

# The Food Security Project Municipal Food Security Dimensions and Opportunities

Summary report of the trial RAP Survey

City of Greater Geelong – Corio Norlane  
City of Wyndham - Heathdale

2008

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**Connecting Communities  
Strengthening Democracy**



# The Victorian Local Governance Association

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is a unique peak body for councilors, community leaders and Local Governments working to build and strengthen their capacity to work together for progressive social change.

The VLGA has helped in leading the developing community movement to improve local food chain systems and local area food security across Victoria ([www.foodsecurity.vlga.org.au](http://www.foodsecurity.vlga.org.au)).

Importantly, the VLGA supports Local Governments and other stakeholders who are building integrated planning and policy approaches to whole of population municipal and community food security.

## Environments for Health

The Environments for Health (E4H) Municipal Public Health Planning Framework (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2001) is based on the natural, built, economic, and social environments.

This framework has now been utilised to identify the dimensions and opportunities for improving local area food security through community planning and processes, and will be progressed through good governance. The systemic view inherent in E4H is reflected in the definition of food security.

### Food security

'Food security can be defined as the state in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable diet at all times through local non-emergency food sources. Food security broadens the traditional conception of hunger, embracing a systemic view of the causes of hunger and poor nutrition within a community while identifying the changes necessary to prevent their occurrence. Food security programs confront hunger and poverty' (Community Food Security Coalition, 1995)

We have an individual choice in what we eat but we have a collective responsibility to see that there are systems in place to support (and not impede) the household and individual choices that will strengthen the collective independence and health and well-being of our communities.

## Municipal Food Security

Local Governments have a whole of population mandate. The recent Victorian Health and Wellbeing Act (Victorian Government, 2008) now provides legislative support for Local Governments undertaking improvement in whole of population health and well-being through strategic planning across most business units.

The first step in improving local food security, through the Project's rapid assessment procedures (RAP) Survey Work Book involving the community, has elements similar to those in more complex assessments elsewhere.

Local Governments can improve community health and well-being through support for equitable and local food chain systems, and by ensuring that shopping, transport and other infrastructure barriers do not affect the ability of the residents to achieve activities of daily living,

independence, health and well-being, and quality of life. On many occasions, this can be achieved in a cost-neutral or cost-effective manner.

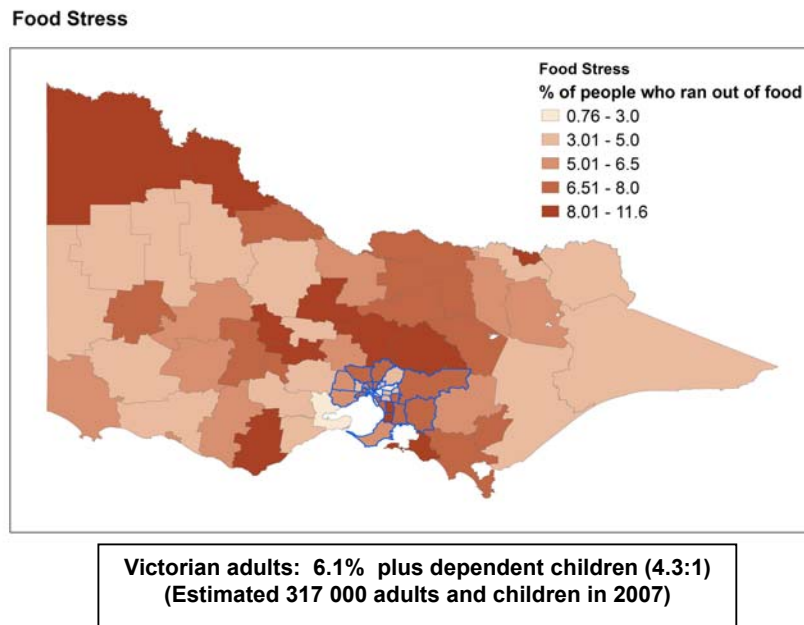
The strategies include inclusion of whole of population checklists for health and wellbeing and other methods in land use planning and support for urban gardening, built environment planning, trade and economy, equitable food access, and advocacy for integrated local public transport to the food supply.

This is a traditional Local Government role, and can be achieved through local food policies and Municipal Public Health plans linked to Community Plans, Municipal Strategy Statements, Corporate Plans, and ultimately core Council functions.

These plans provide leadership and a structural framework for the environments and amenities that affect the resident's ability to access healthy food, and make healthy food choices on a lifelong basis without resort to Local Government community services and/or emergency foods.

Other important local food security stakeholders are the residents, self-help groups and clubs, primary health care partnerships, primary health care agencies (community health promotion plans and direct services), community services, welfare organisations, and health institutions such as local hospitals. These organisations all have a traditional and established role in addressing the social and health needs of many groups, households and individuals.

In Victoria, the frequency of food insecurity at the adult level is of the order of 6.1%, and the 2007 survey showed that the range was 0.8 to 11.6% in adults across Local Government areas (The McCaughey Centre, 2007).



## Victorian Neighbourhood Renewal Program

Neighbourhood Renewal is a place based initiative of the Victorian government aimed at addressing disadvantage ([www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au](http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au)). To narrow the gap between disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Victoria and the rest of the State, each Neighbourhood Renewal project is implementing a six-point plan of action that focuses on:

- Increasing people's pride and participation;
- Enhancing housing and the physical environment;

- Lifting employment and learning opportunities and expanding local economies;
- Improving personal safety and reducing crime;
- Promoting health and wellbeing; and
- Improvement in government responsiveness.

Increasing concerns about inadequate community food security in Neighbourhood Renewal sites have led to the development of strategies such as community gardens, community kitchens, food co-operatives, breakfast clubs, and community food enterprises.

These initiatives relate to food supply and access and produce multiple outcomes for residents such as increased availability and access to healthy food as well as opportunities for social connectedness. They have helped to generate interest and enthusiasm around issues of food access and supply.

These initiatives now need to be built on, and encourage further identification and action around issues underpinning supply and access to healthy and affordable food.

Long term strategies are needed to achieve the systemic and sustainable change required, particularly in Local Government areas of disadvantage, such as those with Neighbourhood Renewal Projects.

A rapid assessment process for municipal food security will provide the necessary understanding of the local issues to facilitate a shared understanding, strategic and cost-effective approach to food security.

## **Transforming the way Local Government thinks about planning and integrating food security for all**

This document highlights the effective utilisation of the Victorian Environments for Health (E4H) framework to identify the dimensions and opportunities for improving local area food security.

The Project outcomes included the initial identification of systemic barriers to local food security and the beginning of Local Government and other planning for intervention strategies.

Victorian Local Governments have a legislative obligation to plan for municipal health and well-being through Municipal Public Health Plans. Long term sustainable solutions to local food security barriers towards an *integrated* sustainable water and local food chain systems from paddock to plate for all promotes social inclusion and food inclusion.

Social cooperation is essential to ensure sustainability of local food supplies to support community independence and resilience.

Democracy, good governance, and community planning for mental and physical well-being for whole of populations will achieve a democratic community movement for health and well-being. Water security and food security for all will be protected.

## **What we did in partnership**

A previous version of the E4H Municipal Public Health Planning framework for food security (Wood and Streker, 2005) included health and well-being and was developed into a Work Book for application by participative research methods (information gathering through primary and secondary sources).

The E4H framework facilitated the trial of the rapid assessment procedures (RAP) Survey Work Book to quickly identify Municipal Food Security dimensions and opportunities in a geographical area.

The trial was undertaken in the Local Government Neighbourhood Renewal sites of Corio Norlane and Heathdale in the City of Greater Geelong and the City of Wyndham respectively.

Contact with primary sources included key informant interviews, observation, and focus groups of workers and residents (community consultation).

These methods were time responsive, cost effective, and flexibly applied, and can be repeated easily (in whole, or in part) in the future for monitoring purposes.

The participatory research methods described led to the Project outcomes without any apparent barriers, through tapping into existing structures and activities.

RAP provided an effective method of implementing and evaluating the trial of the Survey Work Book, which included an inter-sectoral framework for municipal food security in the whole of population setting.

The procedures were complimentary, provided cross-validation, and were strengthened by community consultation. The outcomes for the trial were captured in each site and used collectively to update the Survey Work Book and to evaluate the rapid assessment procedures used.

## **Trial outcomes**

This Project utilised a group of rapid assessment procedures to achieve the outcomes, including the revised *Municipal Food Security Survey Work Book* (VLGA, 2008).

The trial in the Local Government Neighbourhood Renewal sites progressed well without any major barriers and reached a stage of resolution within six months in both sites. In this short period, opportunities were limited to progress Local Government inter-sectoral integration of food security strategies. Evaluation of the trial included observations, key informant interviews and focus groups.

### **Municipal Food Security Survey Work Book**

The structure of the RAP Survey Work Book (VLGA, 2008) was thoroughly reviewed in response to the trial evaluation.

### **RAP Municipal Food Security Surveys in both sites**

The RAP survey was applied over a relatively short time (six months) to the collection of secondary and primary data, which in turn identified the range of municipal food security dimensions and opportunities.

In the evaluation, participants at both sites considered that it would have been helpful to have more guidance - training in RAP at the beginning of the trial - and provision of optional management structures, procedures and timelines for conduct of the Survey.

### **Development of site recommendations**

The RAP trial of the Municipal Food Security Survey Work Book increased awareness in Local Governments, built capacity, and strengthened the two local Neighbourhood Renewal

communities in their consideration of local issues. The identified opportunities have the potential to be categorised by cost and duration.

### Common features of site outcomes

VLGA examined the Survey Work Books of both sites, for commonalities in the major barriers to municipal food security (Table 1).

**Table 1: Examples of commonalities of major barriers to municipal food security to support sustainable food security through the local food chain system**

Dimensions and opportunities			
NATURAL	BUILT	ECONOMIC	SOCIO-CULTURAL
Arable land not preserved	Centralised food supplies	Limited competition in food supply High food cost	At risk groups (social exclusion, food exclusion)
Little local food grown	Centralised dining and meal outlet access	Low food variety Poor quality fresh food	Low skills and knowledge re household management
Water restrictions affect ability to grow local food	Inadequate public transport to local food supplies	High cost of public transport	
	Inadequate amenities & infrastructure for food access	Unknown location of emergency food relief outlets	

HEALTH
Specific food problems in at risk groups

Potential examples of Municipal Public Health planning and Corporate planning to address these systemic barriers to municipal food security are shown in Table 2, and have the potential to be categorised by cost and duration.

**Table 2: Examples of Municipal Public Health Planning**

Dimensions and opportunities			
NATURAL	BUILT	ECONOMIC	SOCIO-CULTURAL
Agricultural land preservation	Decentralisation of food supplies	Increased competition in food supply Reasonable food cost	Provision of support and opportunities for social inclusion and food inclusion
Local food growing	Decentralisation of dining and meal outlet access	Increased food variety Good quality fresh food	Provision of opportunities for improving skills and knowledge re household management
Edible food planting	Investigation of public transport routes	Review of the cost of public transport	
Extension of water conservation and recycling	Review of amenities and infrastructure for food access	Map location of emergency food relief outlets	

HEALTH
Specific food programs for at risk groups

## Settings for improving food security at the local level

This RAP trial of a Municipal Food Security Survey confirms settings for improving food security at the local level (Table 3) that were suggested in a previous study (Wood, Swinburn, and Burns, 2003).

**Table 3: Settings for improving food security at the local level**

Sector	Duration	Target population
<b>Community and residents</b> Consultation empowerment, issue identification, survey validation, assistance with interventions	Perpetual	Whole of population ( <i>natural, built, economic, social-cultural dimensions</i> )
<b>Local Government</b> All Departments Municipal Public Health Policies and Plans	Moderate - long duration	Whole of population ( <i>natural, built, economic, social-cultural dimensions</i> )
<b>Primary Care Partnerships &amp; Community Agencies</b> Inter-sectoral policies and strategies	Short - moderate duration	Vulnerable households and individuals ( <i>socio-cultural, health dimensions</i> )
<b>Emergency Food Relief</b> Policies and strategies	Short duration	Vulnerable households and individuals ( <i>socio-cultural, health dimensions</i> )

In RAP in the sites to date, many other stakeholders have not had the opportunity to participate (food growers, food producers, food distributors, food suppliers, traders, commerce, tertiary institutions, regional interests and planning strategists).

Improving whole of population health and well-being can in the future be supported by the development and testing of a prediction checklist for the effect of short, medium and long term strategies. Three basic evaluation questions could be employed:

- Are any area demographic and other trends forecast in each environment for health?
- If the no-change option is selected, how will each environment for health develop?
- When change in a dimension has been selected, what are the predictions?

All strategies can be evaluated by using the Survey Work Book to repeat relevant parts of the Survey at intervals, say two years.

## Monitoring of food security at the local level

In recent years, data on household food security has become available at national, state, and at the local government level in Victoria using the question '*In the last 12 months, were there any times that you ran out of food and you couldn't afford to buy more?*'

In local areas, data is also required at the Collector District level to provide advocacy and support for local interventions and their subsequent evaluation.

Opportunities to progress the collection of this area data should be taken whenever possible, together with that for population groups. The Neighbourhood Renewal Program provides one of these opportunities.

## Recommendations

Achievement of environmental sustainability in the wider community and a liveable and just society require integrated Local Government planning and resources which will support activities of daily living for all and a 'Fairer Victoria.'

Progressing Municipal Food Security Surveys across Victoria will therefore require the following recommendations:

1. Development of guidelines for use of the Survey Work Book and a short training course and resources. Together they will provide an outline of the potential management and processes for the Survey. The guidelines will also provide models for the Survey outcomes including those of community consultation and municipal food security.
2. Implementation of this training course with five Local Governments with Neighbourhood Renewal Projects, who submitted Expressions of Interest last year in conducting a Municipal Food Security Survey.
3. Promotion of this course to all Local Governments in Victoria, with encouragement of local food policy development.
4. Improvement in the monitoring of local food security by area (Collector District). One of these opportunities is through the Neighbourhood Renewal Program.
5. Development of a brief checklist (population, cost, duration) to assist conversion of food security dimensions and opportunities to integrated planning for local improvement in food security.
6. Development and testing of a prediction checklist for the effect of short, medium and long term strategies to achieve sustainable improvement in whole of population health and well-being.
7. Extension and testing of the derived method for examining Municipal Food Security dimensions across comparative areas by area, and by population.

NOTE: Recommendations 4-7 can be achieved within recommendations 1-3.

Further development of the Project outcomes and their dissemination across Victoria will support the inclusion of mainstream food security strategies in Local Government, Neighbourhood Renewal, and other planning partnerships for and with local communities.

## Acknowledgements

This Project was funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services through a partnership between the Program areas of Neighbourhood Renewal and Public Health.

It would not have been possible without the Project partnerships between VLGA and the Cities of Greater Geelong and Wyndham. Particular thanks is given to the many people in the Councils, Neighbourhood Renewal Programs and residents who contributed to the successful conduct of the trial and its outcomes.

## For more information . . .

For more information or a copy of the Project Reports, please contact the Victorian Local Governance Association. Telephone: 03 9349 7999; e-mail: [fsn@vlga.org.au](mailto:fsn@vlga.org.au); ([www.foodsecurity.vlga.org.au](http://www.foodsecurity.vlga.org.au)).

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