



Merri-bek
City Council

Food System Stratgey

2024-2027



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Acknowledgement

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Message from the Mayor

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I present to you the Merri-bek Food System Strategy 2024–2027. We recognise the critical role that food systems play in our health, wellbeing, and the sustainability of our environment. We acknowledge that our food systems will continue to be impacted by climate related events and economic factors.

Our vision is to continue to build a just and vibrant food system—one that addresses ongoing food insecurity, strengthens our current networks, and empowers our community.

The Merri-bek Food System Strategy encompasses all aspects of a well-connected food system—from production and processing to distribution and access, and finally, consumption and waste recovery, which then feeds back into production. This holistic approach will help us build a resilient and sustainable local economy.

We are deeply committed to tackling food insecurity. Our strategy will strengthen existing networks and trial innovative pilot programs to increase access to healthy and nutritious food.

Our planning for the future is based on empirical research conducted locally and successful models from around the world facing similar challenges. This research will guide our actions and ensure that our efforts are tailored to the realities of our community.

We will continue to support essential food relief services that address the immediate needs of our residents. Additionally, we will promote education about nutritious food and gardening to ensure our community is well-informed, empowered and resilient.

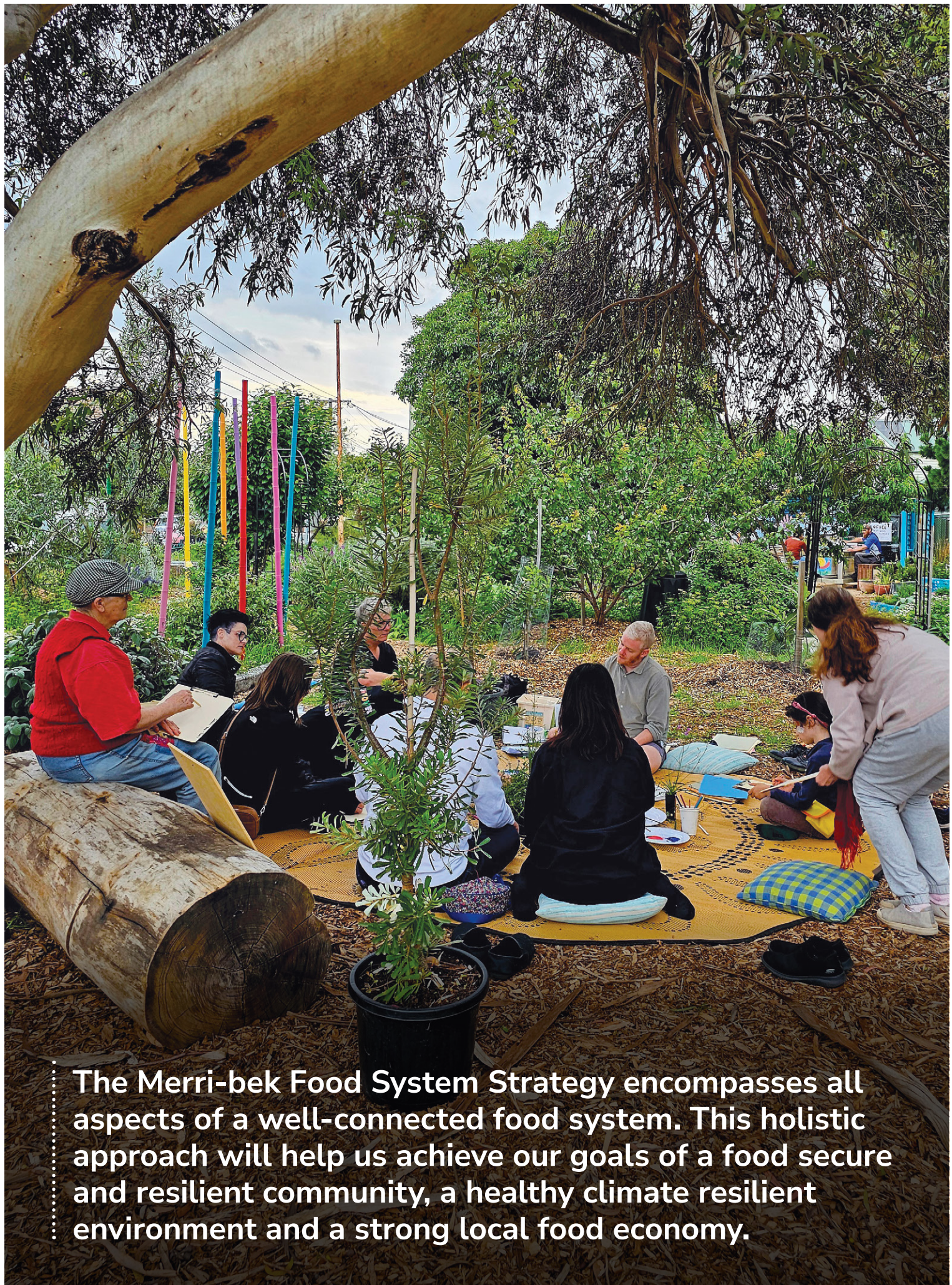


I am excited to witness the transformative efforts that will positively impact our community.

Thank you.

Cr Adam Pulford
Mayor, Merri-bek City Council

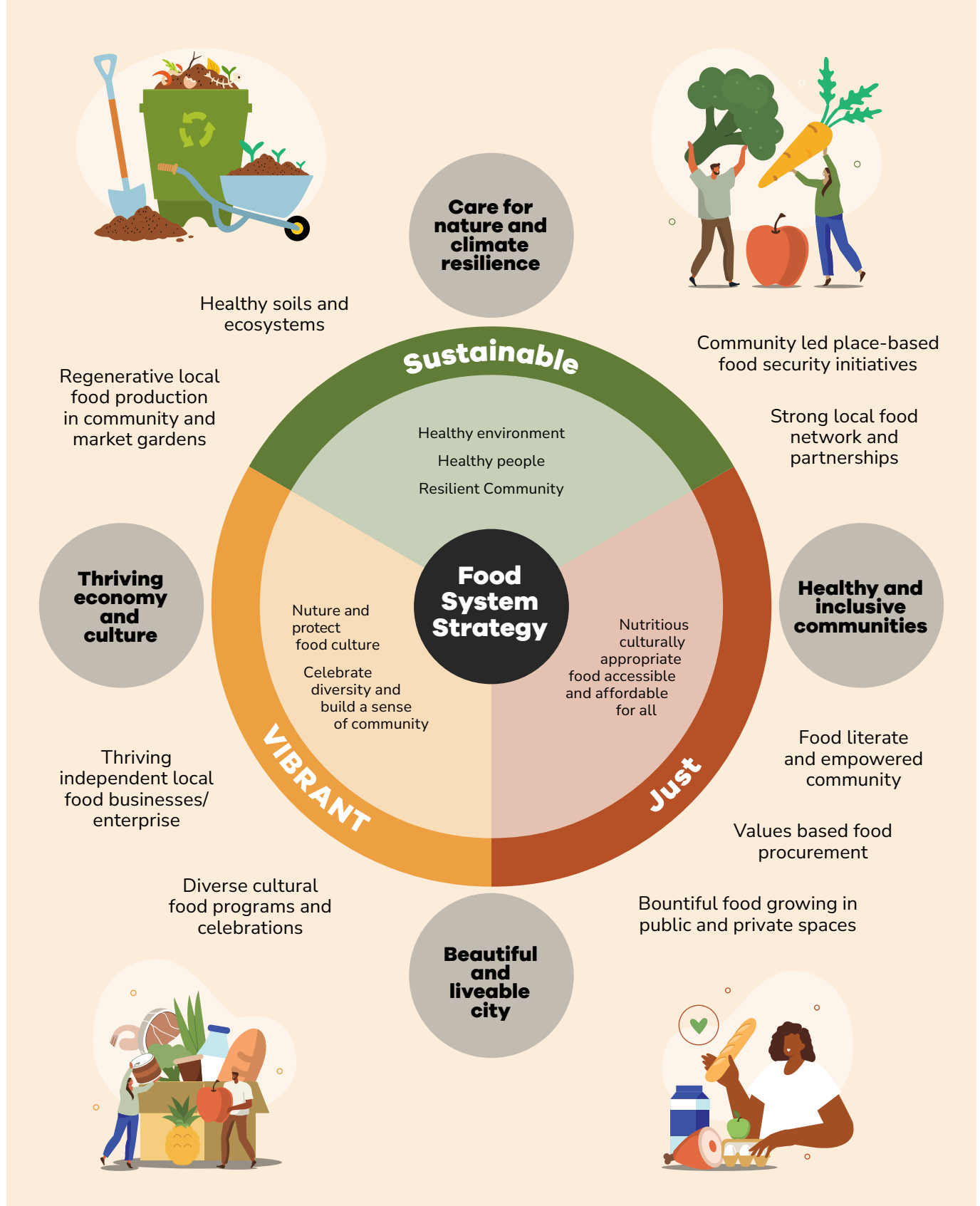




The Merri-bek Food System Strategy encompasses all aspects of a well-connected food system. This holistic approach will help us achieve our goals of a food secure and resilient community, a healthy climate resilient environment and a strong local food economy.

Vision

Our vision is a food system that is Sustainable, Just and Vibrant



What is a Food System?

The food system is everything that happens from farm to fork, from paddock to plate and from soil to stomach so that we can all eat every day. It's farming, it's food processing and manufacturing, it's transport and logistics, it's retail and marketing, it's consumption – eating and cooking, and it's dealing with waste and recycling. The food system impacts climate, biodiversity and human health.^{xiv}

Our predominant food system is not sustainable:



Remote production

- Large scale monoculture of crops and livestock rely on chemical fertilisers, pesticides and antibiotics
- Vulnerable to drought, floods and other severe weather events



Long distance transport

- Generates greenhouse gas emissions
- Risk of supply disruptions



Remote processing

- Large centralised warehouses and factories generate food and packaging waste
- Processed food is a leading cause of diet related disease



Long distance distribution

- Generates greenhouse gas emissions
- Risk of supply disruptions



Limited food access points

- Large companies monopolise food access which can mean higher costs and consumers have little control over the types and variety of foods available
- Economic benefit from food sales not retained in the local economy



Local consumption

- Disruptions to supply and fluctuations in price put the socially and financially disadvantaged at risk of food insecurity
- 99% of Australian children do not eat enough vegetables



High waste levels

- One in three Australian households wastes the equivalent of one shopping bag per week of food, costing \$2000 per year



Higher costs, lower nutrients

- Australians are eating more unhealthy, processed foods amid the rising cost of living

We need an alternative local circular food system:

Resource recovery

In a local food system, food waste becomes a resource when it is composted to provide the nutrients for growing more food, creating a circular food economy.

Production

Food grown at home, in community and local market gardens can be grown without harmful chemicals, is fresher and more nutritious because it doesn't need to be transported as far or stored for long periods.

Processing

Diverse local food processing activities, especially if also sold locally, can support employment and keep money circulating in the local economy.

Circular Food System

Consumption

The more local and visible the source of food consumed, the greater awareness of the impact of food on human and planetary health. Growing and consuming your own food is linked to diverse, plant rich healthy diets and improved mental health and well-being.

Access

The greater the number and type of food sources and outlets across Merri-bek, the better residents are able to access foods that meet their nutritional and cultural needs.

Distribution

The more local, diverse and decentralised food distribution is, the more stable and secure our food supply (amount, variety and price) because it is less vulnerable to disruption. It also has less greenhouse gas emissions associated with transport and storage.

When more food is produced and consumed locally, each step in the system works closely with the next, conserving resources and supporting the health of people and the environment.

Executive Summary

Merri-bek Council has been at the forefront of the growing and evolving Food System policy area since the launch of our first Food System Strategy in 2017.

Actions under the Food System Strategy 2024-27 will unite the extensive knowledge, relationships and community networks built over the last seven years to embed the food system change needed for food security and community resilience in the face of the climate emergency and growing social and economic inequality.

Long Term Goals of the Food System Strategy

- Merri-bek community is food secure
- Merri-bek community is resilient
- Merri-bek has a strong local food economy
- Merri-bek environment is healthy and climate resilient.

This will be achieved under the following six strategic focus areas.

Strategic Focus Areas

1. Food Equity and security
2. Sustainable local food production
3. Inclusive, connected food cultures
4. Education and capacity building
5. Strong local food economy
6. Food system advocacy





Introduction

The goals of the Food System Strategy 2017-2020 and its extension 2020-2024 were intentionally ambitious and aspirational. Council recognises that a long-term investment in food system change is needed to capitalise on the achievements of these strategies.

The Food System Strategy vision and goals have never been more relevant and important. Our food system is under strain from more frequent and severe shocks which are disrupting global supply chains. These include climate change related floods, fires and drought, the pandemic and geopolitical conflict¹.

The importance of healthy, accessible, affordable local food systems for food security and community resilience is recognised in the Council Action Plan 2021-25. The State Government has also recognised that healthier food systems support healthier people and help deal with the impacts of climate change. The Victorian State Health plan requires Councils to consider implementing healthy and sustainable food system initiatives to help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, improve access to fresh, healthy and affordable food and improve health outcomes. The VicHealth Strategy 2023-33 has shifted focus from individual risk factors to a systems-based approach. Food systems is one of three key focus areas to better understand and respond to the many complex factors influencing and impacting on health.

More local government areas are seeing the relevance and need for resilient food systems. They are adopting a food system approach to help deal with climate change impacts, the rising cost of living and inequality. Merri-bek Council is a partner in the multi-year University of Melbourne Foodprint research project which aims to strengthen Victoria's food system to the impacts of shocks and stresses by providing evidence and guidance about how to properly plan for food resilience.

A long term investment in food systems is needed for meaningful change.





Principles

The core principles on which the original Food System Strategy were founded continue to apply to Council's strategic vision for a vibrant, just and sustainable food system, with additional background informed by community engagement. Council will:

- 1.** Address the full breath of a circular, closed loop food system (growing, processing, distribution, access, consumption and disposal) to deliver multiple social, environmental and economic benefit
- 2.** Build on existing community strengths and initiatives, delivering long-term sustained benefit by supporting and resourcing collaboration and partnerships with committed community members and organisations
- 3.** Apply human rights and equity principles to all actions and initiatives, recognising that access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food is a fundamental and universal human right
- 4.** Align the food system strategy with other Council policies and actions in an integrated, whole-of-council approach
- 5.** Collaborate with research institutions, peak bodies and other levels of government to advocate for the legislative and systemic changes needed to achieve our vision
- 6.** Ensure the strategy remains flexible, responsive and relevant without compromising the long-term strategic intent and goal

These points have informed the new direction of our strategic focus areas for 2024-2027.

Strategic Priorities

A strong foundation has been built during the first seven years of the Food System Strategy from which to expand and deepen our program work.

Overview

Strategic Focus Area	2024-27 Priorities
1. Food equity and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen the Food and Material relief service sector and advocate for investment in addressing food security• Secure external funding for the Community Food Hub project• Continue to evaluate the outputs of the Community Food Hub project as a long-term holistic solution to food insecurity
2. Sustainable Local Food Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to support and promote the benefits of regenerative agriculture and gardening• Review and streamline Council processes for enabling food growing in public spaces
3. Inclusive, Connected Food Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with key organisations to engage local communities and celebrate cultural food festivals• Honour First Nations knowledge and culture in urban agriculture/edible landscapes and food practices
4. Education and Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement educational gardening programs to upskill and empower communities to grow food• Host local food system network forums to encourage collaboration, share resources and bridge gaps• Support and upskill community organisations to monitor and evaluate their impacts
5. Strong Local Food Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support local community food enterprises to establish and thrive• Help create viable local independent production, processing, logistics / distribution and food retail options which support employment and keep money circulating in the local economy
6. Food System Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to participate in local government network forums and collective advocacy to State and Federal government• Continue to participate in strategic research projects and partnerships• Advocate for more reliable and ongoing funding streams, support for volunteering and access to infrastructure

1. Food Equity and Security

Food prices and food insecurity have been rising across Victoria and beyond. In 2022, over 8% of Victorian adults reported experiencing 'severe food insecurity'ⁱⁱ

Monitoring of food insecurity in Victoria is infrequent and narrow in scope. It is focused on severe food insecurity only, and the response has been limited to the provision of emergency food reliefⁱⁱⁱ.

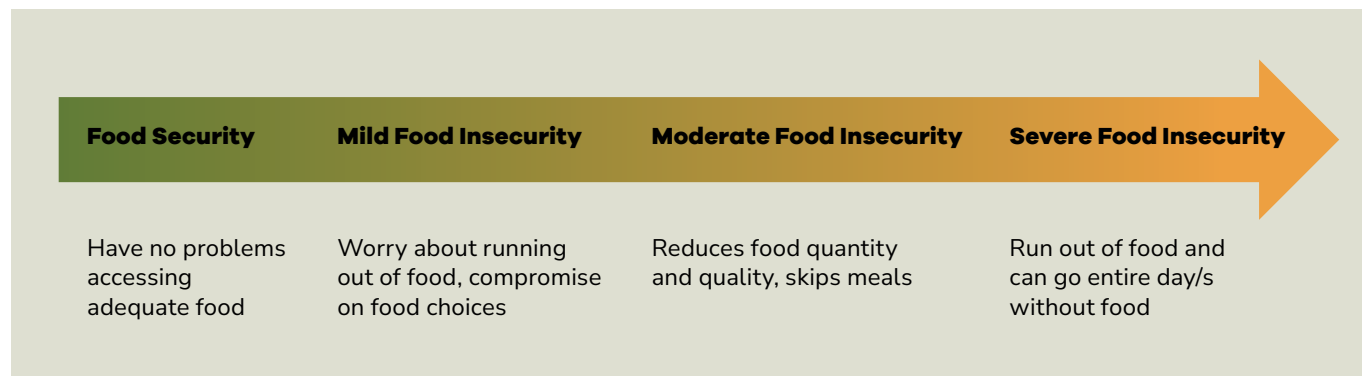


Figure 1: Food insecurity spectrum^{iv}

There is currently a lack of clarity on the responsibilities of state or federal governments for promoting food security and addressing food insecurity^v. The emergency relief sector in Victoria is not well understood in relation to its complexity, scale, nature and the services it delivers. A 2021 report into the sector recommends a long-term investment in solutions to address food insecurity, including a state-wide food relief framework and establishment of a Victorian emergency relief peak body to coordinate action, collect data and information about the sector's operations^{vi}.

The Food System Strategy uses the definition of food security based on six dimensions:

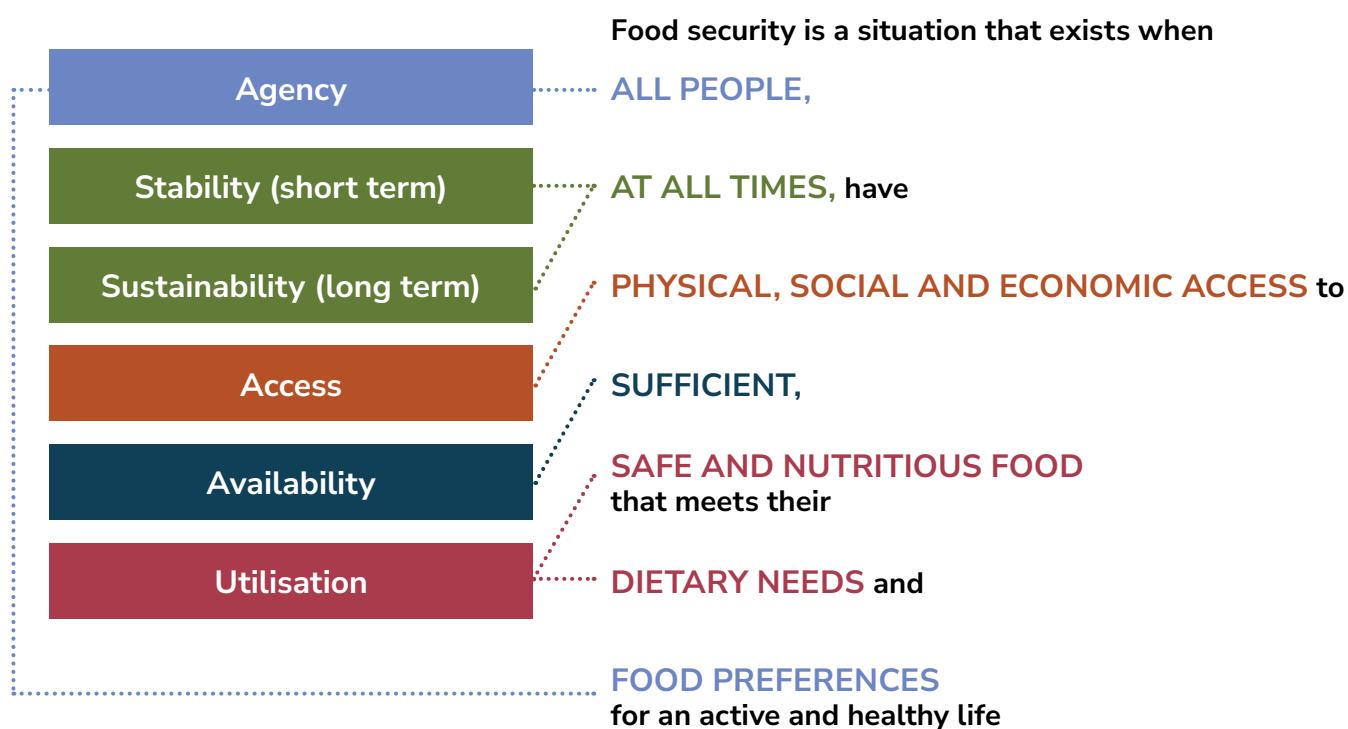


Figure 2: The six dimensions of Food Security^{vii}

All six dimensions of food security need to be addressed to achieve food security. The emergency food relief response focuses primarily on availability, and to a lesser extent access. Food relief and food security organisations in Merri-bek are struggling to meet the demand for food relief and are facing multiple challenges such as lack of coordination with other services (including assessment and referral processes), chronic under resourcing and reliance on volunteers including for skilled and critical roles.

There are over 22 agencies and organisations providing food and material relief and food security services to Merri-bek residents. These encompass a range of approaches by faith-based organisations, charities, neighbourhood houses and community-led organisations who possess a strong understanding of the needs of their cohorts. Council proposes taking a stronger leadership and facilitation role to support the Merri-bek food and material relief network and to work through the service sector to better measure outcomes and advocate for investment in addressing chronic and acute food insecurity.

Council's Community Food Hub project is taking a long-term holistic approach to food security by identifying the common gaps and needs across community-led organisations and implementing a joint response. This early-intervention model comes from the recommendations in our feasibility study and is based on research from models addressing similar challenges around the world. It aims to prevent mild and moderate food insecurity and lessen the incidence of severe food insecurity. The focus is on improving access / affordability and sustainability as well as availability. Issues being addressed through this project include the lack of a reliable, affordable, quality, nutritious and culturally appropriate food supply, and the lack of food logistics, warehousing and other infrastructure. See the Appendix 1 - Culturally relevant food for Fawkner Case Study for how this is being tested on the ground.

To be effective Council needs to work across local government areas and with other levels of government to both measure and respond across all six interconnected dimensions.



Food Equity and Security: Current direction

- Community food hub in the north project and coordinator
- Food Leadership Action Group (FLAG)
- Community Food Hub grants program
- Collective Impact Measurement framework/tool



Food Equity and Security: New direction for 2024-27

- Strengthen the Food and Material relief sector and advocate for investment in addressing food security
- Secure external funding for the Community Food Hub project
- Continue to evaluate the outputs of the Community Food Hub project as a long-term holistic solution to food insecurity





2. Sustainable Local Food Production

There is continued strong interest from the Merri-bek community in urban agriculture and food growing. This includes development and expansion of existing community garden sites as well as interest in establishing new sites. Merri-bek community and market gardens want to see increased awareness and recognition of the many community benefits, which are supported by research into the broader urban agriculture sector^{viii}.

Social and economic benefits include developing farming and food growing skills, increased access to fresh food, building community connections and wellbeing, supporting shared learning and respect for different cultures and cultural identity. The environmental benefits of growing food on underutilised land include regenerating soil and promoting biodiversity, recycling of water and nutrients (through composting), and contributing to urban greening.

Urban agriculture and local food production is recognised in the Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy as an important action to both mitigate (reduce greenhouse gases causing climate change) and help our community adapt to the impacts of climate change. Access to local food grown in healthy soils which can withstand heatwaves and reduce stormwater run-off becomes more important as rising temperatures and severe weather events disrupt global food supplies. The sense of community and resilience that can be fostered through the collective growing and sharing of food is also a buffer against climate shocks and stresses.

Collaboration across council departments is needed to reduce barriers and increase support for urban agriculture, including through identification of and more secure access to underutilised land, volunteer support, investment in circular economies and access to capital and funding. These issues will be addressed through the review and update of the communal food growing guidelines and toolkit.



Sustainable Local Food Production: Current direction

- Strengthen urban agriculture operations and governance - Community Garden forums
- Support to establish new food growing spaces/sites



Sustainable Local Food Production: New direction for 2024-27

- Continue to support and promote the benefits of regenerative agriculture and gardening
- Review and streamline Council processes for enabling food growing in public spaces



3. Inclusive, Connected Food Cultures

Council facilitates inclusive and diverse cultural food programs through partnerships with Merri-bek organisations to deliver food events and festivals which support community connection and inclusion. Council has partnered with CERES to deliver the popular annual community festival Olives to Oil since 2021. In 2023, Council sponsored the Coburg Garden Festival, a collaboration between 8 Coburg based groups in a celebration of community, food and gardening and will continue to partner with organisations.

The outcomes and benefits of these initiatives are described in more detail in Appendix 1 Case Studies.

There is a growing interest and recognition from the Merri-bek community, as well as more widely, of the importance of recognising First Nations people and their food culture and knowledge systems in food system policy^{ix}. Council will work directly with First Nations communities to honour Aboriginal knowledge and cultural belonging and support urban connections to Country through urban agriculture and edible landscapes in Merri-bek.



Inclusive, connected food cultures: Current direction

- Celebrate food and culture through multicultural food events and shared learning
- Partner with CERES to deliver the annual Olives to Oil festival



Inclusive, connected food cultures: New direction for 2024-27

- Work with key organisations to engage local communities and celebrate cultural food festivals
- Honour First Nations knowledge and culture in urban agriculture/edible landscapes and food practices

4. Education and Capacity Building

Council is committed to building food skills and knowledge in the community. My Smart Garden is a free sustainable gardening community education program run collaboratively by partner Councils in metropolitan Naarm/Melbourne. It aims to support residents to grow their own food, protect their home from sun and wind, support biodiversity, use water wisely and reduce waste. Since becoming a member in 2021, Council has held or co-hosted over 30 free workshops and events and over 2000 Merri-bek residents have participated in the program.

78% of surveyed My Smart Garden participants started or improved fruit and vegetable growing and 89% report saving money through the program.

My Smart Garden Program
Evaluation Report November 2022

The My Smart Garden program won the 2023 Tidy City & Sustainability Education award and the Community Champion award at the 2023 Premier's Sustainability Awards, in the Thriving Environment Category.

In late 2023, an executive board of member Councils was established who employed a Program Coordinator to work with Councils to develop the 2024-29 My Smart Garden Strategic Plan. This will focus the priorities and strengthen the delivery of the program in the coming years.

Merri-bek food groups recognise and value the important role Council plays in facilitating relationships, partnerships and networks. Council will continue to support community groups through the coordination of the Local Food System Network and by hosting networking forums to share best practice food system projects and case studies.

In addition to support for governance processes, community groups and service providers told us they need help to measure their impacts and benefits, to raise the profile of the work and attract more funding and resourcing. Council will explore ways to upskill community in the implementation of data collection and monitoring and evaluation processes.



Education and Capacity Building: Current direction

- Join the My Smart Garden education program
- Local Food System network/forums



Education and Capacity Building: New direction for 2024-27

- Implement educational gardening programs to upskill and empower communities to grow food
- Host local food system network forums to encourage collaboration, share resources and bridge gaps
- Support and upskill community organisations to monitor and evaluate their impacts



5. Strong Local Food Economy

This is a new focus area for 2024-27. Merri-bek has a vibrant, diverse range of local independent market gardens, food processors, grocers, hospitality and retail outlets which contribute to the local food economy. There is a strong food manufacturing sector, providing more than 1,000 local jobs.

New manufacturing centres are being established, such as in Newlands Road, Coburg, driven by access to skilled labour and good transport connections. Merri-bek residents place a high value and importance on local food stores which, alongside the major supermarket chains, are their main source of food.

Local and regional decentralised and diverse food supply chains can create jobs, improve livelihoods and contribute to the resilience of Melbourne's food supply.^x

Facilitating collaboration between food businesses, education providers, Community Food Enterprise (CFE) and community food groups can further strengthen the local food economy and livelihoods through training, education and employment opportunities.

CFE's and community food groups in Merri-bek need help with business skills, financial and volunteer management. Council will explore partnering with organisations that have skills and experience in running small scale food wholesale and retail enterprises, to offer training and support for people who want to set up and run a CFE in Merri-bek. Embedding support for local food enterprises in Council's catering and food procurement processes is another key opportunity, as is looking into broadening access to Council's funding and grant programs. Council will share relevant business support services and opportunities to access infrastructure, for example commercial kitchens.



New Strategic Direction: Strong Local Food Economy

- Support local community food enterprises to establish and thrive
- Help create viable local independent production, processing, logistics / distribution and food retail options which support employment and keep money circulating in the local economy





Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti

6. Food System Advocacy

Merri-bek will continue to join with other Councils and food system actors to advocate for the legislative and systemic changes needed to achieve our Food System goals. Merri-bek became a signatory to the Victorian Food System Consensus Statement in 2023. Access to food as a human right is one of the leading advocacy points under the statement.

The Merri-bek Human Rights Policy recognises access to healthy, safe, affordable culturally appropriate food as a significant equity issue requiring Council's support / intervention. The human right to food has not been legislated in Australia, so governments cannot be held accountable for food security. Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities could be extended to include the human right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.^{xi}

Council will join with other councils to advocate for a state policy framework which is supportive of local food systems and urban agriculture, for example through the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, Planning and Environment Act and Climate Change Act and Strategy. This would enable greater policy coherence and impact at the local government level, through the local urban planning scheme and land use policies.^{xii}

Council will continue to advocate internally and externally to secure the funding and resourcing needed to support community led food system initiatives. This includes full coverage for volunteer management, governance, base operations and allowance for data collection and the evaluation of projects and initiatives. Support to access premises and other infrastructure will be provided through community infrastructure planning and expression of interest processes.



Food System Advocacy: Current direction

- Sustain Australia local government network forums
- Participation in research projects e.g. Melbourne Uni Foodprint
- Signatory to the Victorian Food System Consensus Statement



Food System Advocacy: New direction for 2024-27

- Continue to participate in local
- government network forums and collective advocacy to State and Federal government
- Continue to participate in strategic research projects and partnerships
- Advocate for more reliable and ongoing funding streams, support for volunteering and access to infrastructure

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Food System program includes a range of responses – from the immediate or short-term which are constrained by business-as-usual limitations – to exploring longer term innovative interventions to redesign and ultimately transform the food system.

To achieve our vision, we need the full range of responses working together to ensure our activities progress towards change at a structural and systemic level.

The Food System Strategy outcome logic model in Figure 2 (page 20) provides the theory of how system change will occur. It shows the causal links between the Strategy activities and the desired outcomes, leading to the intended changes over time.

Based on what has been learned about the effectiveness and impact of the work in the last four years, these links have been updated to more clearly define the proposed pathways to achieving the Strategy vision.

Monitoring and evaluation of the food system strategy has been primarily through tracking the numbers of events / activities and participants, surveying participants of Council-run or partnered events, reporting on project-based outcomes / achievements and developing case studies.

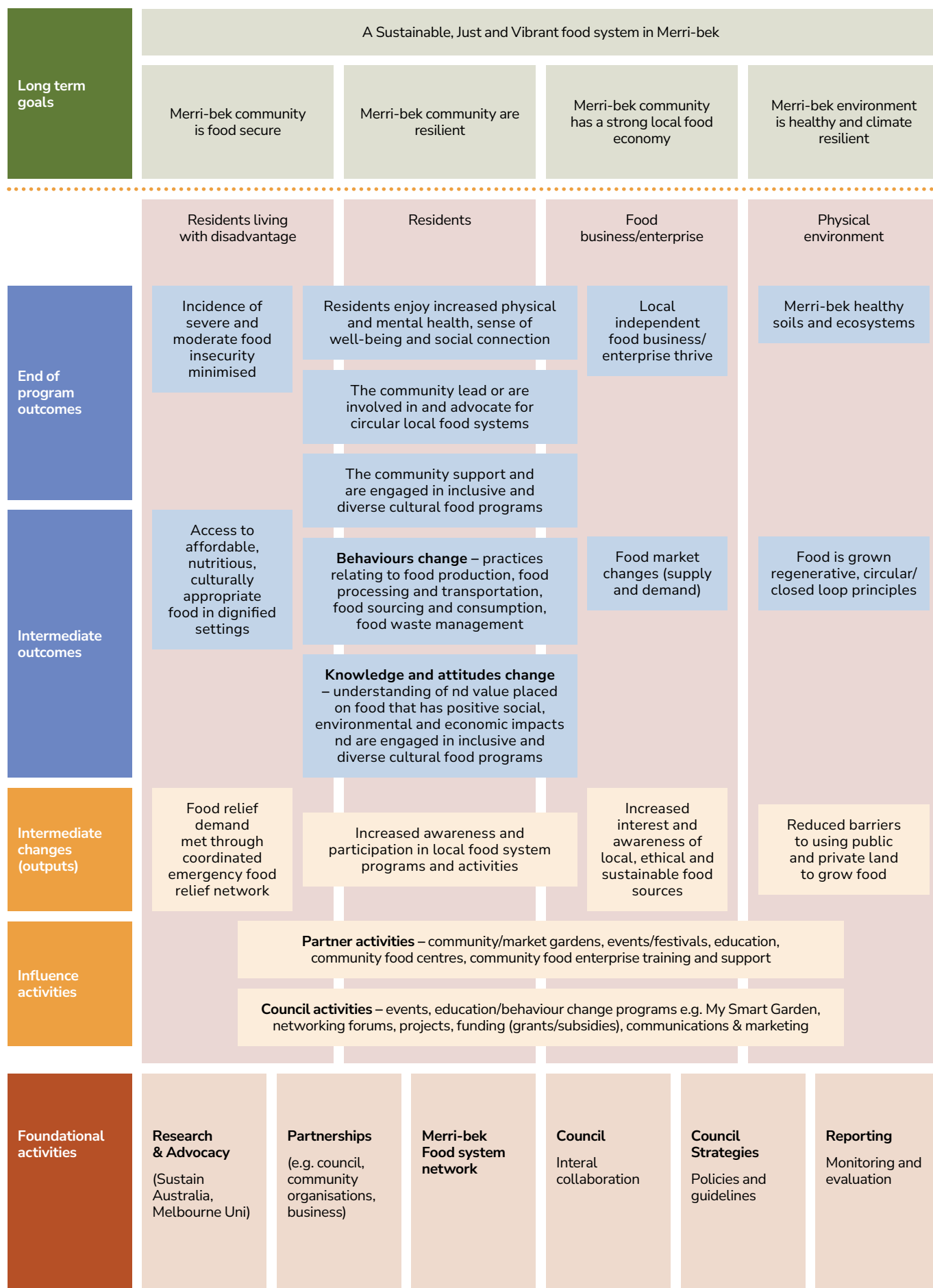
Council commits to working with community groups to help improve monitoring and evaluation processes, including support to identify indicators and implement data collection processes (see Strategic Priority 4. Education and Capacity Building).

Food System Strategy goals align closely with the Climate Risk Strategy, Social Cohesion Plan and Zero Carbon Merri-bek Action Plan. We will work with these complementary program areas to identify and implement shared indicators in the monitoring and reporting of the Strategy's progress during 2024-27.

The development of Merri-bek specific food security indicators will be a focus in 2024-27 to better measure the success of the Strategy. Just as the rising demand for emergency food relief services is an indicator of a food system that is failing to deliver social equity, health, and wellbeing for the whole Merri-bek community, improved food security is an indicator of a fairer, more effective and healthier food system.



Figure 3: Food System Strategy Outcome Logic



Appendices



Appendix 1: Case Studies

Case Study: Culturally Relevant Food for Fawkner

Merri Food Hub (MFH) is a community food initiative based at the Fawkner Senior Citizens Centre. The Hub offers an affordable, safe and consistent supply of culturally relevant fruits and vegetables to Merri-bek residents sourced from local growers and suppliers who prioritise environmentally sustainable practices. **Fawkner Food Bowls (FFB)** is a supplier of fresh local produce, as well as an inclusive communal growing space that supports food system education and learning.

Project aims

Between July to December 2022, MFH received funding through the Community Food Hub project to partner with FFB to:

1. Increase access to culturally relevant foods to the Fawkner population who are among the most diverse and have among the highest reported rates of food insecurity in Merri-bek
2. Build partnerships to establish a viable local supply of fresh food using existing infrastructure

How it worked

The project paid for an Operations Manager at MFH to coordinate production and distribution with FFB, assess community needs through surveys and on-site conversations with customers, and promote the availability of culturally relevant foods.

An Urban Farm Manager was also employed to support scaling up production at Fawkner Food Bowls and coordinate what crops were grown with the identified needs of MFH's customer base.

MFH and FFB worked together to coordinate the transport and cold storage of produce from FFB and other Merri-bek producers to MFH to be distributed through their weekly market and food boxes.

Outcomes

24 culturally relevant foods, as identified by MFH customers, were included in subsidised fresh produce box for customers facing food insecurity, which had the same choice, range and quality enjoyed by full paying customers. Average weekly MFH customers increased from 90 to 158 during the project, 38% from multicultural backgrounds.

The two roles worked effectively together to identify availability of relevant produce, what was selling well or in demand, and to plan what would be planted and harvested. This coordination supported both enterprises by providing certainty on both ends of the supply chain. They also enabled good coordination and utilisation of cold storage at FFB and transport of produce from FFB and other growing sites by volunteers to MFH.



Key Learnings

- Having the paid Operations Manager and Urban Farm Manager role enabled Merri Food Hub and Fawkner Food Bowls to scale up their impact based on existing models that are informed by community needs and experience
- Access to physical infrastructure is an ongoing gap and need for Community Food enterprises like Merri Food Hub
- Urban farm models like FFB need more development to provide a reliable, affordable and consistent supply of food to organisations like MFH delivering food security services

Case Study: CERES Olives to Oil Festival

Since 2021, Council has teamed up with CERES for the annual Olives to Oil Festival, which brings people from different demographics and backgrounds together to harvest olives and have them pressed communally into delicious, local olive oil.

How it works

Residents get together with family, friends and neighbours to harvest olives in backyards and public streets and parks, then drop them in bulk containers at CERES environment park. The olives go to a Victorian olive processor and are returned to participants as olive oil.

Outcomes and benefits

300 Merri-bek households have collected a total of 9 tonne of olives since 2021, with 70% of those surveyed saying the festival helped them connect with their community and neighbours.

2023 Olives to Oil Festival Evaluation Report

The event promotes the benefits of local produce by transforming unused olives from neighbourhood trees into nutritious, locally produced oil. There is a great collective excitement generated by sharing in the olive bounty on collection day, as well as the food, music, tree care workshops and demonstration oil pressing activities.

Not only does the festival make use of a precious urban food resource that often goes to waste, but it is also about celebrating the cultural food heritage of Melbourne, particularly the traditions brought by post-war Greek and Italian migrants who planted olive trees.

The diversity of olive sources has resulted in delicious oil vintages that have won awards. The Olives to Oil festival was awarded 2023 Merri-bek Community Event of the Year.

Merrin Layden, CERES Community Food Systems Manager says in the Guardian:

‘Making oil from olives is difficult to do for households, as you need access to a processor, a large batch of olives and complicated equipment. The program was born out of wanting to bring the community together over a shared harvesting tradition.’



Olive Collection Day at CERES in Brunswick.



Case Study: Coburg Garden Festival

In December 2023, Council supported Newlands Neighbourhood House and Reynard Street Neighbourhood House to host the inaugural Coburg Garden Festival.

A celebration of community, food and gardening, the festival brought together eight passionate community partners who hosted 15 events over three days across Coburg.

A central theme of the festival was recognition that all gardening activities in Merri-bek are being done on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country and are therefore occurring within an ancient and ongoing ecology that is integral to the life of the First Nations people of this Country.

Participants were treated to multicultural food, music, community garden tours and nature walks, and gardening and composting workshops. The community partners involved in this hyper-local festival demonstrated what a circular food system looks like on the ground: growing, preparing, consuming and recycling our food in ways which respect the limits of our natural resources, enhance soil health and biodiversity and honour traditional food cultures.



Figure 4: Map of event sites, Coburg Garden Festival, 1-3 December 2023

Appendix 2: Definitions

Community garden

Public or private land gardened by a group.

Closed Looped Food System

A food system that maintains the connection between all its components (production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and waste recovery). Looped food systems are facilitated by growing, processing, distributing, consuming and composting in the same local area or region.

Community Food Enterprises (CFEs)

Locally owned/controlled food businesses or ventures founded around a desire to create positive outcomes for the communities they serve. This can include improved social or environmental outcomes, increased access to healthy food and support for local regenerative and ethical producers. CFE's can be community cooperatives, not-for-profit or for-profit social enterprises.

Community Food Hubs

Centres or networks that work directly with farmers and the community to assist in the marketing and distribution of nutritious food, conduct consumer education and outreach, community engagement and farmer training.

Food security

When all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary need and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Food system

Everything from farming, food processing, transportation and the selling of food, through to how we buy, enjoy and dispose of food. We all have an influence on the food system through what we choose to eat and where we obtain food. The food system also influences the way that we eat through the types of food that are available to us, its cost and the way it is marketed.

Local food system

A food system that provides for most or all of its components (production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and waste recovery) to occur in the same region or local area.

Nutritious Food

A variety of food in accordance with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, balanced against the body's requirements for growth, metabolism and physical activity across the life stages, and consumed regularly and consistently without periods of over consumption or severe restriction.

Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture uses farming principles and practices that effectively rebuild soil health and landscape diversity and function.

Appendix 3: Engagement

Engaging extensively with Merri-bek residents and community organisations in early 2024 has confirmed the value of and support for the strategic focus areas and food system programs and initiatives already in progress. It also highlighted that Merri-bek has a diverse range of independent food businesses, a good foundation from which the new strategic direction – strong local food economy – was created.

There were some clear common issues and potential solutions which emerged that have been prioritised in the 2024-27 Strategy.

Council also engaged comprehensively with organisations who have clients or members who are disadvantaged and have a lived experience of being food insecure. This has given a good understanding the number and types of services provided and the challenges that need to be addressed to enable these organisations to meet their clients' needs.

Appendix 4: Victorian Food Systems Consensus Statement

Notice of Motion 13 September 2023:

'The City of Merri-bek endorses the actions and leverage points in this consensus statement because we believe it will lead to a better food system for Merri-bek, other local government areas and for Victoria more broadly. A food system that is healthy, regenerative and equitable for decades to come. One that guarantees a right to food for all and fosters a resilient, thriving community. Amid the sky-rocketing cost of living and speculation on vital agricultural land in Victoria, it is imperative that we commit to strategies that enable access to food for all, protect our food production industries and regenerate the land'.

The Victorian Food Systems Consensus Statement, Towards A Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria^{xiii}

Leverage Point 1:

Right to Food Law

Create an enabling policy environment to transform Victoria's food system by legislating the right to food in Victoria and embedding it into all relevant State and Local Government policies, budgeting processes and activities.

Leverage Point 2:

Food Systems Governance

Strengthen food systems governance capacity by establishing a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.

Leverage Point 3:

Food Systems Monitoring

Advance better food systems strategy and policy design by establishing a comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring framework in Victoria's State of the Environment Report.

Leverage Point 4:

Agroecological Food Production

Support the transition to regenerative farming practices to enhance ecological function and build resilience by proactively supporting and resourcing agroecological solutions.

Leverage Point 5:

Local Food Infrastructure

Strengthen local and regional food systems by creating a Local Food Investment Fund to grow capacity, improve coordination and drive efficiencies in local food infrastructure.

Leverage Point 6:

Public Sector Food Procurement and Retail

Transition all public sector food procurement and retail to preference healthy and sustainably produced food sourced locally or regionally by developing compulsory social and ethical food procurement and retail standards and implementation assistance.

Leverage Point 7:

School Food Systems

Transform Victorian school food systems and enhance food systems literacy by working with our educational community and allocating appropriate resourcing and investment.

Leverage Point 8:

Community Food Systems Strategies

Require, empower and resource local councils to lead the participatory development of community food system strategies by amending the Public Health and Well-being Act 2008.

Leverage Point 9:

Community Food Systems Planning

Prioritise and promote healthy community food systems by reforming Victorian Planning Provisions legislation to explicitly state the promotion of health, alongside economic, environmental and social well-being considerations.

Leverage Point 10:

Food Relief Models

Improve dignified access to fresh and healthy food by developing a new, coordinated and collaborative approach with the food relief sector.

Appendix 5: References

- i Carey, R., Murphy, M. and Behen, T. (2024) Planning a resilient food system for Victoria. The University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124375>
- ii The 2022 Victorian Population Health Survey indicates that around 8.1% of Victorian adults had experienced 'severe food insecurity' in the past 12 months; that is, they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more, a 40% increase since 2020.
- iii Carey, R., Murphy, M. and Behen, T. (2024) Planning a resilient food system for Victoria. The University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124375>
- iv adapted from FAO (2024) and Australian Household Food Security Data Coalition. Carey, R., Murphy, M. and Behen, T. (2024) Planning a resilient food system for Victoria. The University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124375>
- v Carey, R., Murphy, M. and Behen, T. (2024) Planning a resilient food system for Victoria. The University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124375>
- vi Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic), Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) 2021, More than a band-aid: Emergency Relief in Victoria, Melbourne. <https://vcoss.org.au/uncategorized/2021/06/emergency-relief/>
- vii Source: HLPE. (2020). Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.
- viii Donati, K. and Rose, N. (2022). Growing Edible Cities and Towns: A Survey of the Victorian Urban Agriculture Sector. Sustain: The Australian Food Network. <https://doi.org/10.57128/MIUD6079> 'Environmental and social values are key drivers in the urban agriculture sector. Creating a healthy food system is a high priority for 98% of respondents. Enhancing mental health/wellbeing, creating more self-sufficient communities and healthier urban environments, responding to climate change, localising the food economy, connecting directly with customers and advocacy for more edible cities were also very/extremely important to over 80% of respondents'.
- ix Donati, K. and Rose, N. (2022). Growing Edible Cities and Towns: A Survey of the Victorian Urban Agriculture Sector. Sustain: The Australian Food Network. <https://doi.org/10.57128/MIUD6079>
- x <https://science.unimelb.edu.au/foodprint-melbourne/publications/infographic-resilient-food-supply-chain>
- xi Carey, R., Murphy, M. and Behen, T. (2024) Planning a resilient food system for Victoria. The University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124375>
- xii Donati, K. and Rose, N. (2022). Growing Edible Cities and Towns: A Survey of the Victorian Urban Agriculture Sector. Sustain: The Australian Food Network. <https://doi.org/10.57128/MIUD6079>
- xiii Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group, 2022. Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement. <https://vicfoodsystem.org.au/>
- xiv International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems 2015 (IPES), p3, 'The new science of sustainable food systems'



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Merri-bek Language Link

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