FoodCommunity
working together to improve food security

ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
Nutrition and Health Innovation Research Institute

SOUTH WEST

FOOD ACTION GROUPS

Stakeholder Focus Group | Early Feedback Report

Authors

Jess Doe
Edith Cowan University

Sarah Goodwin
Edith Cowan University

Professor Amanda Devine
Edith Cowan University

Associate Professor Melissa Stoneham
Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University

Dr Stephanie Godrich
Edith Cowan University

This report can be cited as:

Doe, J., Goodwin, S., Devine, A., Stoneham, M & Godrich, S.L. (2023). *South West Food Action Groups: Stakeholder Focus Group Early Feedback Report.* Perth, Western Australia: Edith Cowan University

For enquiries about this report, contact:

Dr Stephanie Godrich
Chief Investigator, Edith Cowan University
s.godrich@ecu.edu.au

Acknowledgement:

The Food Community team would like to thank all participants for their valuable contributions and time towards this project, and for their ongoing efforts in supporting food security across Western Australia.

The Issue

All people need food in sufficient amounts, and of good quality, to meet their dietary needs. It can be challenging for some people to have guaranteed physical, social and economic access to healthy and affordable food (food security). At a community level, this means residents can obtain a safe, nutritious diet produced through a sustainable food system that maximises healthy choices, supports cultural and taste preferences, and provides everyone with equal food access.

The Background

The Food Community project, aims to identify, map, evaluate and strengthen initiatives supporting food security. The Food Community website helps to bring people interested in working in food security together to learn more about food security and how to support it, in a coordinated and collaborative way. However, for sustainability, a governance approach is required to progress food security action. Food Action Groups offer an excellent 'where to from here' solution to this problem.

Food Action Groups have been helping community members and people working in food security to get involved in food system decision-making in Europe, the UK and North America for over 20 years. Stakeholders collaborate to implement activities like nutrition programs, social supermarkets, and getting locally produced food into hospitals, aged care centres and school meals (among others). No such Food Action Group model exists in regional Western Australia. This is a clear gap that presents us with an opportunity for innovation.

LOCATION | South West, Western Australia

The South West region is located south of WA's capital, Perth, covers 23,970 km and includes 12 local government authorities.

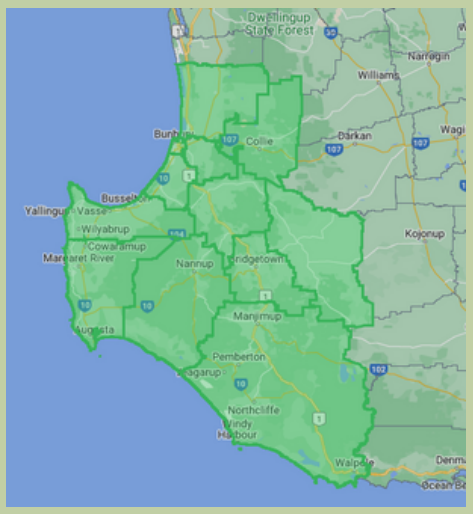

Figure 1: South West Western Australia (Adapted from REMPLAN MapBuilder, https://mapbuilder.remplan.com.au/?link=10dcdc50-d04f-4b3f-bbf8-5ec1198b79db)

Current Status

South West focus groups were held in March 2023, where the team shared their findings from an international review of Food Action Groups' activities, and sought feedback on preferences for an ideal Food Action Groups model, the key stakeholders to involve in its creation, potential barriers, and funders.

What we heard...

What a good food pathway looks like...

Community connection and engagement through fresh, affordable and local food; education and empowerment by teaching children about growing food and fostering behaviour change; inclusivity by creating an open and inviting space for everyone to buy their food.

When the food pathway works, why does it work?

Farmers markets and short supply chains, some affordable supermarket options, structured health initiatives, nutrition education and sustainable agricultural practices which enhance the resilience of food supply chains.

South West Food Problems...

Primary production challenges, scaling hurdles, regional disparities for equipment and resourcing costs, international competition affecting pricing and competitiveness and insufficient small farming options due to land limitations.

Proposed Food Action Group Activities...

- Increasing understanding of health and nutrition through nutrition literacy and education.
- Strong monitoring and evaluation with a focus on food distribution.
- Focus on changing access and supply of food in WA to prioritise local produce.
- Provide advocacy training to support local food initiatives and research.
- Foster diverse partnerships to share issues and understanding
- Support for local businesses.
- Managing effective timelines for Food Action Groups in the South West region.

Proposed Structure...

Diverse funding sources; fit for purpose; progress from grassroots to established structures; maintain autonomy with an independent chairperson; political engagement; focus on specific areas of the food pathway to maximise impact; develop policy or position statements for effective communication; and establish a clear value set that reflects the group's direction.

Stakeholders...

Local government, WA Farmers' Market Association, primary producers, those with marketing expertise, larger businesses or industry representatives and link to healthy weight action plans.

Perceived Barriers...

Food industry resistance, lack of diverse skills among members, clarity of purpose, a need for evidence, addressing controversy and timeframe clarity and management.

> *"...around processing and distribution, that kind of food hub type model of a physical space where people can come together and actually utilise shared facilities to value add, to refrigerate, to get branding advice, to jar things up, aggregate that and then just distribute it..."*

Where to from here?

We are now looking into our findings from the South West and other WA regions more deeply. Once complete, we'll commence identifying suitable funding for the establishment of one or more Food Action Groups in the South West.

Follow the project through Facebook and sign up to the Food Community website today!

foodcommunity@ecu.edu.au
@ecufoodcommunity
www.foodcommunity.com.au