

Summary of City of Casey: Food Security Framework for Action Stakeholder Workshop

Date: 20/02/2023

Participants: Approximately 30



Summary

The Stakeholder Workshop was held at the Old Cheese Factory in Berwick on February 20th 2023. This participatory workshop brought together approximately 30 stakeholders including council staff across 10 departments, frontline service providers, community organisations and property developers.

Sara Ball, manager of Connected Communities, started the workshop off and highlighted the importance of local governments working in a participatory way to create new frameworks for change. Nick Rose, executive director of Sustain: The Australian Food Network introduced the days activities, set the context of food security in Australia and in the City of Casey, and described the drivers of food insecurity and the impact it can have if ignored. Molly, project coordinator of Sustain, gave an overview of the benchmarking report and community survey. The workshop also had four guest speakers to further contextualise food security in Casey. Leanne Petrides from Community Information and Support Cranbourne, and Helen Small from Casey North Community Information and Support Service, spoke about the experience of working within a front line agency. While Fatima Haidary and Tessa McManus from Feast of Nations talked about their upcoming program to connect young people with their food cultures.

Throughout the workshop stakeholders participated in reflective discussions on the benchmarking and community survey findings, conducted a SWOT analysis of their organisation and devised priority short and longer-term actions to guide the development of the framework.

The key themes that emerged from these activities were:

- Wanting to working together and building networks
- The need to collect robust food insecurity data
- Residents are affected by: lack of time, lack of transport, cost of living, limited cultural diversity in food relief options
- Support for re-establishing the Emergency Food Relief Network
- Advocating for income inequality and partnering with neighbouring councils to strengthen impact
- Securing greater support for food relief organisations already working on the ground
- Creating opportunities for home growing and community gardens
- Supporting culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Designing programs for food literacy, time-saving skills, and healthy food
- Embedding urban food production into new housing developments

Reflections and discussion around themes from benchmarking and community survey

Priority themes for City of Casey

Working together

- Council/organisational design of programs not always reflective of community needs, often as a result of cost constraints or time pressure. We need to take the pride of the person into account and prioritise dignity.
 - Design of programs needs to shift towards a client focus.
 - “We have to be careful (as councils) not to initiate programs that then become red tape” – some people fall to the cracks in terms of accessing support by not having appropriate concession cards or similar.
 - **Making referral processes/access as easy as possible for residents to access services.**
- Relationship building important to achieve effective programs
 - Service providers need to be able to update customer services websites/pages.
 - All organisations work independently. We need to be more strategic in linking services.
 - Using volunteerism as a way to invite people into community initiatives. Using free food as a reward for volunteering.
- We need more effective ways to work with farmers and the act of growing food
 - How are we supporting farmers? Where are the food suppliers in this conversation?
 - Finding out how other councils overcome risks about growing on nature strips.

- Developers are hit by Council's landscape and maintenance areas when it comes to fruit tree planting. There are internal barriers in Council that impact availability of food growing.
- Community Gardens are not allowed to sell produce, so what can they do with it?

Addressing the roots of the problems

- Affordability
 - Community Support Services: feedback from these services reflects the results in that affordability is by far the most important barrier to food security.
 - We can't change mortgages/rent, but we can make it more affordable for people to get to food – e.g. Council/community transport.
 - Having more diversity/variety of food outlets available – supermarkets are more expensive for fresh food.
 - Greengrocer should be mandatory retail in all developments, accompanied by community kitchens – “if you have that as a non-negotiable for new estates, you've started that action”.
- Engaging and advocating for youth in community
 - There is an issue with children not coming to school.
 - Create breakfast programs linked to other before school care programs; make it attached to sport, come for football practice before school and eat breakfast.

Collecting food insecurity data

- There must be better data with a larger sample to see the extent of food security.
 - Local government and local surveys are more effective.

Resident experience reflections

Lack of time

- How can we bring back traditions from childhood of growing, sharing, and foraging for food?
- When there is a network of residents that do all of the above, it is easier to access good food.
- Increased travel time and other family responsibilities (including families working more alongside rising cost of living) leaves no time to cook hot meals
- There is a need for childcare out of business hours
- Potential resource: [No money, no time](#) has lots of recipes
- It takes time to visit multiple venues where you can access healthier options. But if you're time poor how do you manage this?
- Residents who are parents: 'you just want to feed them quickly, if you're exhausted you don't want to argue'

Affordability

- Difficulty in accessing seasonal and healthy foods at supermarkets mainly because it is too expensive
- Need more farmers markets, e.g. at the farmers' market you can buy a box of mangoes for \$10 whereas Coles puts food out to suit themselves rather than customer.
- People are affected by the casualisation of the workforce and the gig economy impacts ability to buy affordable food (such as inability to buy in bulk with living pay-check to pay-check)

Accessibility

- Without a car in Casey, you cannot access anything. A number of comments were made that public transport and the need to have a car in Casey is a main barrier to accessing food.
- This is compounded if you are disabled or unwell.
- Noticeable food shortages after COVID-19, especially cheaper options such as frozen vegetables
- On eating seasonal foods. Farmers' markets seem to make it easier to access what's in season because it is cheaper and in abundance.
- A lot of people needing services don't have access to computers.
- Unhoused and economically disadvantaged are unable to prepare and cook because they are living in cars or sleeping rough.

Cultural diversity

- Language barriers make it hard to access financial counselling or navigation through websites to find food relief options
- It is easy for people with ESL to be taken advantage of because the system is difficult to manage

Community engagement

- Residents don't know that Council is involved in this space because there is little community communication and consultation, such as a lack of knowledge around the existence of community gardens.
- There is a need for more opportunities to home garden and to create community gardens, food swaps, recipe sharing
- Raising awareness could create opportunities to show people innovative ways to store food, cook in bulk, grow their own food

Mapping food security sector in Casey

Prior to the workshop a spreadsheet was distributed to Casey staff to populate services that already exist within the Casey area to form an understanding of the current sector. To further populate this database, during the workshop participants mapped the food security actors they were representing or those they knew but were not present at the workshop. This exercise revealed there are approximately 25 food security providers currently operating in Casey.

Food Security Sector SWOT analysis

City of Casey

Please see the [Comprehensive City of Casey SWOT analysis](#) for further detail

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traits: breadth of know-how, passion, talent, desire to create change, intersectional concepts, internal experts • Broad range of policies, strategies, action plans • Passionate staff who are connected to the community • Existing partnerships with community service organisations and emergency food relief providers • Circular economy living lab • Working across multiple departments • We support all community gardens • We have access to opportunities to advocate to other levels of governments 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity and knowledge of priorities in food security • Loss of experience, history, networks with staff turnover • No dedicated staff resources to drive/innovate/advocate collaboration • We work in silos • Inefficient use of resources • Focus on immediate economy return • Government controlling access to programs • Council policy on food planting prohibits public planting of fruit trees • Previous ER network only met four times a year
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>Resourcing: Reintroduce advisory group, adding experts to administrator panel, funding staff members for food security responses.</p> <p>Planning: Keep food security in mind when undertaking new Council policy and planning.</p> <p>Procurement: Innovative and local approaches to sourcing for relief agencies and leading by example with council event food choices.</p> <p>Communications: Executing meaningful and robust communication strategy across all channels and expanding social media presence, e.g. promoting gardens, food services, local farmers. Console and date resources on food security on council websites and platforms.</p> <p>Networks and partnerships: The development of EFR Network and build partnerships between council, developers, food security services to improve local availability of food. Draw on community power and reach out to grassroots organisations.</p> <p>Community gardens: Funding to support Casey community gardens and advocating for community gardens in growth areas during the PSP process. Capacity building through council programs that trains volunteers or food enthusiasts to encourage local community gardens.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism and intolerance • Lack of broad-based appreciation of need by community • Climate change and increasing number of adverse weather events • Discord between escalating groups, lack of volunteers, fatigue/burnout of leaders leading to maintaining the welfare model • Increase in community demand for gardens with lack of land to facilitate gardens • We might not get community support for Farm2School, find schools to pilot the program, or not find the funding • Dependent on external funding from State/Federal government • Lack of resourcing to continue the EFR network, cost of food security activities, lack of budget allocation • Meaningless politics in the return of Councillors in 2024 • People wanting to uphold the status quo/systems of oppression including conservative Councillors

Frontline agencies

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We help people with complex problems reach permanent solutions in a non-judgemental and supportive way. We have the ability to provide a support that is ongoing (i.e. one person they can come back to to avoid having to repeat) • We are community and needs based • Great team (volunteers, paid staff) • Good relationships (Casey council, other service providers) • Reputation (well-regarded) • Support programs (e.g. mentoring, skill acquisition for both young and adults) • Different skills backgrounds (our volunteers and recipients are from different backgrounds and share knowledge with each other) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough ER funding • No resources to support and sustain volunteers • Ageing volunteers and diminished workforce at a time when demand is increasing • Stressed and burnt out staff, e.g. vicarious trauma from hearing more complex and traumatic stories • Lack of building space • Lack of public parking • Logistics and supply issues • Rapid and high increase in requests for support particularly from a new client cohort we have not seen before leading to insufficient funding to meet growth in need • Language barriers with ESL clients
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for strong social media campaigns if we can get sufficient ground swell, develop and grow a loud voice • Reduce school drop out by providing homework for kids and equip parents to help kids with homework, provide food to keep people healthy • Forming partnerships with other stakeholders, covering large community networks and diverse group • Funding (sourcing, stocking) • Safe houses (cut out red tape) • More time to advocate (i.e. income support payments) instead of dealing with crises all the time • Re-ignite ER network to examine gaps/reduce duplication 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disjointed/silo nature of external partners and funders • The threat of the 'unworthy' in need being more publicised and promoted, leading to reduction in support for our services • Government red tape • Too many 'tokenistic acts' and 'think-tanks' • Removal of public transport/train station facilities • Changes in policy in other org's that impact on us (e.g. doorways) • Reduction in ER funding

Large food relief agencies (OzHarvest and Foodbank)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing food waste from supermarkets and retailers • Delivering multiple programs that target different factors related to food security e.g. nutrition and food literacy • Distribution has state wide reach and networks • Regional teams • Clear strategy on 'healthy food for all' • Quick response 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food supply is reliant on donors and supply fluctuates (climate change including floods and fires exacerbates) • Limited resources to expand service delivery (particularly economic resources) • Currently focused on emergency food relief
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased food supply through 'School breakfast club program' • More partnerships with Casey Council and ER network, leverage to expand reach • Move fresh food into Casey and develop community food plan • Advocate for right to food approach and law: equality and equity for all 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on external funding • Volunteer workforce decreased • Lack of governance from local/state/federal governments around food security • Supply of food diminished, while also increasing food demands • Emergencies shift our focus

Developers (Mirvac & Balcon)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to connect with community stakeholders/partnerships to innovate • Access to space and building/planning expertise • Community development resources • 4000+ families, over 50% of residents are first home buyers • Commitment to bettering the lives of our community • Opportunity/responsibility to help those who need support • Passionate small family business with extensive philanthropic efforts 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning overlays - local and state government (easements/maintenance/streetscapes) • Lack of community motivation and community based leaders • Lack of knowledge on food insecurity - it's not our core business • New community/strategic amenity developments
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to CISS • Food education • Land for community gardens • Farmers/grocers in future town centre • Community bus to access shops 	

Large food systems stakeholder (VFF, Monash Health)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health promotion, knowledge of nutrition, healthy choices guidelines • Promote agriculture, memberships based farmers union and advocacy group (see vff.org.au) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support for peri-urban farmers small/emerging/ageing • Constraints from and lack of investment from Department of Agriculture/Industry peak bodies. No investment in peri-urban agriculture or farmers per capita as per broadacre agriculture
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Agriculture (state/federal) and peak farmer bodies (AUSVEG, MLA, DA) could collaborate and invest in retaining and maintaining agriculture on farms with access to good soil, water, climate, labour and transport • Produce to sell to/at local markets 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss and lack of small agriculture infrastructure and Department of Agriculture services • Lack of local and accessible skilled training and higher education for young and new farmers and especially farm workers

Roundtable discussions on priorities to respond to Food Security in Casey

Short term priorities for action

- **High priority:** Re-establish emergency relief network. CoC could lead networks for interconnectivity and improved resource allocation. Finding an organisation that could operate this. It needs to be strategic and action orientated, while also having people that speak multiple languages to have greater inclusive and accessibility.
- Work with community relief and other agencies to innovate funding opportunities (to benefit Transit Soup Kitchen & B2B)
- Cut red tape and expedite access to assets and facilities
- Mobile markets (Foodbank initiative)
- Community drive for volunteers & support for volunteers; having someone in Council coordinating this (there is already a volunteer officer in council).
- Getting more culturally appropriate foods into Casey via food networks.
- Engaging local food partners such as greengrocers, butchers, farmers, small producers.
- Upcoming food survey to include questions on what cultural groups need to prepare/share food.

Medium-long term actions

- Community Kitchen: All CoC new community facilities automatically have a community kitchen available to emergency food relief providers to prepare food and support skills development. Have a library booking type system for the community kitchen- potential to have it as a shared space?
- 30% of all trees planted by CoC are fruit trees.
- Community growing schemes e.g. front + backyard farming/ growing.
- Map the organisations or businesses that make the most money in CoC and develop workplace giving/philanthropy to identify who hasn't given back! Improve corporate behaviour.
- Sustainable Food Hub at locations like the Old Cheese Factory.
- Workshops on food literacy for community members.
- Business investment in the Feast of Nations program.
- Training for communities from CALD groups to gain new and relevant skills.
- Universal design guide to support cooking for all groups.
- Opportunities for people to get to know each other- break down barriers and support cross-cultural communication.
- Urban farm on school land- sold by schools
 - Is this a state government discussion?
 - Permits? Teachers or farmers could manage; partnerships with horticulture students.
 - Supports capacity building of young people.
 - Could partner with Chisolm Tafe.
- Vertical farming in urban areas.

Addressing root causes, looking beyond food relief

- Income inequality
 - Normalise and **strengthen financial counselling programs with a focus on prevention and early intervention**; It has to be funded, counselling is critical.
 - Create podcasts with subtitles and transcripts in multiple languages that cover different themes similar to the Barefoot Investor.
 - Boost social media presence and outputs for education and promoting financial counselling service
- Housing
 - More social housing opportunities e.g. linking those experiencing homelessness with elderly residents who live alone
 - Could there be a cap on investment properties? Or how can we make the houses available, e.g. a government scheme that buys back houses for social housing, or at least a reduction in taxes.
 - Are there any policies for rooms and housing?
- Creating innovative mechanisms to address critical issues
 - Charge non-sustainable businesses more to offset incentives paid to healthy greengrocers
 - Landscaping policy/ maintenance policy not allowing fruit planting- community
 - Rate capping- How to create new options for fines, licences, permit e.g. paying rates weekly

Advocacy priorities

Government

- Strategy for working with government to streamline approach i.e. working out **how** to advocate.
- Support from state government to fund incentives for healthy food grocers.
- Advocate to state government to resource a pilot project to work in food security.
- Advocacy to all levels of government- calling for better collaboration between departments at local, state and federal government levels; So many regulations/departments that there needs to be multiple levels of advocacy.
- Advocacy to decrease junk food in schools e.g. free fruit at morning tea, support for sugar tax.
- Advocating for food secure oceans, marine sanctuaries- increase awareness and ethical consumption among residents and fishmongers.
- Legislative change to protect people (especially those most vulnerable) from fines, loans, scams.

Partner with neighbouring councils to strengthen advocacy and impact

- Greater South East Melbourne- existing network of 8 Councils that have previously worked together.
- Interface Councils.

- Growth area councils.

Planning

- Planning reforms to retain existing farmland and support local food production (example discussed in Smiths Lane Estate in Clyde North where front lawn landscaping offered as part of development to support food production; not sure if any training or maintenance included in this initiative).
- Accessibility and transport- there are too many areas without local shops; planning rules need to be more overt in provision of local healthy shops, (20 minute neighbourhood concept discussed).
- Planning for health- advocacy to amend legislation to give local governments a responsibility to consider health in development planning.

Securing greater support for food relief organisations already working on the ground

- CISS's working to address root causes need **money**.
- FR agencies experience difficulties in expanding from an environmental health perspective. Need to match organisations with the right support e.g. warehouses, opportunities to preference applications from organisations with a social purpose supporting such as those addressing food security).
- Listening to providers to know what the advocacy priorities are, 'when you're working in an agency, you're putting out fires, you can't actually advocate for these things'
- Work to integrate local produce into food relief donations/purchases, e.g. Gleneagle community gardens donating produce for food relief. There is potential to build on this significantly.

Priority actions from workshop evaluation survey responses

"What are the one-two most important actions you think Casey should take to address food insecurity?"

Fostering communication and inclusivity

- Building networks and partnerships was mentioned several times as a key action to improve food security.
- Reigniting the Emergency Food Relief Network.
- Finding out what the needs are of community members, frontline organisations, peak bodies, council staff, developers, listening, and then acting was emphasised.
- Involving and celebrating the voices, culture and food of the large CALD community in Casey.

Advocating for human rights

- Embed a right to food approach to all relevant policies.
- Advocate for better income payments and more social housing.

- Establish and embed the framework before the Councillors return to the office to ensure the longevity of the framework before its killed off by the politics from the councillors.
- Advocate for additional funding in the sector.

Funding, adequate resourcing and opening doors

- Make more funding available to food security organisations.
- Ensuring that programs/initiatives are sustainable long term i.e. they don't stop when a staff member leaves.
- Helping our service providers be more strategic.
- Begin discussions with the two CISOs playing a stronger role in coordination of the food relief sector.
- Food security needs to be included in planning and development.
- Reduce planning/maintenance controls on developers trying to provide community benefits.
- Utilise easements at a ground level rather than protect assets above/underground.

Urban farming

- Support community gardens.
- Encourage and fund urban farming and utilising all available land e.g. nature strips, land on school grounds.
- Increase the number of community gardens available to communities.

Food security programs and spaces

- Community funding programs and initiatives that tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity.
- Collaborate, co-design and fund support programs including financial counselling services, community gardens and food literacy education programs including a podcast.
- Building community facilities with dedicated free spaces for food relief groups.