



Community Food Hub Merri-bek

Food Leadership Action Group



Why are we here?

North of Merri-bek has some of the least food secure communities in the municipality.

2024

Food security project proposals & implementation

The coordinator will participate in existing projects and coordinate project proposals prioritised under the key focus areas.

2023

Hired Community Food Hub Coordinator

To do continuous **stakeholder & community engagement** & coordinate collaborative **food security projects**.

2021

Food Leadership Action Group (FLAG)

Council funded the establishment of the FLAG as the **governing body** to establish a **collective impact framework** & **lead the food hub project**.

2020

Community Food Hub Feasibility Study

In 2020, Council commissioned the feasibility study to **conceptualise** the food hub functions based on broad needs

2017

2017-24 Food System Strategy

Merri-bek City Council's vision is to create a sustainable, just and vibrant food system. **Food security** is one of five priorities -> Council's flagship food security project is the **Community Food Hub**.



The community engagement story...

Workshops

- Merri-bek City Council's connectors - (reference committee of cultural representatives respected within their communities who are generally food secure)
- Merri-bek City Council's Age Friendly (Older People) Reference Group

Face-to-face interviews (1.5 hours) with individuals from

- Nepalese students (representative)
- Nepalese community (representative)
- South Asian migrant community & passionate gardening community (representative)
- Italian migrant community & passionate gardening community (representative)
- Turkish Alevi Community Council of Australia (representative)
- Pakistani, Urdu speaking community in Fawkner (food insecure individual)
- Pakistani, Urdu speaking community in Glenroy (food insecure individual)
- To be continued...

*Note that

- "representatives" are not food insecure but spoke on behalf of their overall community group including members of the group that are experiencing food insecurity



The organisational engagement story...

Local community organisations that offer food relief with intake assessments or referrals from intake partners.

1. CIS Merri-bek
2. The Salvation Army, Asylum Seeker & Refugee Service
3. Nourishing Neighbours
4. Uniting Asylum Seeker Centre
5. VincentCare
6. Fawkner & Glenroy Libraries
7. Didi Bahini Samaj
8. Alevi Community Council of Australia

Social enterprises that run affordable pop-up markets

1. The Community Grocer (Fitzroy, Carlton, Pakenham & Flemington (new))
2. Merri Food Hub (Fawkner)
3. Whittlesea Food Hub (Epping)
4. Bendigo Foodshare (Bendigo)

Not-for-profit / Social enterprises that run community meals

1. Open Table
2. Just Food Collective

Not-for-profit community health organisations that have run food relief and/or affordable pop-up fresh food markets

1. CoHealth (Glenroy)
2. Merri Health (Coburg)

Local, agroecological farmers that are interested in food security projects

1. Fawkner Food Bowls

Merri-bek City Council officers and advisory groups

1. Glenroy Community Hub manager
2. Glenroy & Fawkner Libraries manager
3. Meals on Wheels management team
4. Social Cohesion Officer
5. Diversity Officer
6. Food Systems Officer
7. Merri-bek Social Worker
8. Accessible Communication Advisor
9. Living and Ageing Well Program Lead
10. Social Support Coordinator for the Ageing Community

Education institutions

1. *Nourish Network, Deakin University*

The food insecurity situation

What is food insecurity

FOOD INSECURITY FALLS INTO TWO CATEGORIES

Food insecurity with hunger

Food insecurity is when people do not have (or can't easily get) enough healthy food to eat.

1 in 25

adults in Victoria ran out of food in the previous 12 months and could not afford to buy more



1 in 5

Aboriginal adults ran out of food in the previous 12 months and could not afford to buy more



Food insecurity without hunger

Food insecurity without hunger is when a person has enough food to eat but the food may not be healthy or they may be worried about having enough money to buy more food.

Nearly 2 in 5

adults in Victoria did not always have healthy food or were worried about running out of money to buy food



1 in 8

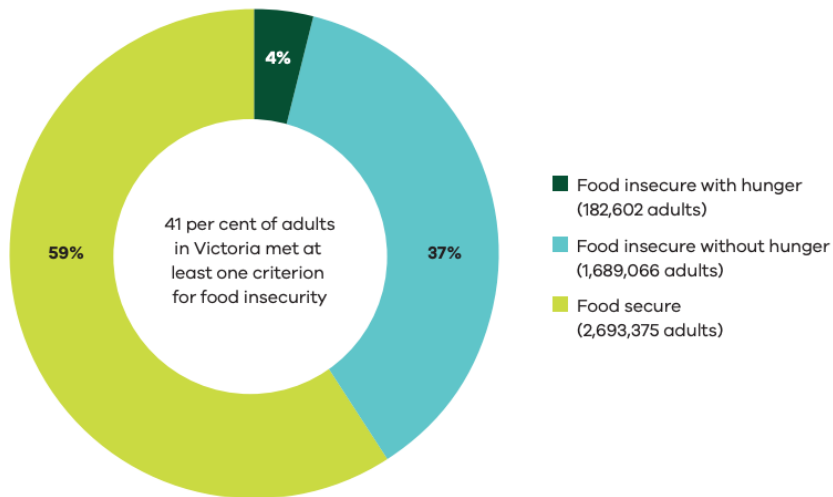
parents relied on unhealthy low-cost food for their children to avoid running out of money to buy food



The size of the need in Victoria: 41% of the population is food insecure

The size of the problem

The report quantifies the size of the food insecurity problem in Victoria and found that of the 4,565,043 adults aged 18 years or older in Victoria in 2014, 1,871,668 (41 per cent) were food insecure, by at least one of seven measures of food insecurity.



1 in 25 adults

(182,602 adults) in Victoria **ran out of food in the previous 12 months and could not afford to buy more** (food insecure *with* hunger)



1 in 8 adults

in Victoria **worried about running out of money to buy food** (food insecure *without* hunger).

In 2017 VicHealth published indicators that Merri-bek had a **medium prevalence of food insecurity with hunger** & proportion of parents who relied on **low-cost food**

Table A1-4: Prevalence of food insecurity with hunger in Victoria, by metropolitan local government area

Metropolitan local government area	SES ^a	Food insecure with hunger ^b			
		%	95% CI		
			LL	UL	
Maribyrnong (C)	Very low	2.2 *	0.8	5.7	
Melbourne (C)	High	**			
Melton (S)	Neither high or low	3.5 *	1.7	6.9	
Moonee Valley (C)	High	2.6 *	1.3	5.4	
Moreland (C)	Neither high or low	3.6 *	1.4	8.9	
Nillumbik (S)	Very high	0.7 *	0.3	1.8	
Whittlesea (C)	Low	2.4 *	1.3	4.2	
Wyndham (C)	Neither high or low	3.9 *	2.1	7.0	
Yarra (C)	Neither high or low	7.2 *	2.8	17.5	

Data are crude estimates (not age-standardised).

LL/UL 95% CI = lower/upper limit of 95 per cent confidence interval.

Estimates that are (statistically) significantly different from the corresponding estimate for Victoria are identified by colour as follows: **above** or **below**.

* Estimate has a relative standard error (RSE) between 25 and 50 per cent and should be interpreted with caution.

Table A1-22: Proportion of parents who relied on low-cost food, by metropolitan local government area

Metropolitan local government area	SES ^a	Relied on low-cost food to avert food insecurity with hunger		
		%	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Moreland (C)	Neither high or low	10.6*	4.4	23.6
Nillumbik (S)	Very high	10.9	6.0	19.0
Whittlesea (C)	Low	18.8	12.0	28.1
Wyndham (C)	Neither high or low	15.9	10.2	24.1
Yarra (C)	Neither high or low	**		
North and West Metropolitan Region		14.0	11.9	16.5
Bayside (C)	Very high	**		
Cardinia (S)	High	16.7	10.6	25.3
Casey (C)	Neither high or low	23.0	15.9	32.1
Frankston (C)	Neither high or low	16.5	9.9	26.2
Glen Eira (C)	Very high	**		
Greater Dandenong (C)	Very low	7.5*	3.5	15.4
Kingston (C)	High	12.0*	6.0	22.4
Mornington Peninsula (S)	High	12.6*	5.6	26.2
Port Phillip (C)	Very high	**		
Stonnington (C)	Very high	9.0*	3.3	22.1
Southern Metropolitan Region		12.9	10.4	15.9
Metropolitan Victoria		12.2	10.8	13.7
Victoria		13.0	11.8	14.2

^a SES = socioeconomic status. SES is based on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) that is a product developed by the ABS to rank areas in Australia according to relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage.

^b Survey respondents who were parents were asked: "In the last 12 months, did you have to rely on a restricted range of low-cost food for your children because you were running out of money to buy food? Data are crude estimates (not age-standardised).

LL/UL 95% CI = lower/upper limit of 95 per cent confidence interval.

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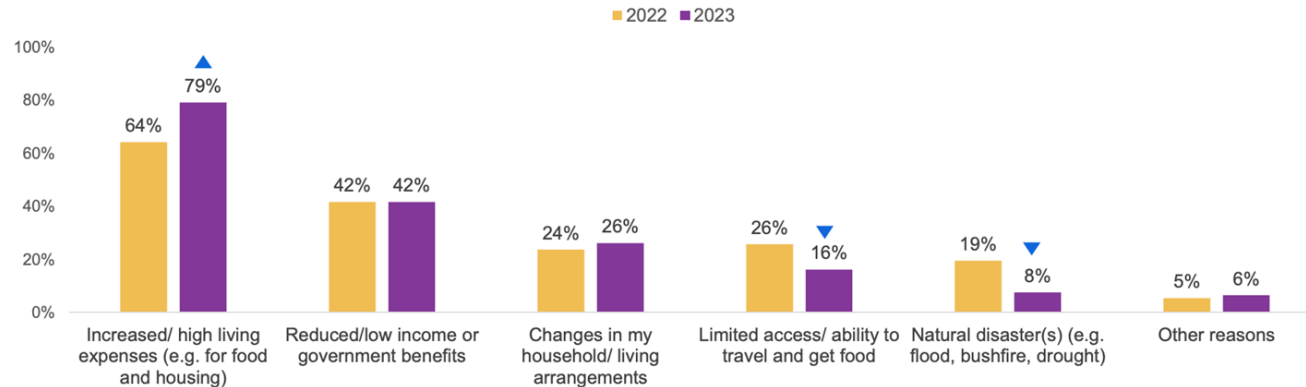
** Estimate has an RSE of greater than or equal to 50 per cent and is not reported because it is unreliable.

Our interview insights and Foodbank's 2023 Hunger Report indicate a rise in prevalence due to the increasing cost of living

Cost of living was the most common reason for food insecurity in 2023. As travel and disaster-driven food insecurity appeared to recede, even more food insecure households now perceive cost of living as the key contributor to their situation.

Meanwhile, consistently 2 in 5 (42%) food insecure households attributed their situations to income/ benefit-related changes

Reason(s) contributing to Food Insecure situations in the household, 2022-2023
Amongst Food Insecure Households



Source: FHR 2022-2023 Research; Q40 In the last 12 months, which of the following do you think have contributed to the situation(s) where you and/or your household could not afford enough food?
Base: Total Food Insecure Households, 2022 n=1248, 2023 n=1514

11 - © Ipsos | Foodbank Hunger Report Research 2023: National Key Findings Report

▲ ▼ Significantly higher/lower than previous year



Source: https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_Foodbank_Hunger_Report_IPSOS-Report.pdf

The 2 lowest income quintiles are high risk indicators of food insecurity where income ranges from zero upwards

Table A1-7: Prevalence of food insecurity with hunger in Victoria, by population characteristic

Population characteristic	Food Insecure with hunger		
	%	LL	UL
Aboriginal status			
Non-Aboriginal	3.5	3.1	4.0
Aboriginal	18.5*	10.1	31.2
Household composition			
Couple	1.9	1.4	2.6
Couple with children	3.1	2.5	3.9
Lone parent with children	13.2	9.6	17.9
One-person household	5.5	4.2	7.2
Group household	4.7	3.2	6.9
Employment status			
Employed	2.5	2.0	3.1
Unemployed	11.9	8.1	17.2
Home duties	7.8	5.6	10.7
Student	4.0*	2.4	6.7
Retired	1.4	1.1	1.8
Unable to work	19.2	15.3	23.8
Total annual household income			
Less than \$20,000	10.4	8.5	12.7
\$20,000–\$39,999	6.5	5.1	8.3
\$40,000–\$59,999	4.1	3.0	5.6
\$60,000–\$79,999	3.1*	1.9	5.0
\$80,000–\$99,999	1.6*	0.9	2.9
\$100,000 or more	1.2*	0.7	2.0
Home ownership			
Owned or mortgaged	2.3	1.9	2.7
Rented from public agency	15.7	12.0	20.3
Rented privately	7.6	5.9	9.8
Level of difficulty in getting to shops by normal mode of transport			
Easy	2.9	2.5	3.4
Difficult	6.0	4.1	8.8
Victoria	3.6	3.1	4.0

Income quintile	Median income per week	Median income per annum
Lowest	\$504	\$26,000
Second	\$998	\$51,896
Third	\$1,411	\$73,000
Fourth	\$1,932	\$100,464
Highest	\$2,972	\$154,544



The challenge of sizing the need in Merri-bek

We know that Merri-bek north has a food insecure community that is multicultural

- The proportion of Merri-bek - North's residents who were born overseas is higher compared to the average for Australia as a whole.
- In Merri-bek - North, the percentage of households experiencing poverty is not only higher than in Victoria, but also higher than the national average in Australia.

Source: Ananyev, M., KC, U., Payne, A.A. and Samarage, C.R. (2023) Breaking Down Barriers Community Profiles, Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, The University of Melbourne. Data visualisation. <https://bdbprofiles.melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/>

BUT we lack suburb level data on

- Current **size & severity/prevalence** of the need measured by
 - volume of food insecure households
 - by household size and suburb
- **Value of food subsidy required** measured by
 - value of affordability gap
 - by suburb

We calculated the **volume of households by income quintile by suburb** in Merri-bek





Upholding the right to food for low income groups

Australia was a founding member of the United Nations and played a key role in the drafting of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** more than sixty years ago.

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 (1) **Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being** of himself and of his family, **including food**, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

“For the first time, this study describes habitual dietary intakes, costs, and affordability by socio-economic group (SEG) in Australia. It also provides granular, quantitative data across all Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) food categories, which have been absent from the literature.

The intake of discretionary food and drinks was similar across SEGs, while **the intake of healthy food and drinks decreased from high to low SEGs**. Insights into varying intakes within subcategories of discretionary food and drinks provides further data to inform policies specific to low SEGs. Results confirm that **affording a healthy diet is problematic for low SEGs**.

This highlights the need to **keep the price of healthy food as low as possible**, both in absolute terms and relative to the price of unhealthy food. It also highlights the need to **ensure low SEG households have sufficient income** so that healthy and sustainable diets are affordable for all Australians.

This study provides valuable evidence to support the development of targeted policies to help low-income households purchase and consume healthy diets, and improve diet-related health.”

Source: Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Human rights at your fingertips - Human rights at your fingertips*, Accessed 18 Apr 2024. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/commission-general/universal-declaration-human-rights-human-rights-your-fingertips-human>

Source: Lewis M, McNaughton SA, Rychetnik L, Chatfield MD, Lee AJ. Dietary Intake, Cost, and Affordability by Socioeconomic Group in Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021; 18(24):13315. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182413315>



Limitations of the current funding & conventional supply chain makes it very hard to address food justice, the right to food and food as medicine



Community facing organisations, bear the brunt of the rising need with funding and supply challenges

Community facing organisations are bearing the brunt of the rising food insecurity need due to the cost of living crisis.

- Food security and food relief organisations **share a common beneficiary** -> both are focused on addressing the needs of the same food insecure communities.
- We recognise **their strength is in their care and deep one-on-one knowledge** of food insecure households
- We value their operations including intake and ongoing assessments.

Community facing organisations that provide food relief are stuck between a rock and a hard place.

- **Limited food subsidies** force these organisations to focus on addressing food insecurity with hunger for as many people as they can via food parcels/pantry. This looks like getting as much energy dense food as possible and accessing rescued fruits and vegetables that come in limited cultural varieties and freshness for free.
- **Limited operational subsidies** spread their resources thin for procurement, logistics and distribution of food, on top of case management and the other forms of support they provide.
- **Limited reliable suppliers of affordable/subsidised culturally appropriate fresh produce** means they have to default to procuring from food waste/rescued food distributors which can be unreliable, offering limited culturally appropriate or fresh produce. Food waste suppliers sit at the end of the **conventional supply chain**.

Food insecurity without hunger is a much bigger proportion of the need

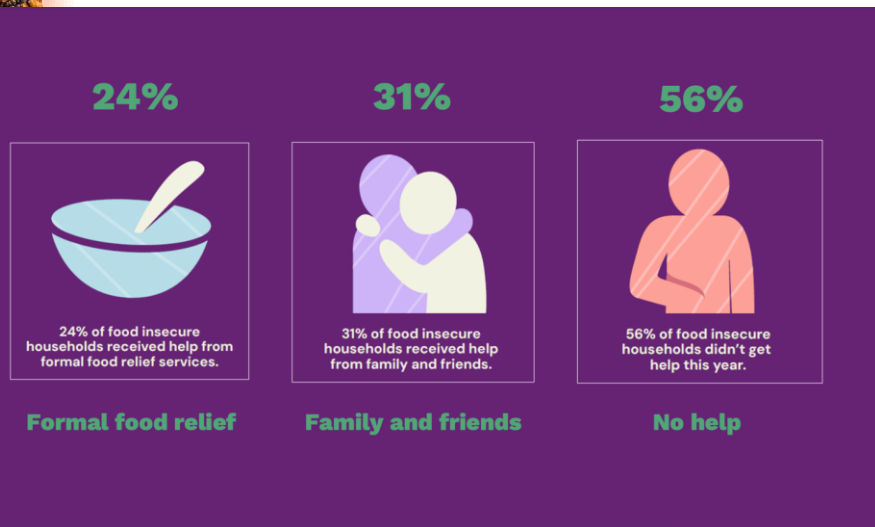
Figure 1-1: The food insecurity continuum



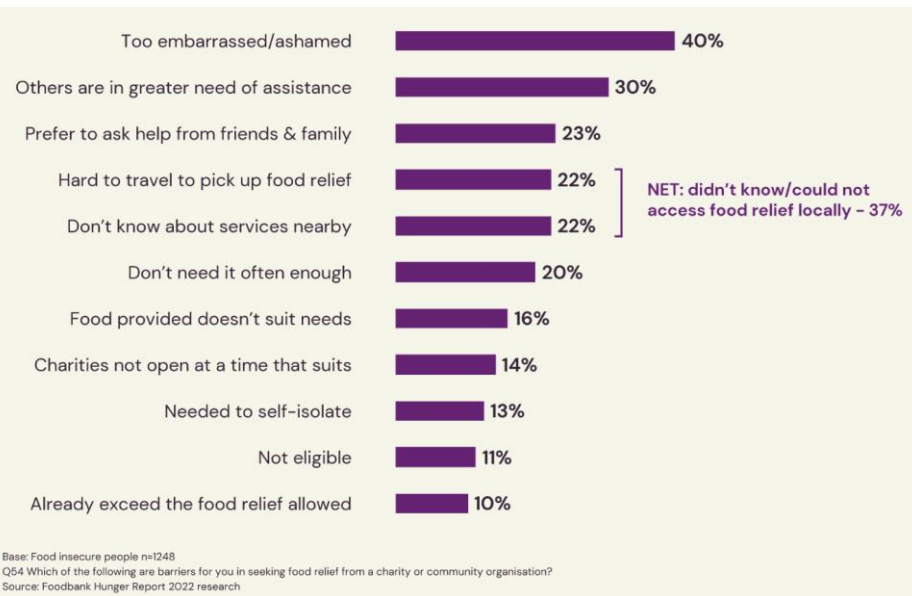
Adapted from Rosier, 2011.

Victorian Agency for Health Information 2017,
*Challenges to healthy eating – food insecurity in
Victoria*, p74

And a large proportion of the need is not met by “formal food relief” and is not funded



Source: https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_Foodbank_Hunger_Report_Summary.pdf



Source: <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2022/>

The conventional supply chain does not address resilience, local economic outcomes or closed loop agriculture

The funding is not structured to

- strengthen the resilience of the state's food system to future shocks and stresses
- embed self-determination and food sovereignty of Victoria's First Nations peoples
- ensure equitable access to food by addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity
- promote regenerative and agroecological production systems
- promote protected closed loop and urban agriculture
- support local and regional food supply chains by investing in local food processing and distribution, and supporting the development of decentralised logistics and marketing schemes
- ensure sustainable livelihoods by providing a living wage in food and farming and diverse career and training pathways.

Australia's food security problem

At least **one million** Australians **can't afford** to buy enough food



Climate change and **pandemic** are disrupting the food system



There will be more frequent **shocks** to our food supply



Less land, water and other **natural resources** are available to grow food



Food prices will continue to **rise**



More Australians will be **unable** to buy enough food in future



More people are becoming **dependent** on emergency food relief



Emergency food relief is **not** a long term solution



Australians need **dignified** access to nutritious food



We need a **food resilience plan** to ensure **everyone** has **enough food** in a world of shocks and stresses

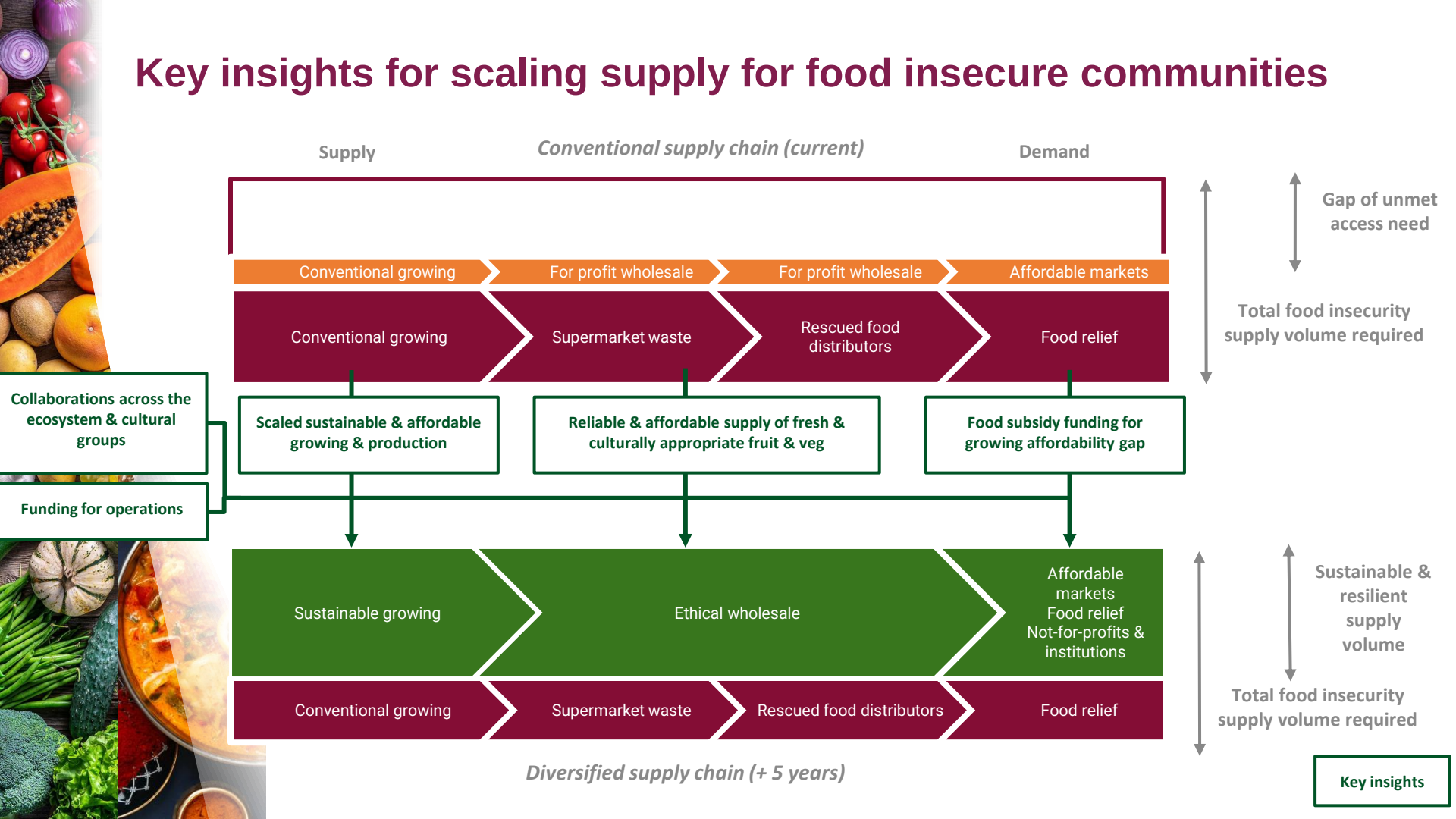


fvas.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/foodprint-melbourne



Source: Foodprint Melbourne, Report: Roadmap for a Resilient Melbourne Food System, The University of Melbourne, accessed 8 Sep 2023, <https://science.unimelb.edu.au/foodprint-melbourne/publications/report-roadmap-for-a-resilient-melbourne-food-system>

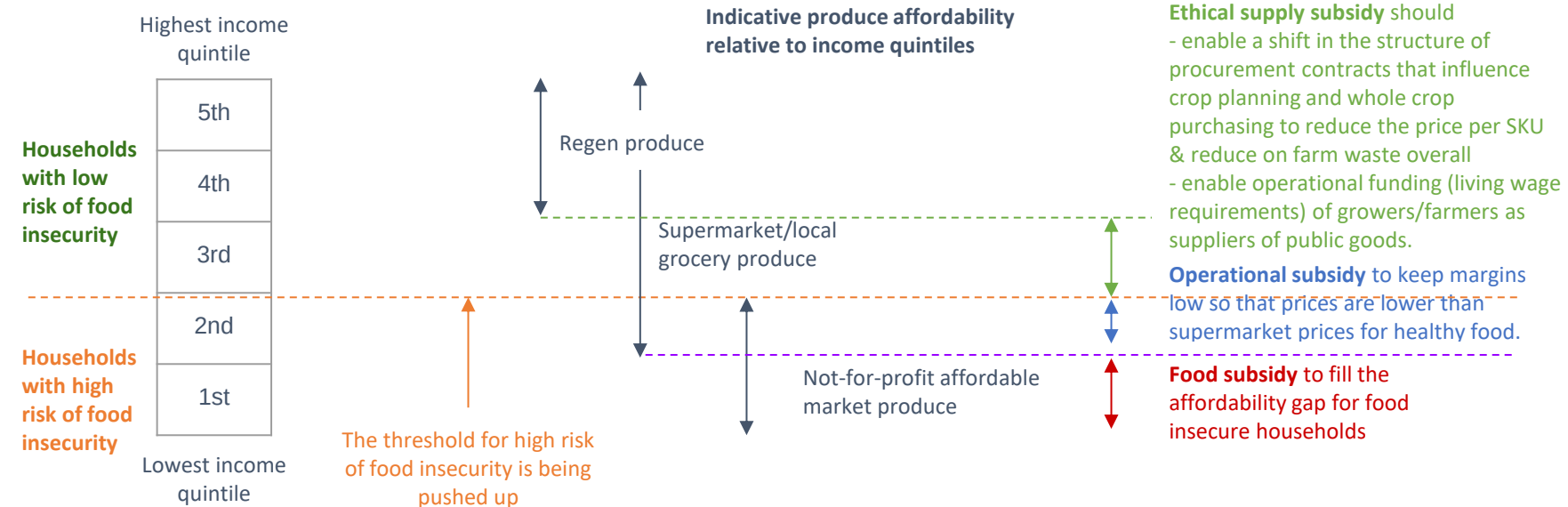
Key insights for scaling supply for food insecure communities



Impactful ethical supply subsidies require existing operational and food subsidies

Ethical supply that meets the food insecurity need must have a price range below supermarket prices.

Diagram of range of affordability of produce by income quintile





The need for an ethical wholesaler to leverage infrastructure: A Whittlesea Food Collective Case Study

Whittlesea Food Collective (WFC) is a Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) initiative located at Melbourne Polytechnic

Prior to Covid, community facing organisations in Whittlesea raised the need for aggregation and distribution infrastructure to support their food relief operations.

So WCC partnered with Melbourne Polytechnic to access one of their buildings and got Australian and Victorian Government grants for coolrooms, truck and offices. Donations paid for the pallet racking, garden and kitchen and a philanthropic grant paid for the walkey stacker.

The rent for the building started at \$7,000 all inclusive and will be \$25,000 this year.

WCC also developed Wollert Farm with the initial hopes that it would supply fresh fruits and vegetables to their food insecure communities. Unfortunately the farm location was not suitable and has become an indigenous nursery instead.

Post Covid, WFC run a free supermarket and an affordable fresh fruit & vegetable market (referred to as their food hub) from their building at Melbourne Polytechnic. Aggregation and distribution for other food relief organisations did not come to pass.

WFC have shown the value of a dedicated organisation coordinating the procurement, aggregation and logistics of subsidised and affordable food supply to leverage the infrastructure. The Community Grocer are currently running a Sustainable Procurement Project that involves identifying infrastructure that would serve a region (greater than Merri-bek) as well as an organisation that could coordinate the supply,

What is working - WFH have **dedicated staff who run procurement of affordable produce from Epping Wholesale Market, and coordinate and leverage the logistics and storage infrastructure they have.** This has enabled them to meet the need and collaborate with other organisations.

- WFH food hub customers have been relatively stable, around 50-60 per week, however they'll be opening up a second market day next term and are expecting that to increase.
- They are 50% cheaper than supermarkets and 11% cheaper than local grocers. And that their box system is starting to grow.
- They've seen a 150% increase in people accessing food relief/material aid in the past year due to cost of living pressures, including many accessing support for the first time.

What is not working - a business model based solely on sales is not viable, **they require operational subsidies to meet the need**

- VicHealth funding for the operational team for the pop-up market is coming to an end. The funding was to setup a market model that covered its own costs. However, WFC, like many other markets focused on equitable access to food insecure communities, will not be able to cover their costs solely from sales revenue. They will require further operational funding to continue to offer public good outcomes to low income communities.

What is new - they are **introducing food subsidies** into their food hub model

- WFH have started trialling distributing food vouchers at their free supermarket for redemption at their affordable pop-up market to further increase financial access of their food insecure community.

Proposals

FLAG is coordinating collaborative projects focused on...

Funding & supply projects that are co-located with multiple partners at Glenroy Community Hub in Merri-bek's North (Horizon 2)

- Affordable fresh produce pop-up market (commencing 1 May)
- Cooking workshops and community meals (pending grant approval)
- Voucher program (proposal in progress)

Funding & supply projects that partner with food relief organisations in Merri-bek (Horizon 1)

- Food subsidies & fresh produce supply for food relief pilot (proposal in progress)

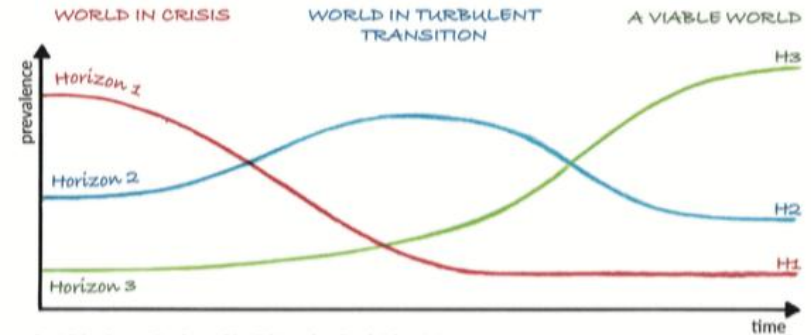
Partnering on the initial stage of a long term ethical & resilient supply project (Horizon 3)

- The Community Grocer's sustainable procurement experiment (project is in progress)

Exploring funded feeding programs that leverage existing food processing facilities and institutional procurement in Merri-bek (Horizon 2)

- Affordable fresh produce pop-up market (exploration stage)

THREE HORIZONS FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO THE TRANSITION TOWARDS A REGENERATIVE CULTURE



Sustaining innovation keeps 'the lights on' and maintains status quo.

Disruptive innovation identifies opportunities to change the scope of what is possible.

Transformative innovation facilitates the transition towards regenerative cultures.



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Thank you