

Making Sense of Sustainability

What do we really mean by sustainability in relation to the Food for All Program

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Introduction

SLIDE 2

VicHealth has made a substantial commitment to and investment in food security particularly in local government.

- 2001-2 demonstration projects in the Cities of Yarra and Maribyrnong and made a significant investment in the evaluation of the projects.
- 2005-2010 VicHealth adopted a Healthy Eating-Food Security Investment Plan
- 2005-2008 Phase 1 of FFA that involved the funding a literature review on integrated planning in local government and the implementation and evaluation of food security projects in nine LGAs (2 regional, 3 urban fringe, 4 metro), and a wide range of additional activities such as:
 - The funding of a web based Food Security Network at the Victorian Local Governance Association for two years
 - The development and delivery of training and resources, for example
 - *Leading the Way: Integrated Planning for Health – Food Security* short courses 9 one day courses held in 5 regional centres, one peri-urban area and two in the Melbourne and metropolitan areas during 2006
 - A specifically developed resource pack for FFA project partners
 - Specific food security oriented training and resources on *How to work with media* for all the FFA projects and their host LGAs.
 - Annual Food For All Forums (2006-2008), plus additional forums focussing on food security and planning issues (Dr Kami Pothukuchi in 2007 and Dr Aleck Ostry in 2008).
 - VicHealth also funded a Research Fellow (Dr Cate Burns) during 2005-2010 to undertake research on the *Environmental and cultural determinants of obesity in populations at risk of food insecurity*.
- 2008-2010 Phase 2 of FFA that continued the funding of the food security projects in six of the LGAs (2 regional, 1 urban fringe and 3 metropolitan) and the accompanying evaluation

- VicHealth commissioned the VLGA to undertake a literature review and community consultation around the link between land use and food supply and the health and wellbeing of the community.
- The Human Rights and Bioethics Unit of the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University was contracted by VicHealth to develop a scoping paper re the possible establishment of a Food Policy/Security Alliance/Coalition in Victoria
- A number of formal submissions including
 - The Victorian government's review of the Planning and Environment Act
 - Department of Planning and Community Development's Retail Policy Review
 - Senate Inquiry into Food Production in Australia, 2008
 - Future Farms: Providing for Victoria's Future Rural Land Use Discussion Paper, June 09

Throughout VicHealth has invested in evaluation, each stage has informed the next both in terms of conceptual and implementation. Since September 2007 I have had the role of evaluating the FFA projects.

At this time, we are all thinking deeply about sustainability. Discrete funding of the FFA projects in local government will not continue past mid 2010.

The key questions we are addressing in Phase 2 are:

1. What have we learnt about the promotion of a food security focus in local government?
2. What has been achieved?
3. Will these achievements be sustained into the future?

This paper addresses the third of these and this is done by asking four questions: **SLIDE 3**

1. What do we mean by sustainability?
2. What factors influence whether sustainability is achieved?
3. How are we assessing the sustainability of the Food for All Program?
4. What can we say at this stage about the "sustainability" of the work of the six local government Food for All projects?

1. What do we mean by “sustainability”?

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Sustainability is a term that is readily bandied about these days, but is a bit light on in terms of clear definition and shared understanding. A scan of the literature suggests there is little consensus about what is meant by “sustainability” in relation to innovative projects, demonstration or pilot projects.

Generally the literature (see Appendix 1) suggests that people mostly use the term sustainability to mean a number of things including

1. The **continuation of the project** itself in a similar form to that which was originally funded.
2. The **on-going delivery of the benefits or outcomes** that derive from the project.
3. The standardisation of the **project activities as a normal or routinised** part of organisational practice.
4. The incorporation **of project goals and outcomes into the community.**

2. What influences whether sustainability is achieved? SLIDE 5

The literature suggests that there are a range of factors that appear to influence the likelihood of a project being sustainable in any of the above senses. These factors operate in three key contexts.

1. The Project itself: factors associated with the design and implementation of the project, such as

- The incorporation of thinking about empowerment, integration, involvement and engagement and capacity building into project design and conceptual underpinnings
- The provision of external ongoing support for the project from experts
- Constant emphasis on evidence and best practice
- Integration of awareness of the theory and processes of change.

2. The host organisation: factors associated with the organisational context within which the project is established, such as

- A supportive or receptive climate or culture within the host organisation
- Support internally from the host organisation's leadership or specific project champions
- A positive orientation to change within the host organisation.

3. The external environment: factors associated with the community in which the project is sited, such as

- A congruence between project goals and broader public health goals
- Broader political support for the project and/or project goals
- High level championship of the project
- Effective promotion of the project
- An economic climate supportive of project goals and of expansion rather than contraction.

As an aside – My 30 year experience in evaluation leads me to say that these insights are not necessarily incorporated into funding decisions when demonstration or pilot projects are planned.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves some searching questions about the design of pilot projects and where pilot projects should be funded

- Does the project incorporate the design features that are going to increase the likelihood of long term sustainability?
- Have we funded pilots in organisations or areas many of these factors are present and thus there is the greatest likelihood of sustainability?
- If we have chosen to fund where few of these factors are present, are we compensating for this by funding at a higher level, over a longer period?
- Are we working with an external environment that is supportive of potential sustainability? And are we expecting the pilot to change the broad environment or are we working on that as well?

3. How are we assessing sustainability in the FFA Program?

We are assessing sustainability by measuring a range of impact indicators in each project in the three key contexts.

3.1 Firstly in relation to the project itself

SLIDE 6

- its efficiency
- its effectiveness and
- its ongoing resource allocation.

Context	Key aspect of sustainability in this context		
	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Resources
Project design and implementation	<p>Were local FFA projects efficiently implemented?</p> <p>Specific indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical underpinning and the project design that focuses on empowerment, inclusion, community development etc • Appropriate staffing and management • Well managed finances • Identification of local FS issues undertaken with strong community engagement • Implementation of range of appropriate well founded strategies in Council and in the community 	<p>Were local FFA projects effective in achieving FFA Program goals & bringing about the intended outcomes?</p> <p>Specific indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced systemic & infrastructure barriers to food security • Increased access to & consumption of healthy food • Incorporation of food security & related issues into local government policy, planning, strategy & action plan development & implementation • Enhanced integrated planning to reduce barriers to healthy eating • Strengthened local government leadership & partnerships with community & other agencies to reduce barriers to healthy foods • Advocacy re reduction of barriers to healthy food • Accumulation of an evidence base & practice experience to support future work in local government 	<p>Were funds acquired or in kind resources allocated to continue projects beyond the end of VicHealth funding in June 2010?</p> <p>For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To fund as an ongoing discrete project • To fund on a substantive recurrently funded basis • To fund initiatives in community partner organisations

3.2 In relation to the organisation that hosted it

SLIDE 7

And the project’s impact on

- organisational culture
- organisational capacity to continue project work
- organisational leadership
- organisational adoption of project goals and outcomes into policy & practice.

3.3 In relation to the community or environment within which the project operates

SLIDE 8

And in terms of the project’s impact on

- local organisational culture
- local organisational capacity to continue project work
- local organisational leadership
- organisational adoption of project goals and outcomes into policy and practice.

	Key aspect of sustainability in this context				
Context	Culture	Capacity	Leadership	Policy	Practice
The host local government authority (LGA)	Do the LGAs have compatible cultures (values, mission, & vision) that support the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program?	Do the LGAs have the capacity (skills, knowledge & resources) to implement activities that support the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program beyond the life of the local projects?	Is leadership evident at senior levels in the LGAs that champion FFA Program goals & outcomes beyond the life of the local projects?	Have the LGAs adopted explicit or implicit policy that supports FFA Program goals & outcomes?	Have the LGAs adopted practices that integrate FFA Program goals & outcomes into everyday operations?
Context	Culture	Capacity	Leadership	Policy	Practice
The community context including local organisations & members of the local community	Does the local community, including local organisations have a compatible culture (values, mission & vision) that supports the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program?	Does the local community, including local organisations have the capacity (skills, knowledge & resources) to maintain & extend activities that support FFA Program goals & outcomes	Are there local organisations & /or individuals who lead or champion on-going thinking & action around FFA Program goals & outcomes?	Have local organisations adopted or integrated explicit or implicit policy that supports FFA Program goals & outcomes?	Have local organisations integrated practices that reflect & advance FFA Program goals & outcomes into their everyday operations?

4. How are the FFA projects going in terms of sustainability?

A brief assessment is made in the three contexts:

4.1 The local projects

SLIDE 9

Context	Key aspect of sustainability		
	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Resources
Project design & implementation	Were the FFA projects efficiently implemented?	Were the FFA projects effective in achieving the FFA Program goals & bringing about the intended outcomes?	Have funds been acquired or in kind resources allocated to continue the local projects beyond the end of VicHealth funding in June 2010?
Current assessment	<p><i>On the whole "Yes" in the face of significant challenges, such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff recruitment & retention • limited project capacity in terms of budget and level of appointment • organisational restructure, review & change and in some cases inhospitable council or community culture • pressure of major issues such as rapid urban development, drought, rural recession etc • initial lack of understanding & awareness of food security issues • in some cases food security issues identification not done with adequate background information or community engagement 	<p><i>Partially - a long process begun well including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline and trend data still lacking on access and consumption, however local data re specific target groups indicates some gains in relation to low income and disadvantaged individuals via Council HACC programs, food relief initiatives and education initiatives with CALD groups and new arrivals • Reduction in systemic and infrastructure barriers to food security presents significant difficulties to local government projects where barriers emanate from issues beyond local government capacity to change eg public transport, fast food vs fresh food advertising and availability, issues associated with income security, employment and food prices. • Raised awareness of food security issues in LGAs & in communities • Number of food security strategies developed & implemented in the community with disadvantaged & at risk groups, • Partnerships between local government & community organisations developed • Some impact on local government policy & practices but challenges present in influencing integrated planning as formal, cross council planning limited in most LGAs • Projects more effective advocates at local level, whilst VicHealth engaged in broader advocacy issues • Evidence and learning growing. 	<p><i>Not yet known, however:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One LGA has matched VicHealth funding to the end of Phase 2 so PO can be appointed on a full time basis. • Several LGAs have successfully attracted funds to support food security initiatives in Council & in the community but not to continue the 'project' itself as yet • See table on the host community - many agencies have acquired funding to continue food security initiatives begun with or supported by the FFA projects

4.2 The Host Councils

SLIDE 10

Context	Key aspect of sustainability				
	Culture	Capacity	Leadership	Policy	Practice
The host LGA	Do the LGAs have compatible cultures that support the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program?	Do the LGAs have the capacity to implement activities that support the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program beyond the life of the local projects?	Is leadership evident at senior levels in the LGAs that champion FFA Program goals & outcomes beyond the life of the local projects?	Have the LGAs adopted explicit or implicit policy that supports FFA program goals & outcomes?	Have the LGAs adopted practices that integrate FFA Program goals & outcomes into everyday operations?
Current assessment	<p>Not all Phase 1 FFA Projects were in LGAs with 'compatible' culture.</p> <p>Phase 2 shows more evidence of LGA's having vision & mission statements that incorporate health & wellbeing & food related issues</p> <p>Progress greatest where culture is compatible in both a commitment to health and wellbeing, social justice and planning for a healthy community</p>	<p>More capacity evident than 5 years ago, particularly in human & community services, eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social planning development teams • Aged and disability services • Children's and family services • Youth and leisure services <p>However, capacity still limited in infrastructure & economic areas, where Qs are still being raised about the relevance of FS and health & wellbeing to strategic, urban and economic planning. Questions still being asked as to the role of local government in food security.</p>	<p>Leadership increasingly evident especially in social planning or social development teams. More rarely in environmental health and in strategic planning.</p> <p>WA suggestion that where the Council culture is compatible, we are more likely to get Councillors who are champions of food security (eg Swan Hill, Maribyrnong).</p>	<p>By end of Phase 1 some evidence of adoption of food security into MPHPs & health & welfare action plans. Relatively little evidence of adoption into in MSS & infrastructure action plans.</p> <p>Phase 2 now seeing consolidation of food security into MPHPs & Council/Community Plans. Some discussions now taking place around the relevance of food security related issues to the MSS</p> <p>Greater penetration into policy where Council has greater continuity of focus on FS (for eg inclusion into housing affordability, economic and environmental strategies)</p> <p>Tendency for input to policy and strategy development to be opportunistic rather than routine; driven by Project (or team) rather than by section of Council.</p>	<p>This remains challenging but some achievements made for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FS questions into routine community surveys • Social planning development teams • Aged and disability services • Children's and family services • Youth and leisure services <p>Jury still out on whether adoption of discrete FS Policy or Strategy makes a difference in terms of practice</p>

4.3 The Host Communities

SLIDE 11

	Key aspect of sustainability				
Context	Culture	Capacity	Leadership	Policy	Practice
The community context including local organisations & members of the local community	Do local organisations have compatible cultures that support the long term goals & outcomes of the FFA Program?	Do local organisations have the capacity to maintain & extend activities that support FFA Program goals & outcomes	Are there local organisations & /or individuals who lead or champion on going thinking & action around FFA Program goals & outcomes?	Have local organisations adopted explicit or implicit policy that supports program goals & outcomes?	Have local organisations adopted practices that integrate FFA Program goals & outcomes into their everyday operations?
Current assessment	<p>Some significant changes here especially in health & welfare related organisations & in relation to certain target groups, eg older people, children & families & those living on low incomes.</p> <p>In some areas compatibility evident in agencies involved in provision of food support; in other areas little change but signs of the beginnings.</p>	<p>Increasingly evident especially in areas mentioned in column to left & in relation to recent arrivals & the support services for them in certain LGAs</p>	<p>Growth in leadership by local agencies especially in</p> <p>Health sector eg community health, PCPs, regional health services</p> <p>Children & family services</p> <p>Welfare sector agencies involved in the delivery or food support to those living on low incomes.</p> <p>Some evidence of emergence of local, vocal community champions, both individuals and organisations</p>	<p>A wide range of local organisations have adopted policy and practices and in a number of instances received discrete and extra funding to support specific food security related programs. Examples include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> community health, PCPs, regional health services BestStart, Communities for Children & other agencies seeking to advance children's health & wellbeing. However, mixed results in school gardens agencies involved in supporting people with disabilities & living on low incomes specific mental health, drug & alcohol, employment & housing services agencies supporting recent arrivals & people fm CALD groups agencies supporting community gardening initiatives <p>Encouraging development of self running Food Alliances, Food Networks and Food Forums in several LGAs and their regions with Council being one agency among many.</p>	

5. Conclusions

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1. **Sustainability is a not a simple concept** and assessing it requires a broad lens.
2. **It takes time to achieve sustainability** especially when we are talking about culture as well as policy and practice changes. The evidence of the FFA Program suggests that where there has been a longer term focus on food security, there has been greater impact and more likelihood of sustainability in the terms outlined here.
3. **The resources required are significant** – too little and too brief leads to limited achievement of goals and outcomes and limited sustainability.
4. **A multi-pronged approach is needed when working with this type of health promotion activity:**
 - work at the project level, at the organisational level and at the community level is hard yakka, but is vital.
 - work also needs to occurs simultaneously the state and/or national level – the more work goes on here, the greater the support to the work at the local level and the greater the chance of sustained outcomes.
5. **Explicit consideration of the factors likely to enhance sustainability** is important when planning pilot projects.

I'd like to finish with the words of one of the projects that has had the longest involvement in food security. When discussing sustainability in March this year they commented

SLIDE 13

“In the Council there is greater recognition of food security as an issue that needs to be addressed as part of community health and wellbeing, as a social justice issue, and as an environmental sustainability issue. There is also greater recognition that this is an important issue for local government to take a lead role in.”

Appendix 1 References re health promotion, food security & sustainability

Crisp B. Swerissen H. 2002 Program, agency & effect sustainability in health promotion. In *Health Promotion Journal of Australia Vol 13 No 2 pp40-43*.

Elsworth G. & Astbury B. 2005 *Sustainability in health promotion: Case studies in two food insecurity demonstration projects*. RMIT University CIRCLE. Considers the sustainability of innovative activities in relation to The Café Meals project in the City of Yarra, & the Braystone Fruit & Vegetable Shop & Delivery Service.

Elsworth G. & Astbury B. 2007 *Investigating the sustainability of health promotion: programs*. RMIT University CIRCLE. Considers a small representative sample of VicHealth funded projects to explore their sustainability & to develop a model of sustainability.

Harvey G. & Hurworth R. 2006 Exploring program sustainability: identifying factors in two educational initiatives in Victoria. In *Evaluation Journal of Australasia Vol 6 No. 1 pp 36-44*. Based on evaluations of Turning the Tide in Schools & Collingwood College Kitchen Garden

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