highest prevalence, with nearly three times the state rate of presentation (COW Social Profile - Preliminary version 2013). The high prevalence of diabetes is linked to the high obesity rate.

Low breast-feeding rates

Wodonga's breastfeeding rates at three months are in the lower tenth percentile of the state; 43% versus the Victorian average of 51% (Women's Health Goulburn NE, 2010). Although breastfeeding at six months is also suboptimal, it has improved over the past decade (up from 30% to around 39%). The establishment of the 'Breastfeeding Friendly' program at Wodonga Hospital ten years ago was a major factor in driving this improvement. Wodonga Hospital currently has a 'developing' lactation clinic (staffed by one EFT for 1700 births pa), with plans to expand this significantly pending funding.

Note that support for breastfeeding mothers in Wodonga's built environment is adequate i.e. it has 14 baby change facilities and 46 breastfeeding-friendly venues.

Low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption

Only 14% of Wodonga residents comply with recommended daily servings of vegetables i.e. 5 serves per adult per day (versus 7.2% Victorian average) and 40.9% comply with recommended daily servings of fruit - i.e. 2 serves per adult per day (versus 45.3% Victorian average). (Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-12, selected preliminary survey findings).

Two contributing reasons for this low compliance with recommended servings of vegetables and fruit include economic barriers (see 'Economic Access' section of this report) and physical barriers (see 'Physical Access' section).

Mismatch between individuals' real and perceived health status

Despite some of the adverse data concerning levels of obesity, diabetes, fruit and vegetable intake amongst Wodonga residents, 47.9% self-report 'excellent' or 'very good health' (not dissimilar to the Victorian average of 46.6%). While this suggests a degree of mismatch between individuals' real and perceived health status, self-

reported health status has been shown to be a reliable predictor of ill-health, future health care use and premature mortality, independent of other medical, behavioural or psychological risk factors. (Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-12 - Selected preliminary survey findings).

Unhealthy food choices and/or suboptimal cooking skills by some sectors of the community (including some emergency food relief recipients, CALD and indigenous residents)

There are multiple reasons why people make unhealthy food choices. Identifying barriers to healthy eating requires further investigation. For example, consultations suggested that the cooking and food preparation skills of emergency food recipients are often suboptimal, but this has not been formally investigated. It is also unclear whether more vulnerable people have appropriate kitchen equipment and storage facilities or are disadvantaged due to reduced physical access to healthy food outlets (such as distance to shops).

Uniting Care has a kitchen in their church where a weekly cooking class is held (3-8 residents attend this class and prepare 70 meals for FoodShare). Gateway Community Health conducts cooking classes for mental health clients at Watson Street and has included a community kitchen in their refurbishment. This will be used to teach cooking skills to various groups (including young mothers, CALD persons and those with mental health issues). Wodonga TAFE conducts Food for Thought cooking classes.

Approximately 50 African people live in Wodonga. They comprised a mix of immigrants and refugees, from various African countries and a range of socio-economic circumstances. Consultation feedback suggests some are vulnerable to iron deficiencies (resulting in menstrual problems) due to dietary imbalances. They have reduced access to culturally appropriate foods, especially their traditional vegetables. Although Coles in Lavington has started selling selected grains (including tapioca), prices are high. Some African residents are believed to be relying on a limited range of foods (e.g. potatoes).

There are also approximately 150 Bhutanese people living in Wodonga. Although their socio-economic circumstances are mostly lower than those of African residents, they generally have better access to culturally appropriate foods (both from the built and natural environments). Bhutanese people tend to be very skillful in growing food and, if empowered, could grow food for many people in our community. However they are vulnerable to making unhealthy food choices, including excess intake of soft-drink and bread. Although this issue is being addressed during shopping tours conducted as part of TAFE language classes, there is evidence to suggest weight gain, diabetes and dental problems are an issue amongst this population.

Research conducted in 2008 suggests that some 6% of Wodonga residents 'can't always get culturally appropriate food', a figure not dissimilar to the Victorian state average of 6.8% (Victorian Population Health Survey 2008 – Social Inequalities in Health). However this figure should be treated with caution given the data may be outdated.

Some 2% of the Wodonga population is indigenous, with diabetes considered a significant (but as yet unquantified) issue amongst the indigenous community. Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation have a 'healthy eating/catering' policy in place and a backyard garden produce sharing program that involves 25 families.

Goals and recommendations to improve health and wellbeing

Note: Font in **bold** refers to recommendations **prioritised** by stakeholders during stakeholder meetings.

Goals	Recommendations
1.1. Improve breast-feeding rates	<p>1.1.1. Continue to support the HTW's Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies initiative that is providing nutrition education to pregnant women. <i>By Medicare Local, Wodonga Hospital and Obstetricians (18 months)</i></p> <p>1.1.2. Support Wodonga Hospital's plans to expand their lactation clinic.</p> <p>1.1.3. Consider social marketing strategies to improve breastfeeding rates (to make breastfeeding the cultural norm).</p> <p>1.1.4. Provide perinatal clients with access to resources / apps around breastfeeding.</p>
1.2. Increase fruit and vegetable intake and improve residents' capacity to prepare healthy meals	<p>1.2.1. Update, reprint and distribute the Food for \$50 brochure to encourage increased rates of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption and promote balanced meals. Distribute through Carevan and FoodShare. <i>By GCH with HTW funding (12 months)</i></p> <p>1.2.2. Encourage community centres, neighbourhood houses, large church organisations and community groups to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase healthy, affordable easy to prepare recipes to all participants through cooking courses etc (including a visit by Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food van). • Investigate the need for additional cooking classes specifically for emergency food relief recipients, indigenous and CALD residents, those with chronic conditions etc (e.g. using GCH's proposed new community kitchen). • Investigate means of overcoming access barriers e.g. facilitating bulk purchases of cooking ingredients to reduce costs or providing a bus to enable fruit and vegetable purchases. <p><i>By HTW and GCH</i></p> <p>1.2.3. Consider social marketing strategies to improve rates of vegetable consumption. <i>By HTW (late 2014)</i></p> <p>1.2.4. Encourage and support the distribution of how-to-cook literature, low cost shopping, how to store food, no interest loan schemes etc through FoodShare, Carevan, universities, websites and possibly Council. Consider other resources that could also be distributed or developed.</p> <p>1.2.5. Promote the local markets as an easy access point to fresh, healthy, local and seasonal foods.</p> <p>1.2.6. Promote cultural changes to discourage unhealthy takeaway purchases. [Strategies for achieving this yet to be discussed.]</p> <p>1.2.7. Work with recipients of emergency food relief (and other interested parties) to determine possible actions that will make healthy food more economically and physically accessible.</p> <p><i>Action suggested by the Senior Project Officer, Food Systems and Nutrition Policy, Vic Health</i></p>

<p>1.3. Improve knowledge of healthy food choices amongst school children</p>	<p>1.3.1. Introduce/continue Healthy Together Wodonga achievement program in schools and preschools. <i>By HTW (18 months)</i></p> <p>1.3.2. Introduce the Healthy Eating and Food Literacy (HEFL) program in secondary schools. <i>By HTW (6-18 months)</i></p>
<p>1.4. Improve healthy eating by people from CALD backgrounds, especially Bhutanese and African residents</p>	<p>1.4.1. Develop a Welcome Kit (similar in concept to the Brimbank Welcome Kit and apparently also developed by Dandenong and Moreland Councils) to provide new CALD residents with better access to healthy food. It should be produced in several different languages and contain information including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastfeeding welcome locations • Safety of local tap water • Health issues associated with soft drinks, takeaway food • Australian foods that might substitute for African foods • Recipes • Australian fruit and vegetables <p>Kit should be evaluated to ascertain any ongoing barriers and enablers to accessing healthy food. <i>By HTW Health Promotion Coordinator (18 months)</i></p> <p>1.4.2. Consult with COW Settlement Assistance Officer and CALD community leaders to develop culturally specific plans including development of resources and guides. Also need to use these partnerships to overcome system barriers to accessing healthy food (e.g. transport, income, price).</p> <p>1.4.3. Ensure that the proposed Wodonga Health Champions represent all age groups and a diverse community. Encourage Bhutanese, African and Indigenous residents to become Wodonga Health Champions.</p> <p>1.4.4. Lobby to increase the Multicultural Settlement Assistance Officer's EFT.</p> <p>1.4.5. Support development of the proposed Ethnic Community Council.</p> <p>1.4.6. Consider establishing a 'Community Guides Volunteer Program', to support new arrivals in their search for healthy food and increase their understanding of consequences of unhealthy eating practices, including increased risk of diabetes. (Note: a volunteer guide service has been introduced in Melbourne with a resettlement service group).</p> <p>1.4.7. Consult with representatives from the refugee community to further identify and quantify their food issues, work with them to identify their strengths and assets and develop appropriate solutions (with the aim of increasing intake of healthy foods and decrease intake of unhealthy foods).</p>

<p>1.5. Improve healthy eating by indigenous residents</p>	<p>1.5.1. Develop partnerships with COW, HTW, the GCH Indigenous Health Worker and local indigenous organisations to further identify and quantify their food issues, work with them to identify their strengths and assets and develop appropriate solutions (with the aim of increasing intake of healthy foods and decrease intake of unhealthy foods).</p> <p>1.5.2. Engage indigenous residents in health and health assessments.</p>
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Local Food Economy

Enhancing the local food economy is linked to the concept of promoting 'food sovereignty'; the right of peoples to define their own food systems. Food sovereignty puts the people who produce, distribute and consume food at the centre of decisions on food systems and policies, rather than the demands of markets and corporations that have come to dominate the global food system.

A thriving local food economy will improve food security and benefit consumers, producers and the local economy. It has been suggested that Wodonga is being economically disadvantaged by the volume of local produce currently exported from the LGA. In Wagga Wagga, for example, it has been estimated that up to \$290 million pa is being leaked from the local economy. This figure, determined by a simple sensitivity analysis of Wagga's population (65,000), is based on an estimated 99% of retail food outlets being owned by nationally owned enterprises (Scott P, 2012). According to this analysis, only 14% of turnover from externally owned retail food businesses actually stays in a town or city in the form of wages. This is in direct contrast to locally owned food enterprises where up to 76% is retained within the town via the multiplier effect; the longer a dollar stays in a local economy, the greater the local benefits.

The theme of a local food economy includes variables such as volume and types of food produced and manufactured in Wodonga, agricultural viability of the land, regulations regarding local food production and distribution, attitudes to local food by food outlets, demand for local food and threats to future food production.

Regional situation

Wodonga has been described as 'the hole in the donut': a relatively small urbanised area, surrounded by varied agricultural landscape. Although only 1.6% of Wodonga's workforce is employed in agriculture, the proportion in other LGAs in North East Victoria is much higher (ranging from 41.1% in Wangaratta through to 35.6% in Towong). The main agricultural industries of the North East region are dairy and viticulture (Regional matters: An atlas of Regional Victoria, 2005, p52). However the value of agricultural commodities in the Ovens Murray region surrounding Wodonga is considered low relative to the rest of Victoria. Soil structure and soil acidification in the North East catchment were, in 2002, rated as 'poor', according to a 'Summary of catchment conditions' assessment, although alluvial land along the Murray-Kiewa floodplains is reported as having higher quality soil.

Local Food Economy Issues

Lack of data on volumes and types of food produced, manufactured and distributed in Wodonga

Volumes and types of food production in Wodonga are difficult to quantify as there is no existing database of such information. However one informed respondent stated that although Wodonga (region) potentially produces enough food to sustain its population, the vast majority of it is exported. Other respondents have indicated the Shire of Wodonga itself is a relatively small producer, with a focus on beef and dairy cattle and crops to feed stock.

Food manufacturing and distribution in Wodonga LGA are also difficult to quantify, again because there does not appear to be a publicly-available database with information. However it appears there is only a small (and decreasing) number of food processors/distributors in Wodonga (though several exist in surrounding areas).

Tracts of arable land lying fallow

Wodonga has tracts of arable land that have the potential to be used for food production but are currently lying fallow, while at the same time there are growing numbers of people interested in growing food who do not have access to land. The fallow arable land includes that belonging to COW, land managed by Parklands Albury-Wodonga and acreage of private landholders (including aging farmers who are concerned about the future of their properties). Alluvial land along the Murray-Kiewa floodplains has particularly good potential for growing food.

It would be desirable to establish a landlinks/landshare 'match-making' service to connect fallow land (that has access to water) to those with a desire to farm. Note: There is currently one such match-making arrangement in progress, between a group of Bhutanese people who will be leasing 'non-environmental' land being managed by Parklands in exchange for managing some of Parklands 'environmental land' (to ensure the project is cost-neutral to Parklands, who would



Bhutanese residents are skilled and avid productive gardeners; this is one of their small community gardens.

otherwise derive a small income from leasing the 'non-environmental' land to pastoralists).

One of the themes in Wodonga's Municipal Strategic Statement is: 'The sustainable management and long term protection of rural land to encourage agricultural production and diversification of farming activities'. The proposed landlinks/landshare service may well be a viable means of achieving this goal.

Regulatory and financial barriers facing local producers

Local and regional producers experience significant challenges and costs when attempting to sell direct to the local public, due to regulatory, financial and other barriers. Regulatory barriers apply particularly to meat, egg and dairy producers (with fewer barriers to market gardeners as there is no such legislation for sale of fruit and vegetables). An example of the legislative challenges facing smaller local producers includes recent changes to labeling of free-range eggs, with each egg requiring a stamp. It was reported that one local free range egg producer closed business as a result of this.

Another of the challenges facing local producers is the absence of local processing facilities (i.e. no processing for meat, poultry, dairy and grains). Local producers wishing to sell their produce within the region need to transport it long distances for processing e.g. lamb needs to be shipped to Melbourne for processing, then back to the region to sell. [Note: a local mobile abattoir service exists, but not for animals slaughtered for retail purposes.]

There are also reports that local producers feel like they are working in a vacuum; unconnected to other local producers and unconnected to customers.

One of the avenues for selling local produce is through the Hume Murray Farmers Market (HMFm). This costs \$55 per stall in site fees, a figure considered too high by many of the stall-holders who participated in a Hume Murray Food Bowl survey in October 2013. It should be noted, however, that the HMFm fees are only 'a fraction of the cost' faced by local producers, who need to comply with regulations, pay for insurance and so on.

According to one source, growers obtain their best prices through farm-gate sales (no/low packaging or transport costs), but this method has had limited uptake by Wodonga growers.

In short, small-scale local producers need more trading opportunities, in order to establish and maintain regular cash-flows.

Supermarkets reluctance to source or promote local food and their retail dominance disadvantaging local producers

Wodonga has seven supermarkets, but none tend to source or promote local and/or seasonal produce.

At present, small-scale producers cannot participate in 'mainstream' food trading via supermarkets as they are deemed to be 'too small, unreliable and seasonal'.

The capture of a large proportion of the food supply system by a few large corporations in Australia is a significant negative for local food security. This is because it tends to 'lock in' producers and transport. Producers are contracted to the system and cannot easily dispose of surplus production through local retail systems. Large central outlets out-compete local decentralised and more accessible stores. Choice is ultimately reduced and the economies of scale dominate advantages associated with low food miles and short storage times. Although a complex area it seems likely that supermarket corporation dominance probably reduces rather than improves local food security.

Feedback from consultations suggests that the retail dominance of the supermarkets has squeezed some local producers out of business (and evidence from other parts of the country supports this finding).

For more people to be actively participating in our food systems and be fairly rewarded financially, alternatives to supermarkets need to be created. Only when growers have enough financial reward will they re-invest time, resources and energy to growing food. For Australians to have food security, we need prosperous farmers, not cheap imports.

Suboptimal demand for local produce

While there is a growing cohort of Wodonga residents who preference locally produced food, this trend is not, unlike the Tyrol region of Austria, the cultural norm. Reasons have yet to be formally explored, but consultations suggest a mix of factors including physical access, economic access (affordability) and convenience.

Local produce is available through several avenues including the Hume Murray Farmers Market (HMFMM), two local greengrocers and four 'boxed food' systems. Wodonga supermarkets do not generally identify or promote produce that has been sourced locally.



The HMFMM on Gateway Island is a popular source of local produce, attracting up to 1500 visitors per market day. However a recent Hume Murray Food Bowl survey of 50 visitors to the market indicated only 23% were Wodonga residents and stallholders surveyed indicated they would like to see a growth in customer numbers. Consultations for this food security scan suggest the HMFMM has price, convenience and accessibility issues for some residents (for location of market, see map in Physical Access section of this report). Until six months ago the market was only operating every second Saturday, but a Thursday afternoon-

evening market (the Murray River Farmers Market) at the Albury Wood-Fired Oven commenced in October 2013 and there are plans to introduce the market at The Cube in Wodonga on alternate Saturdays.

The two local greengrocers (Arnolds and Dares) support and sell local produce, and both use signage above regional produce to indicate place of origin.

There are also currently four 'boxed food' systems operating in the area, of which three produce their food locally (Yackandandah Organics and growers in Beechworth and Allans flat) and one sources from Melbourne markets (Albury Organics). Note however, that these businesses only supply relatively small numbers of Wodonga residents.

Various serious threats to future food supplies (local and imported), including climate change and peak oil

There are numerous serious threats to our future (local and imported) food supplies, including climate change, peak oil, depletion of other resources, genetically modified crops, fruit fly, threats to pollination and so on.

Floods, heat waves, bush-fires and storms have become more frequent and intense in Australia and will become worse due to climate change. These events often have adverse effects on food production e.g. a January 2013 heat wave resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 chickens in the local area, caused pigs to drop a breeding cycle (thus reducing pork supply) and affected several backyard crops. Three heatwaves in the summer of 2014 affected a wide range of fruit and vegetable crops and the loss of well over \$100,000 of produce in the region.

Wodonga's ability to cope with either short or long term food supply disruptions is not assured (as per statement in COW Environmental Strategy, p108) and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan does not address means of restoring food supply disruptions.

Goals and recommendations to develop a local food economy

Note: Font in **bold** refers to recommendations **prioritised** by stakeholders during stakeholder meetings.

Goals	Recommendations
2.1. Increase data/understanding of existing local food production, manufacturing and distribution.	<p>2.1.1. Develop database of existing local producers to quantify the volume and type of food production (perhaps in partnership with FoodShare or FoodBank Victoria, if external funding can be sourced). Note however that (according to one source) obtaining such information will be a difficult task. <i>By COW</i></p> <p>2.1.2. Conduct a mapping exercise to identify local food manufacturers and distributors, with a view to promoting/attracting business opportunities. <i>By COW Dept of Economic Development</i></p>
2.2. Develop a local food economy.	<p>2.2.1. Establish a consortium with a focus on growing the local food economy (and address some of the regulatory and financial barriers facing local producers). One of the group's first tasks might be to apply for funding to conduct a feasibility study into best ways for this region to develop their local food economy. <i>By an AWRFA subgroup</i></p> <p>2.2.2. Lobby (at state and federal level) for initiatives that encourage consumers to purchase and preference local produce. <i>By Hume Murray Food Bowl</i></p> <p>2.2.3. Advocate for a food co-op within Wodonga's CBA and/or encourage new fresh food enterprises e.g. fruit barrows, food box sales and farm gate sales (possibly in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses and FoodShare). <i>By Hume Murray Food Bowl</i></p> <p>2.2.4. Obtain data on perceptions of Hume Murray Farmers Market (from producer and visitor perspectives) especially re perceptions of access and prices. <i>HMFB to share the data they are gathering on this with HTW.</i></p> <p>2.2.5. Encourage more local producers to sell their produce at the HMFM (more stall-holders equate to lower costs per stall-holder). This will be easier to achieve if local custom is stimulated. <i>By COW(need to specify department)</i></p> <p>2.2.6. Introduce strategies to improve supply of - and demand for - local produce. [May consider some of the strategies used in the Tyrol province of Austria, where local produce is preferred by residents - producer groups formed a consortium, supermarkets are obliged to mention the farm/producer on their fresh produce signage, every product grown in Tyrol bears that stamp etc.] <i>By Victorian Farmers Market Association</i></p>

<p>2.3. Use fallow, arable land for growing food.</p>	<p>2.3.1. COW to partner with Parklands (and NEC) to support Bhutanese residents to grow food on land managed by Parklands, and strengthen other opportunities for Bhutanese to grow and sell food. By COW (in liaison with Parklands and NEC)</p> <p>2.3.2. COW to join a working group to establish a landlinks/landshare ‘match-making’ service to increase supply of locally grown food. The match-making service would create links between local landholders with fallow land and growers who wish to produce food but do not have access to land. COW could assist by, for example leasing some of their fallow land for prototype/case-study purposes and providing legal advice for drafting of agreements. Establishment of a local website could also be developed to help develop the match-making concept. By NEC and COW</p>
<p>2.4. Increase awareness of – and planning for – threats to future food supplies (including climate change impacts, peak oil and resource depletion).</p>	<p>2.4.1. Advocate an agro-ecology (organic) approach to food production and encourage bio-regional production of diverse foods. By NEC</p> <p>2.4.2. Revise COW’s Municipal Emergency Plan to incorporate planning for short and longer term threats to future food supplies. By COW</p>

Physical Access

Physical access to healthy, affordable food includes variables such as density and location of food outlets, public and non-motorised transport to food outlets, variety and quality of food available, healthiness of workplaces and residents' capacity to grow food.

Physical Access issues in Wodonga

Existence of two 'food deserts'

Wodonga has seven supermarkets, representing a reasonable number and distribution of supermarkets (five are located in/near the CBA, one in the south-east and one the south-west of the town centre). All provide adequate quality and variety of food. Food deserts are areas where there are no fruit or vegetable outlets within a certain radius, and for the purposes of this study the radius was set at 1km. A food map of Wodonga demonstrates two main food deserts; land to the south of Pearce Street, between Beechworth Road and Melrose Drive and land in the south-west of Wodonga. Note however that the planned supermarket in West Wodonga will 'negate' the current food desert in that south-west pocket of Wodonga.

A local stakeholder from Birallee Neighbourhood House has investigated the feasibility of introducing a mobile market selling fruit and vegetables in local food deserts. Although such initiatives do well in the US, she concluded that manning the stall and maintaining the van/trailer were key barriers.

High ratio of takeaway outlets to supermarkets and greengrocers (3:1) resulting in easier access to takeaway than fresh food

For many Australians, fast food has become a common convenience and lifestyle choice, with the average adult eating out more than four times per week (BIS Shrapnel 2007 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource). Foods eaten away from home have been shown to be more energy dense (up to 65% more kilojoules), of larger portion sizes and often higher in saturated fat and salt than meals prepared at home (Prentice & Jebb 2003; Dunford et al. 2010 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource).

For most people, access to healthy food is determined by the presence of supermarkets and other stores selling a variety of fresh produce (Kent et al. 2011 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource 2014). There has been a positive influence on the consumption of healthier foods by people who live in close proximity to such stores and have less access to convenience and fast food outlets (Larson et al. 2009 in Healthy Food Connect – A Support Resource 2014).

The ratio of takeaway outlets to supermarkets and greengrocers is approximately 3:1 i.e. at least 26 takeaway venues (including 18 fast food outlets and 8 Asian takeaways) to nine supermarkets and greengrocers (see map on page 20). While this ratio is of concern, it is comparable to - or slightly better than - other parts of Victoria. Note also that more supermarket sites are planned to ensure that future developments in Leneva, Baranduda and West Wodonga (near La Trobe University) have good proximity to supermarkets.

It is difficult for local governments to influence the number of takeaway outlets. Wodonga Council issues building permits on the basis of building works, not the nature of the business. There are, however, some avenues for ensuring that major takeaway stores cannot be located next to community facilities such as swimming pools.

Inconvenient location of Wodonga's largest fruit and vegetable retailer (Arnolds)

Wodonga has two dedicated greengrocers (in addition to the fruit and vegetables provided by the supermarkets) and both attempt to source local produce, but the outlet perceived by many sources as having the greater range and lower prices (Arnolds*) is less conveniently located (towards the north east of the CBA). Although it provides a home delivery service, this is subject to a \$35 minimum purchase and their online produce is generally more expensive (because it does not include their discounted produce).

* Note: Arnolds has not been included in the Healthy Food Basket survey, hence it is not possible to quantify this observation regarding prices.

Limited success in engaging takeaway stores to provide healthier options

In 2004-05 a 'Healthy Options Wodonga' project was conducted by the dietetics department at Wodonga Hospital in an attempt to encourage take-away outlets to provide healthier alternatives (including healthier fats used in their cooking). Approximately eight takeaway stores showed initial interest. Some businesses complied because they felt it gave them a marketing edge while others weren't persuaded because they felt the additional cost would not be recouped. The project ceased due to resourcing issues. A similar project was then conducted in Albury (led by dietitian Brendan Pearson) but this also folded. The Heart Foundation's pilot of such projects in Sydney suffered identical fates i.e. they were not self-sustaining.

Unhealthy workplaces

There is anecdotal evidence that Wodonga has many unhealthy workplaces including those with vending machines and unhealthy catering, staff spending too much time sitting, lack of standing work-stations and poor work-life balance. These issues have not, however, been quantified.

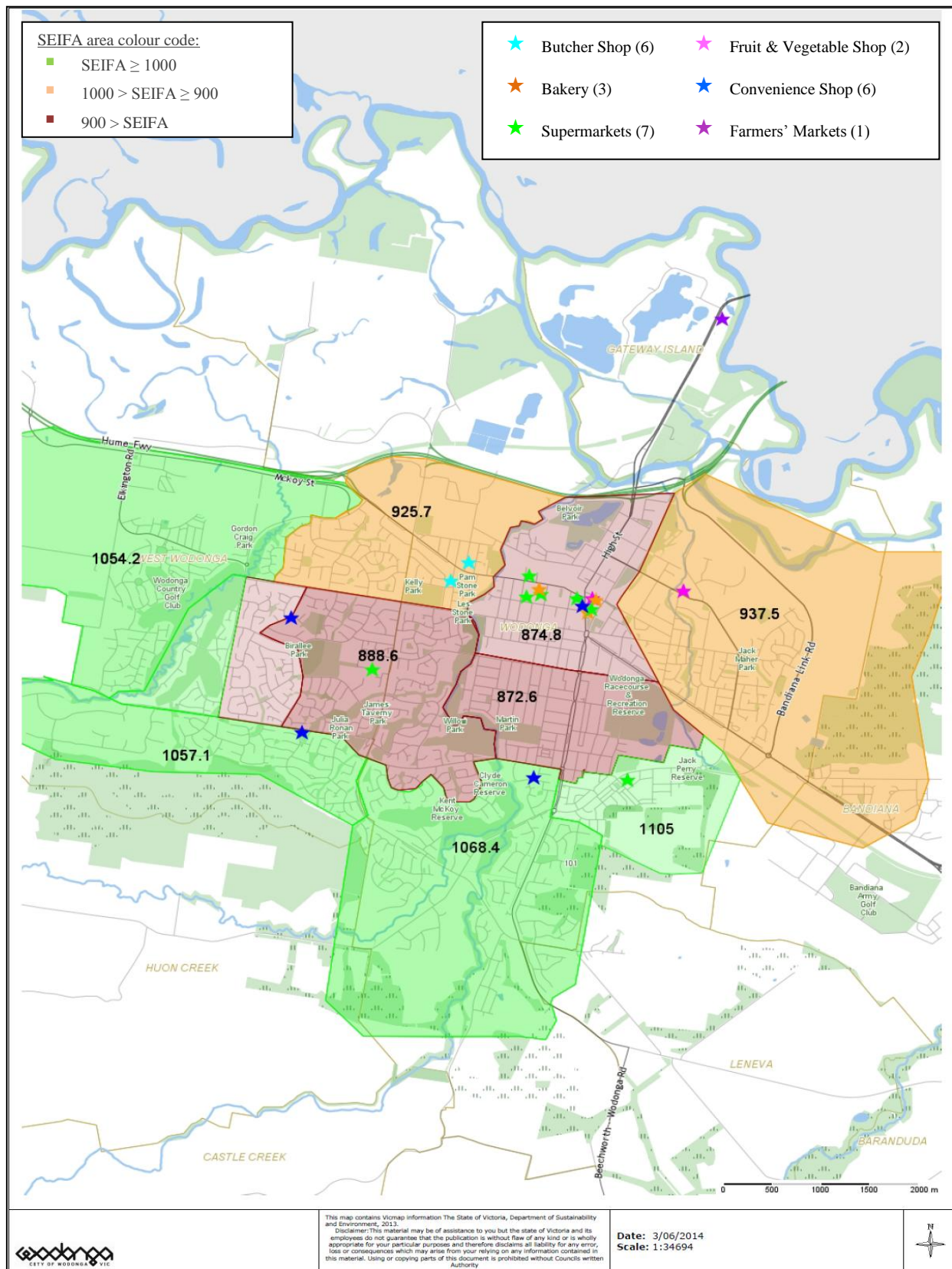
Limited use of public transport by Wodonga residents

Although Wodonga's bus routes incorporate the major fresh food outlets (with the exception of the Woolworths supermarket in Whitebox Rise - see map above), the use of public transport is marginalised, due to the sprawling, low density nature of most of the town's urban development, the dominance of the car culture and limitations of the public transport network. Ten interlocking routes operate weekdays, with restricted service on Saturdays (e.g. it bypasses Arnolds greengrocer) and no service on Sundays. Despite these limitations, transport does not appear to be a major barrier to food access, as only 6% households do not have a car and only 5.1% residents cite 'inadequate or unreliable public transport' as the reason they can't get the quality or variety of foods they want. This situation is, however, likely to change with rising petrol prices and should remain a point of discussion, particularly when engaging with vulnerable groups.

Limited use of cycling or walking for grocery-shopping purposes

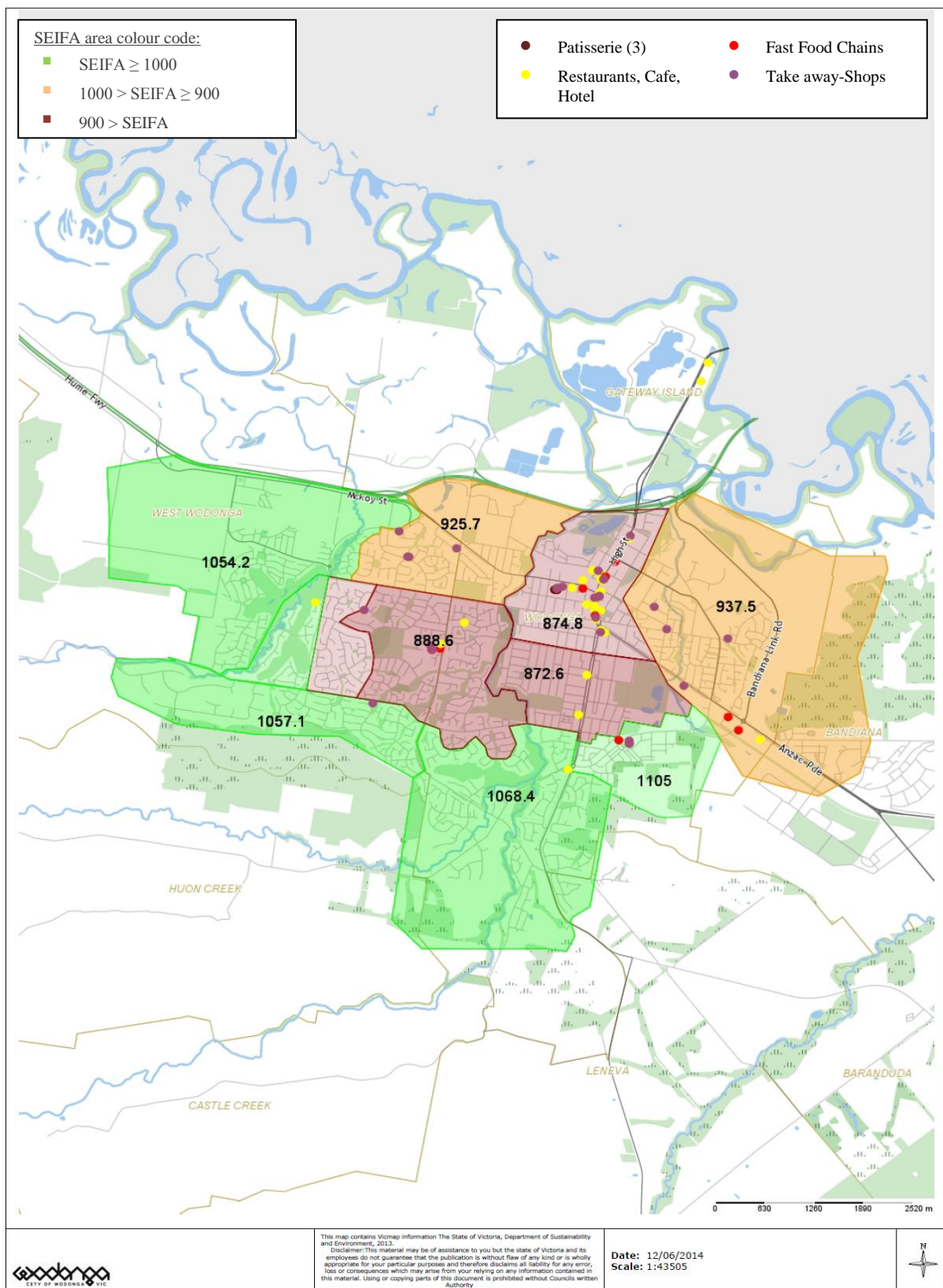
Wodonga has a 60km network of cycling paths which appear to provide adequate access to food outlets for cyclists based to the west of the town centre, but not for those based on the east side (this requires mapping to confirm). Wodonga does not, however, have a strong culture of cycling or walking for grocery-shopping purposes.

Map: Access to essential foods by SEIFA indexed areas



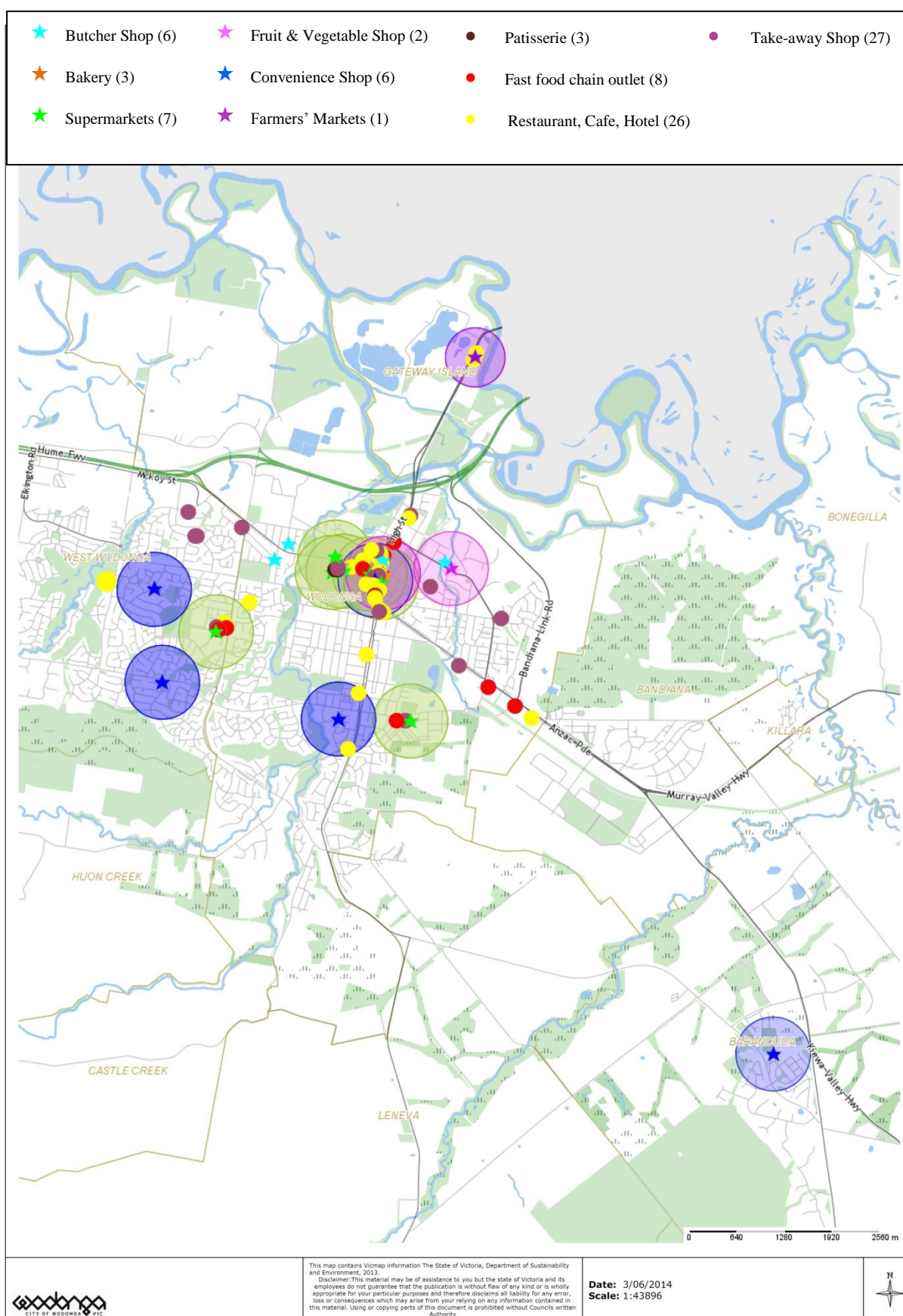
Source: Vicmap information, The State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2013, City of Wodonga, Profile.ID, IntraMaps

Map: Access to non-essential foods by SEIFA indexed areas

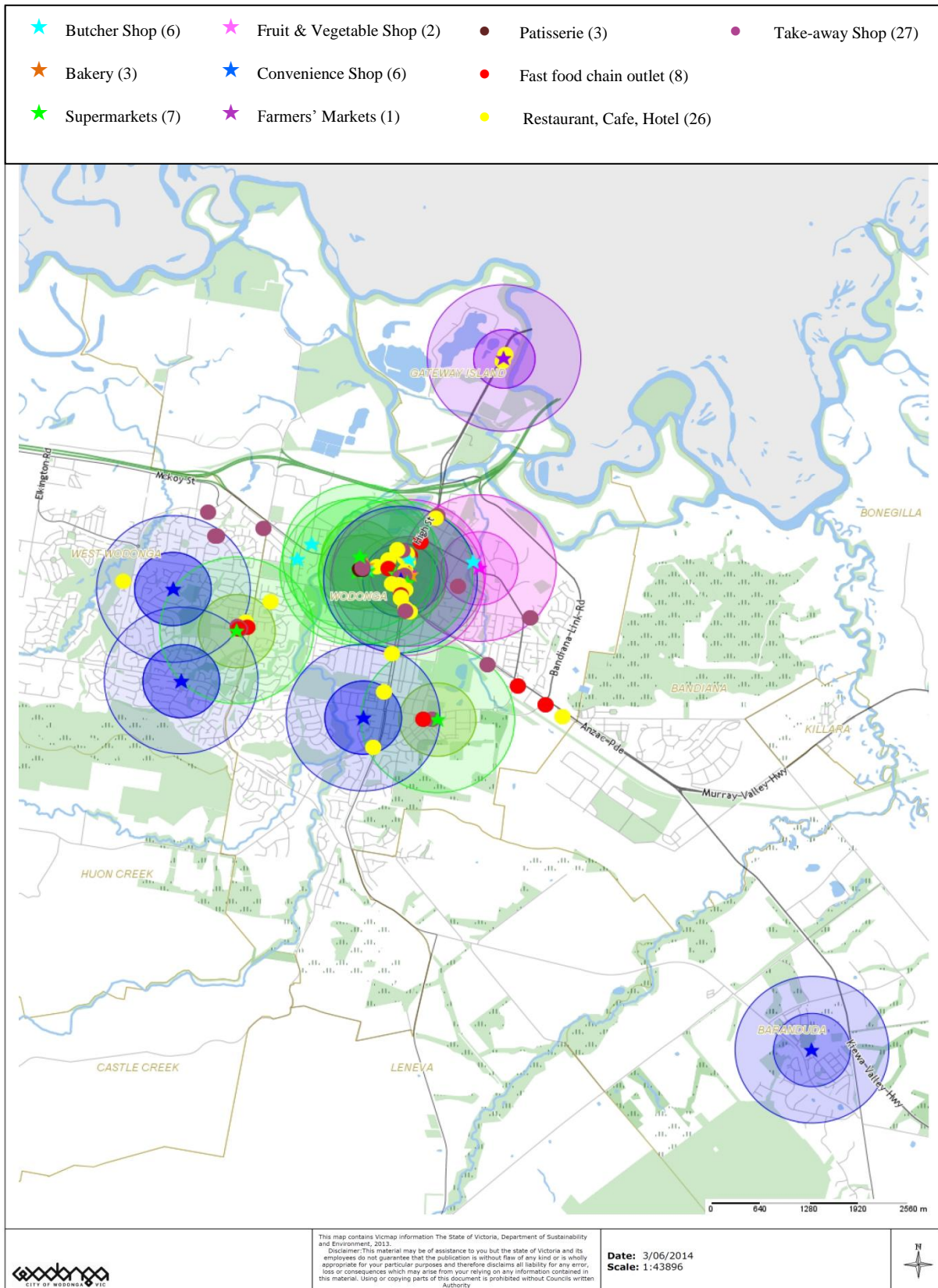


Source: Vicmap information, The State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2013, City of Wodonga, Profile.ID, IntraMaps

Map: Food access - essential vs. non-essential foods, walking buffer 500m



Map: Food access - essential vs. non-essential foods, driving buffer = 1000m, walking buffer = 500m



Multiple barriers to productive backyard gardening

In general, Wodonga residents appear to have limited food growing literacy. A small in-house study in schools conducted by FoodShare suggested that two generations of Wodonga residents have lost the skills associated with the growing food. Another source observed that the 1950s trend of backyard food production had largely disappeared, a finding similar to a European study which indicated that consumers have become more distanced from the growing of food since the 1970s (Warde et al, 2007).

Numerous barriers to productive backyard gardening exist, including lack of:

- Time - especially for those in paid workforce.
- Resources - establishing a productive garden can be costly, especially in set-up phase and prohibitive water restrictions have been an issue during past periods of prolonged dry. See Appendix 1 for details.
- Skills - growing food successfully requires knowledge and experience.
- Motivation - productive gardening is increasing in popularity, but not the cultural norm.
- Space - while this is not the primary barrier for many Wodonga residents, it can be an issue for residents in rental properties and for those in newer, higher density estates such as Whitebox Rise.

Wodonga has a number of productive gardens in community locales (including in at least five schools and four agencies such as Neighbourhood Houses), but it does not have a community garden in the traditional sense of the term (i.e. a space any members of the community can access). There are, however, plans to develop a community garden at Elmwood (just south of the CBA) and early indicators suggest this may more closely match the traditional community garden model.



While many Wodonga residents have low food growing literacy, Lorraine defies the cultural norm and grows up to 80% of her family's fresh food intake on her standard house block.

According to one consultation, the lack of a traditional community garden to date has not been due to an absence of available COW land, but an apparent lack of community push for such a space. Council committed funds to a Trudewind Road Neighbourhood House community garden project as a trial of COW's Community Gardening Procedural Guidelines. This project was not very successful and Council have subsequently not overtly encouraged community gardening, recognising that a 'top down' approach may not be the best method. In addition, with no dedicated staff member on Council to support community gardening, there have not been resources to dedicate to engagement. Council have, however, been monitoring the Hume Murray Community Gardening Collective, hoping further interest and approaches might arise through this group. (The Hume Murray Gardening Collective is a local community group that meets regularly to discuss, share and support local productive gardening initiatives. Members include representatives from some of the aforementioned school and Neighbourhood House gardens, together with members of the Albury Wodonga Regional Food Alliance.)

While there are currently no local examples of edible plantings in public areas, this is a concept that COW has longer anyone appointed at COW to drive this concept). Council changed their bylaws to make it easier for people to plant on their nature strips. Any persons wishing to use their nature strip to grow edible or ornamental plants requires a permit (cost approximately \$60), although this is not rigorously enforced.



Goals and recommendations to improve physical access to healthy, affordable food

Note: Font in **bold** refers to recommendations **prioritised** by stakeholders during stakeholder meetings.

Goals	Recommendations
3.1. Increase community and COWs understandings of Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design Framework.	<p>3.1.1. Provide training on the Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (F-SPUD) Framework for Council planners through a Food Systems Forum, with potential to develop an F-SPUD working group.</p> <p><i>By HTW (6 months)</i></p>
3.2. Increase use of public transport and non-motorised forms of transport (for grocery shopping).	<p>3.2.1. Introduce a behaviour change program to:</p> <p>Encourage greater use of public and non-motorised transport using social marketing techniques, providing incentives e.g. through inexpensive public transport, optimising public transport routes to fresh food outlets and to HMFM on Saturday mornings and improved bicycle paths (including 'off road' bike paths in East Wodonga).</p> <p>Discourage use of cars e.g. by making roads narrower, decreasing car parks or charging for car parks. Consider liaising with Mildura as they are also looking into this.</p> <p><i>By COW, Bicycle User Groups, Dysons</i></p> <p><i>By COW and Dysons</i></p>
3.3. Increase access to fresh food outlets.	<p>3.3.1. Encourage new fruit and vegetable enterprises, especially in new residential developments, and build a commitment to this by incorporating into relevant COW Economic Development plans/policies.</p> <p><i>By COW Department of Economic Development</i></p>
3.4. Increase healthy food options served by workplaces and food outlets (take-away shops, canteens, restaurants etc).	<p>3.4.1. Introduce a 'reward program' for take-away outlets that do well in their Council health inspections. This program is in the planning stage by the COW Environmental Health Dept and is intended to improve healthy eating options, promote recycling and possibly reduce packaging.</p> <p><i>By COW Environmental Health and HTW (6-12 months)</i></p> <p>3.4.2. Provide the Healthy Catering Policy Template (from Victorian Healthy Eating Advisory Service) and other tools/kits to workplaces, food outlets etc. This may involve liaising with Mildura, who have reportedly been very successful in this arena.</p> <p><i>By Environmental Health Officer and COW in conjunction with AWRFA</i></p> <p>3.4.3. Work with convenience stores to encourage them to offer fresh produce. Suggest liaising with Bass Coast, East Gippsland (or contact Tim Owen from Dept of Health, Gippsland) for strategies.</p> <p><i>By HTW Food Systems personnel (12 months)</i></p>

<p>3.5. Increase residents' knowledge of food growing and levels of productive home gardening.</p>	<p>3.5.1. Advocate (to COW councillors and relevant managers and team leaders) for the introduction of selected streetscape measures from the Food-Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (F-SPUD) framework. Note that Cardinia and Mildura are doing well in this space and may be a useful resource. <i>By HTW and possibly an F-SPUD working group (asap)</i></p> <p>3.5.2. Investigate levels of productive gardening skills amongst Wodonga residents. As mentioned previously, a small in-house study of this issue suggested two generations had lost the skills to grow fruit and vegetables, but this requires further investigation. Such data might help attract funding for programs to build productive gardening skills.</p> <p>3.5.3. Investigate the feasibility of implementing the 'Every Home A Farm' project to increase access to fruit and vegetables. <i>By AWRFA</i></p> <p>3.5.4. Promote and support productive gardens in schools. <i>By Landcare and Hume Murray Community Gardening Group</i></p> <p>3.5.5. Support Elmwood's quest for a traditional community garden (similar model to the Kerr Sustainability Centre in Thurgoona).</p> <p>3.5.6. Use 'Health Champions' to improve food growing literacy. <i>By HTW</i></p> <p>3.5.7. Support community centres, neighbourhood houses and community groups to implement programs that encourage food growing skills (such as Productive Garden Open Days similar to Beechworths' 'Patch to Patch' cycle tour of productive gardens).</p> <p>3.5.8. Investigate the feasibility of encouraging a social enterprise model for no dig raised garden creation or vegie garden boxes.</p> <p>3.5.9. Advocate for a community garden for all, including CALD persons. Note: The proposed Elmwood garden may meet this need.</p>
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<p>3.6. Increase access to water (especially during periods of prolonged dry) for productive gardens.</p>	<p>3.6.1. Advocate that NE Water review watering restrictions on productive garden beds (but recognise this may not be considered by NE Water unless there is a perceived whole-of-community benefit). <i>By COW (Environmental Services Manager) and HTW (asap)</i></p> <p>3.6.2. Investigate water donating i.e. large commercial building capturing rain water to support community and home vegetable gardens (could attach to corporate stewardship of gardens program). Would need to ensure co-location of building with water recipients. <i>By COW Economic Development Dept, COW Sustainability Officer, HTW</i></p> <p>3.6.3. Investigate provision of household water tanks for low income residents. <i>By COW</i></p>
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Economic Access

Economic access to healthy food includes variables such as food prices, emergency food relief, access to information on emergency food relief options, levels of food waste and costs of grocery home deliveries.

Emergency relief food parcels and vouchers are well coordinated in Wodonga, which has developed the capacity and infrastructure to provide healthy food for a large (and growing) number of vulnerable residents. Albury-Wodonga FoodShare deliver to 29 agencies, including to 10 in Wodonga. Donors to FoodShare include (all) seven Wodonga supermarkets and eight other Wodonga food producers / retailers.

FoodShare (in conjunction with Wodonga TAFE) intend to improve their clients' skills through provision of accredited training. This program will address some of the social determinants of food insecurity (i.e. providing clients with a 'hand-up' as well as a 'hand-out').

Economic access issues in Wodonga

Cost of healthy food

Access to an affordable and nutritious food supply is recognised as an important determinant of people's nutrition and thus health outcomes (Wilkinson & Marmot, 1998). The Victorian Healthy Food Basket (VHFB) is a tool that assesses the affordability of a healthy diet over time. The VHFB consists of both healthy food choices and foods that represent typical purchases of Victorians, and the basket provides enough food to meet the nutritional needs of four different family types (including a 'typical family' of two adults and two children) for a fortnight (Pattieson & Palermo, 2010).

A February 2012 VHFB survey conducted by VLGA at six supermarkets in Wodonga showed that a typical family basket cost an average of \$434 (with a range of \$417 to \$454). This represents 32% of total Centrelink income and 20% of the 2011 median weekly Wodonga household income (of \$1075). However it should be noted that foods in these baskets were branded rather than generic products, hence actual spending on food-basket products is likely to be lower, given many residents purchase the more affordable generic brands.

The VLGA study does not provide average basket figures across Victoria, hence it is not possible to compare prices between Wodonga and the rest of the state. However, an informal study, conducted by a local ABC radio station in June 2013, compared a 22-item food basket from a Wodonga supermarket chain with the same chain in Wangaratta, Bendigo and Mildura and concluded that the Wodonga food basket was approximately \$2 to \$6 cheaper than that of the other centres.

Formal comparison of fruit and vegetable prices between Wodonga's supermarkets and the town's two greengrocers has not been conducted, but feedback from consultations suggests that greengrocer Arnolds provides the most competitively priced fresh produce.

A statewide survey showed that 30% of Wodonga residents felt that foods are too expensive, 27% couldn't always get the right quality of foods and 12% couldn't always get the right variety of food. These results were similar to the state average (*Victorian Population Health Survey, 2008*).

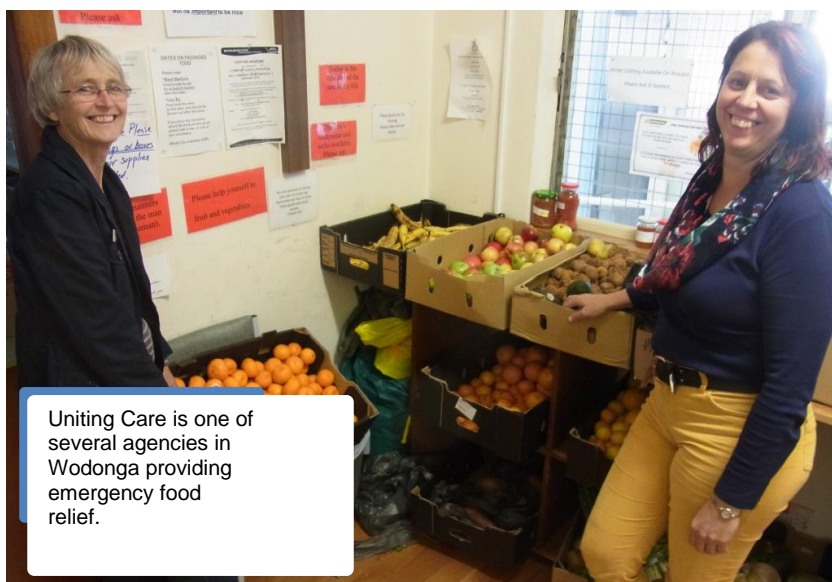
Increasing number of residents obtaining emergency food relief

Up to 9.6% of Wodonga residents experienced food insecurity in 2008 i.e. reported running out of money for food in at least one of the past 12 months (Victorian Population Health Survey 2008 – Social Inequalities in Health). More current data (from the 2011-12 survey) is presently on request from the Health Content Unit in the Department of Health. However, the experiences of local emergency food relief agencies such as Uniting Care suggest levels of food insecurity in Wodonga are increasing. In 2013 alone they provided an average of 336 households with food parcels per month (up from 141 per month in 2008) and a total of 96,750 meals in the first six months of 2013.

Unfortunately data on total numbers and percentages of Wodonga residents accessing emergency food relief services is difficult to determine as a centralised means of recording such information does not currently exist.

Another issue regarding emergency food relief is the availability of junk food items from food relief agencies such as FoodShare and FoodBank. Large quantities of lollies, chips, biscuits, soft drink and other non-healthy

food choices available are readily accessible. This issue requires further investigation and discussion.



Uniting Care is one of several agencies in Wodonga providing emergency food relief.

Although food parcels and food vouchers are relatively accessible to disadvantaged Wodonga residents, low or no cost community meals are less so, including no access to evening meals or breakfasts (with the exception of some limited school breakfast programs) and some access to community lunches (up to 2-3 days per week) at:

- Salvation Army Café (Salarmy Cafe) provide lunches on Tues and Fri (for approx 50 people per day) for a small cost.
- Birallee Neighbourhood House provides a free roast lunch one Monday a month (for approx 15 people).
- Two Birds One Stone Café provides snacks during (restricted) opening hours (patrons pay what they can afford or what they think the food is worth).
- Uniting Care provides lunch on Mondays to participants in their cooking group.

Lack of written information about emergency food relief options

In the process of collating information for this project it became apparent that data on emergency food relief options across Wodonga is not contained in a readily accessible document (unlike Geelong, which recently produced the 'Food Access and Support in the Geelong Region' publication). A local version of such a document/brochure would be useful for clients and agencies.

Food waste by supermarkets and residents

Food that is wasted is a valuable resource that could be re-directed to help ease food insecurity.

Most Wodonga supermarkets attempt to reduce their food waste by selling food within use-by dates at discounted prices, donating to the local FoodShare program and providing fruit and vegetable trimmings to local farmers. Although rising waste disposal costs have motivated supermarkets to reduce their food waste, consultations suggest that some produce is still being wasted, with quantities varying from store to store.

Reasons for supermarket food waste include food being disposed of between FoodShare collection schedules (the FoodShare van visits Aldi daily, but Woolworths and Coles have elected for twice and three times weekly collections respectively), difficulties distributing large volumes of food at short notice (e.g. large volumes of milk with an imminent use-by date) and restrictive OH&S standards (e.g. FoodShare is not permitted to freeze such milk themselves).

Research has shown that Australians discard up to 20% of the food they purchase, with Wodonga residents likely to waste similar volumes. The Street Harvest program is attempting to address one aspect of this problem, by harvesting excess produce from residential gardens and donating this to FoodShare.

Somewhat prohibitive cost of home delivery by Wodonga's largest fruit and vegetable retailer (Arnolds)

Most of the supermarkets and at least one of the fruit and vegetable outlets provide home deliveries, but all either charge for this service (\$8-10) or have a minimum order. In the case of Arnolds, this minimum order is \$30. It should also be noted that Arnolds do not sell their discounted produce online, creating still greater costs for those using their home-delivery service.

Goals and recommendations to improve economic access to healthy food

Note: Font in **bold** refers to recommendations **prioritised** by stakeholders during stakeholder meetings.

Goals	Recommendations
4.1. Reduce residents' reliance on emergency food relief.	4.1.1. Support FoodShare's accredited training program for emergency food recipients.
4.2. Determine (then monitor) current levels of food insecurity.	<p>4.2.1. Obtain the most recent data set from Victorian Government (currently on request from the Health Content Unit in Department of Health). <i>By HTW Research and Evaluation Officer</i></p> <p>4.2.2. Improve quality of data being gathered by local emergency relief agencies.</p> <p>4.2.3. Develop strategies for monitoring/reducing availability of junk food in emergency food relief supplies.</p>
4.3. Find solutions to overcome the cost of healthy food.	<p>4.3.1. Discuss/introduce strategies to overcome healthy food cost barriers (e.g. bulk purchase schemes, access to second grade food.) <i>By HTW</i></p>
4.4. Increase local knowledge of the various emergency food relief options in the area.	<p>4.4.1. Develop an emergency food relief booklet (for distribution by COW, local health service providers, schools etc), similar to the 'Food Access and Support in the Geelong Region' publication. Consider co-opting tertiary students for this task, possibly from Deakin University. <i>By AWRFA</i></p>
4.5. Reduce food waste by residents.	<p>4.5.1. Investigate partnership with relevant bodies and consider social marketing strategies to reduce food waste. <i>COW Environmental Services</i></p> <p>4.5.2. Work with the NSW 'Love Food Hate Waste' campaign to educate consumers on reducing food waste. <i>By AWRFA</i></p>
4.6. Reduce food waste by supermarkets.	<p>4.6.1. Ongoing dialogue with local Coles and Woolworths supermarkets to encourage daily food pick-ups (rather than twice or three times weekly) by FoodShare. <i>By Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare</i></p>

COW Policy Environment

Food security in relation to the themes described above is inconsistently and/or under-referenced in various COW reports, including the Wodonga Council Plan 2013-14 to 2016-17, the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) [under review] and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). Note, however, that two members of the HTW team (Claire Taylor and Megan Freeman) are involved in the revision of the MSS.

Plans to develop a COW Food Security Strategic Plan were put on hold due to resourcing issues.

Goals	Strategies
5.1. Increase references to food security across range of COW documentation.	<p>5.1.1. Review existing COW policies and reports (including those mentioned above) to determine adequacy of current references to food security in relation to the themes mentioned, then advocate for appropriate inclusions. Note: Six other Healthy Together Communities are currently also looking to develop their local food policies – collaboration with them may be beneficial.</p> <p><i>By COW</i></p> <p>5.1.2. Revisit plans to develop a COW Food Security Strategic Plan.</p> <p><i>By COW</i></p>

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Appendix 1

Watering restrictions – impact on productive home gardeners

Information obtained from seven members of a local gardening/permaculture group (Permi8) in July 2013, when asked for feedback about impact of past watering restrictions.

- Some people decided not to grow vegies at all during periods of water restrictions (in the belief vegies need significantly more water than other plants), others grew fewer vegies during restrictions and still others weren't willing to sacrifice their vegie patch (arguing that it doesn't use a lot of water compared to the benefits of feeding a family).
- Crop yields (fruit and vegies) were affected by the restrictions. Trees weren't supposed to be watered at all so little or no fruit grew during this time. One respondent, however, refused to comply with the water restrictions on her fruit trees. She saw their benefits in terms of food and shade and wasn't prepared to sacrifice them.
- A number of respondents bought water tanks during the restrictions, some also bought low-flow soaker hoses and/or timers. For some this was a considerable expense. One commented on the difficult Council regulations re tanks not being visible from the street.
- Several respondents recycled their household water using the bucketing method...in some cases resulting in 'bucket back'.
- The impracticality, inefficiency, inequality and 'social effect' of the regulations were mentioned, including
 1. Impracticality of trying to hand water at set times with young children and work commitments.
 2. Inefficiency of some timed watering systems (such as those set for 4am which were poorly angled so you didn't see water pouring down the gutters).
 3. Inequality with farms and seeing 'paddocks of vegetables being watered in the middle of a hot summer's day with sprinklers'.
 4. Social effect of restrictions – 'during restrictions, if people were out watering, they were always scared when I said hello and immediately justified ahead of saying anything else why they were watering at that time, whether it was within restriction time or not. How does this foster community spirit which is so often lacking?'
- This led one respondent to state she would prefer a water quota that could be self-managed, so she could water when she wanted to or had the time (sometimes she overwatered if she thought she wouldn't be home during the next allocated watering time).
- One respondent commented that we need to plan for lower water use in summer for food growing e.g. growing some things in shady spots or protected from western sun by taller plantings, covering with growing shade, planning on having things flowering and fruiting early in the summer instead of having a high water need in peak summer, having lots of organic matter in soil, reusing water, using grey water, wicking beds etc.
- It was recommended that Councils should proceed with restrictions sensibly, downgrading one step at a time. 'In [shire near Wodonga] there were no restrictions at all, then all of a sudden in one fell swoop – no outside watering at all. Then everyone panicked and pulled out trees and lawn and laid pebbles, this didn't help with cooling the house or surrounding areas at all'.
- Engendering a "water is precious" mindset is probably the priority – because there are no restrictions now, we're not promoting this mindset.

