

Growing food locally

Supporting residents to grow and harvest food

Information Sheet Series: Ten ways local government can act on food security



What is Food for All?

VicHealth's Food for All program funded Victorian local governments to take a lead in addressing the problem of food insecurity by improving access to healthy food. Councils developed practical and long-lasting strategies to tackle food insecurity, particularly within disadvantaged communities.

This information sheet is one in a series of ten, designed to assist local government in advancing a food security agenda.

Encouraging and supporting residents to grow fresh fruits and vegetables can produce many individual and community benefits.

Growing and harvesting fresh produce is a great way for people to become more familiar with a wide range of fruits and vegetables. For some people, growing their own food gives them access to traditional vegetables they may not have been able to buy in their local shops.

Participating in a community project that encourages residents to work together to grow fresh foods and fosters feelings of social connection.

How can local government implement this recommendation?

The *Food for All* program demonstrated that local government can play a significant role in supporting community gardening initiatives, and ensuring that council and community actions are complementary. Local government can consider the following:

- support the establishment or development of community gardens in specific or targeted communities

including childcare centres, local neighbourhood houses or community centres or open space in the municipality

- support urban agriculture; that is, the planting and growing of fruit trees and vegetables in public space such as parks, gardens and streets
- support home gardening as part of its waste management, water conservation and sustainability agenda by running gardening workshops; subsidising cheap or free supply of gardening aids such as mulch and topsoil; the construction of raised beds; compost bins, water tanks, seedlings, tools or labour for older/disabled people
- support food swaps (exchanging excess home or community grown produce)
- review land use, open space and building regulations and practice to make it easier to do all of the above.

See the information sheets on '*Land use planning*' and '*Setting a good example*' for other ways local government can increase the capacity of residents to grow their own food. In particular, Council can ensure that space for growing fruit and vegetables becomes a mandatory or normal part of plans for new residential and council developments.

For more information about VicHealth's work on food security go to www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/foodforall

Food for All program examples

Swan Hill Rural City Council invested significantly in community garden initiatives. These included:

- assisting an existing Indigenous garden — the Manatunga Community Garden — to help provide food for a greater part of the year. More people were engaged in both growing and consuming the garden produce. Council helped the garden group to receive federal government grants that enabled them to install water tanks, a watering system and to purchase fruit trees. Council provided infrastructure support such as framing for a greenhouse, a barbeque so food, including fresh produce, could be cooked onsite, and assistance with community education sessions
The garden workers formed a relationship with the nearby Robinvale Community Growers Market. This provided an opportunity for the garden workers to sell excess produce and use the income to buy seedlings and equipment. The strong relationship built between the *Food for All* project officer, the managers of the garden and the local Indigenous community has been the key to the success of this project
- supporting Communities for Children to establish a garden in a school with a high proportion of families from culturally diverse backgrounds. The garden project taught the children to grow, harvest and cook fresh food, and provided opportunities for cross-cultural education
- working with an existing garden in the local special school. This garden was strongly supported by the school and well integrated into the curriculum, providing an avenue to train students in horticulture. Excess produce was given to locals in need within the community. Future plans include building a commercial kitchen alongside the garden. This would enable community cooking and social activities to be held in the beautiful garden environment.

Maribyrnong City Council indirectly supported a range of local gardening strategies by working in partnership with existing garden groups. They established supportive partnerships with the following groups:

- the Neighbourhood Renewal and Westgate Community Initiatives Group, which ran four learn-to-garden workshops. Fifty-five people attended, of whom 75% had never visited a community garden before and all said they had learnt something new and intended to apply their new knowledge and skills at home. The workshops covered growing your own vegetables, learning container gardening, making a no-dig garden, and cooking pizzas in a wood-fired oven in the garden
- the Community Gardens Network, with representatives from 10 garden groups that meet to share resources and experiences. A Community Gardens webpage was established on the council website and one-year community grants were given 'to improve food accessibility'. Grants were given for new signage and raised beds in a garden.

View the *Food for All* micro-movies at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/foodforall

Further reading

Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and RMIT Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE). June 2004. *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004 Gilles Plains Community Garden A Case Study. Gilles Plains, South Australia.*

Bartolomei L, Corkery L, Judd, B & Thompson S. 2003. *A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo.* NSW Department of Housing, the University of New South Wales, Faculty of the Built Environment, School of Social Work.

Holmgren D. *Design approach to food security.* Address at the food security theme day of the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network's national conference, March 2007, Collingwood Town Hall, Melbourne. accessed at <http://pacific-edge.info/david-holmgren-the-design-approach-to-food-security>

Rowe F. et al, 2007. *Community Harvest Project: Improving Food Security in Urban Areas.* Queensland Health: Brisbane.

Urbis Keys Young. 2004 *Community Greening Program Evaluation Final Report* Prepared for the Botanic Gardens Trust and the NSW Department of Housing. This document reports on five gardening projects in community renewal areas where all of the risk factors for food insecurity existed.

See also:

Cultivating Community is a not-for-profit organisation that has grown out of support for community garden projects in inner-city public housing estates. Visit www.cultivatingcommunity.org.au

The City of Darebin has been providing strong Council support for home gardening for some time under the umbrella of sustainability. Visit www.darebin.vic.gov.au

The City of Yarra provides support to gardeners who meet monthly swap their produce, and for feral gardening on nature strips and open space. Visit www.yarracity.vic.gov.au

The Community Harvest Project exists to, among other things, help individuals and groups to grow or access healthy, sustainable, affordable, locally produced food. Visit www.communityharvest.org.au

Veg Out is an organic, chemical free garden run by volunteers in St Kilda. Visit www.vegout.asn.au