

Food for All

Making a difference

Highlights from the Food for All final forum 2010

Food for All—Making a Difference was the final forum of the Food for All program. It was attended by over 160 delegates with an interest in food security and food systems. It brought together people from local government, public health, research, community health, not-for-profit and community organisations to discuss the practical and sustainable implementation of Food for All in local government.

These are the key highlights from this forum.

Keynote Presentations

How can land-use planning influence food security?

Trevor Budge, Course Convenor of the Community Planning and Development program at La Trobe University Bendigo and an Adjunct Professor at RMIT University

Trevor has over 30 years experience working with and for governments at all levels in a wide variety of research and project work ranging from land use planning, social and economic impact assessment, community development, natural resource management and environmental evaluation. He has held a long interest in linking food to protecting quality agricultural land and convened Australia's first ever national conference on the issue in 1995.

Key messages included:

- How the complexity and limited capacity of the Victorian Planning Scheme has prevented the prioritisation of incorporating food production into our planning system.
- An insight into the challenges of our current food production system characterized by environmental unsustainability, loss of agricultural land and the duopolisation of 80% of our national food production. This has significant influence on the cost and choice of foods in this country.
- Ways local government could take the lead and incorporate food as a key metropolitan strategy element in planning, advocate to stop high quality productive agricultural land being used for other uses, and require all new development (housing and commercial) to include provision for food production.

- Trevor's presentation included inspiring footage of policy success and localised food production systems (including city farms and urban agriculture) in Canada and the United States. These projects highlighted numerous social and health benefits for the community. These included local economic and employment opportunities, better informed consumers and reported improvements in taste and appearance of seasonal produce.

View Trevor's presentation [here](#).

How can we address food security more broadly with urban food production?

Michael Velders, Senior Sustainability Consultant at ARUP

Michael has a background in agricultural and environmental engineering, coupled with change management. ARUP are a global independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists offering a broad range of professional services. They have recently started a Food and Agriculture Centre of Excellence in Australia. Michael's interest lies in sustainable food production and integrating productive landscapes into city living.

Key messages included:

- While the global food system has consistently produced more than enough calories to feed the planet, our food production system is very resource intensive and a long-term approach to address carbon and resource efficiency is required.
- About a third of our carbon footprint relates to food (with the majority of this relating to production rather than 'food miles' as is commonly thought). The ecological footprint of our food is even greater than its carbon footprint at close to fifty per cent.
- Agriculture places significant demands on water, phosphate and oil. This raises concerns about the impacts of climate change on the type of food we grow, the price of food and what food we consume.
- How several overseas projects have demonstrated strategies to make food systems more carbon and resource efficient by connecting urban farming and food production to the city.

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These ranged from integrating agriculture and food strategies into master planning, rooftop hydroponics, large-scale city farms and networks of community gardens.

- Inspiration to consider innovative examples of connecting greenhouse food production with city living through connections with energy production, water and waste management systems. ARUP are currently exploring partnership and investment opportunities in Australia for sustainable city farms.

View Michael's presentation [here](#).

How can we help disadvantaged people access healthy food?

Leah Galvin, Research and Social Policy Officer, St Luke's Anglicare

Leah has worked in state government, local government and community health. She has worked on food security projects (including *Food for All* at the City of Greater Dandenong), and at the Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research at Deakin University as a research assistant. In her current role as the research and social policy officer with St Luke's Anglicare, Leah reports directly to the CEO and advocates for improving food access for families and communities.

Key messages included:

- The social determinants of health (including income, employment and housing) which impact on food security. She also discussed the progress of Federal and State policy initiatives to advance social justice, inclusion and equity.
- Local examples of practical realities faced by families and single parents resulting from food insecurity. These included barriers to purchasing healthy food options and the effects of social disengagement at a community level.
- Highlights of a successful food distribution partnership project in Greater Dandenong, the Avocare Distribution Centre. While feeding hundreds of people a day this initiative incorporated training opportunities for food preparation and storage, food rescue and food distribution and a community café. A further \$1 million dollars has recently been secured to ensure its future development and sustainability.

View Leah's presentation [here](#).

Local Food for All case studies and discussion, facilitated by Dr Meg Montague

Building the local picture: Establishing an evidence base

Pamela Morgan, *Fruit and Veg for All* Project Officer from Maribyrnong City Council, highlighted the importance of collecting local municipal data on food security. Successful strategies included a food outlet mapping project and incorporating a series of questions into the council annual Community Satisfaction Survey. This enabled greater analysis of food security at the local level.

Policy and plans: incorporating food security into council policy and plans

Fiona Florakx, former Food Security Officer, Brimbank City Council and Sallie Amy, *Food for All* Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council reflected on the challenges of integrating food security into council policy and plans. In Brimbank the development and use of a local food security profile to engage and educate council departments on the issue worked well. In Swan Hill the importance of working closely with council staff who can effectively champion the issue was emphasised. Sallie also reinforced the need for a long-term proactive approach to progress food security considering lengthy policy review cycles.

Audience question time and participation

The points below summarise some of the key themes and insights raised during question time and forum audience participation:

- In Australia the community groundswell for local food initiatives is growing, as is advocacy for government to address food system change.
- The lack of supportive policy and demonstrated financial viability continue to be barriers to incorporating food production options into city living.
- Our food system operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic and environmental contexts. It is important to advance food security across and within all departments of government including health,

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economic development, agriculture and planning. Linking food system issues to one political agenda could have a negative impact on the strategic integration across all relevant areas.

- Using overseas projects as a demonstration, Australia could consider opportunities to integrate recycling and reusing food waste with food production and make it an integral part of the urban infrastructure. The development of partnerships between research, private industry and government are essential for exploring and developing such opportunities.
- Despite the increasing interest from community to initiate community gardens and grow their own food, barriers at a local government level often prevent these initiatives from taking place. Suggested options which may lead to greater success include demonstrating adequate community support, developing a comprehensive management process and working together with council departments to develop a community garden policy.
- Many community health centres are continuing to work in partnership with their local council to map fresh and take away food outlets. While the planning scheme is currently unable to influence the retail mix within communities, the collection of this local data remains important for advocacy, planning and policy development of food security strategies.

Media

The *Food for All* program was covered in the media on the day of the forum. This included an article in *The Age* highlighting Melton Shire Council's support to improve access of fresh fruit and vegetables in the townships of Exford and Diggers Rest. After the forum, *Victorian ABC radio* conducted an interview with Ernestine Thompson and Sallie Amy. Ernestine discussed VicHealth's investment and initiatives of the five year Food for All program. Sallie talked about the Manatunga Community Garden in Swan Hill as an example for how local residents can grow and harvest their own food.

Forum Overview

The *Food for All*—Making a Difference forum was opened and facilitated by VicHealth's Ernestine Thompson, Manager—Environments for Health. She provided an overview of the *Food for All* journey from 2005, which saw eight Victorian local governments working with community groups to implement actions to improve access to healthy food. She highlighted the scope of their work which was done in nine municipalities. Ernestine thanked and acknowledged the invaluable input and expertise of all the stakeholders, Council staff, project officers and partner organisations in the *Food for All* program.

Trevor Budge, Michael Velders and Leah Galvin provided informative and thought provoking key note presentations. They explored global and local challenges and opportunities of food systems and focussed on environmental management, land use planning, community food access and demand. Dr Beverley Wood, Food Security Officer, Victorian Local Governance Association summarised key projects the association has undertaken with VicHealth on food security since the early demonstration projects of 2001.

Todd Harper, CEO of VicHealth launched the new food security resources for local government titled 'Ten ways local government can act on food security'. The resources include ten information sheets and ten inspiring micro-movies showcasing the work of the Food for All projects.

Dr Meg Montague, a Social Policy, Research and Evaluation Consultant and the external evaluator for *Food for All* facilitated the afternoon session. This included viewing several of the micro-movies coupled with local government case study presentations by *Food for All* project officers. The afternoon provided an opportunity for the audience to engage further with the issues of food security through sharing local knowledge and experience.