FoodCommunity
working together to improve food security

ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
Nutrition and Health Innovation Research Institute

GREAT SOUTHERN (ALBANY)

FOOD ACTION GROUPS

Community Focus Group | Early Feedback Report

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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 | Great Southern, Western Australia

The Great Southern region is located on the south coast of WA, covers 39,007 square kilometres and includes 13 local government authorities [1].

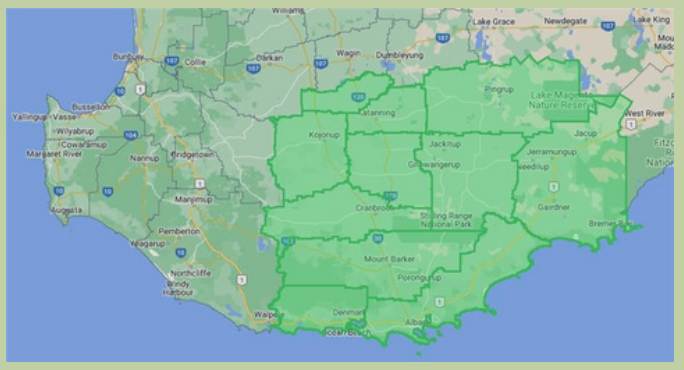

Figure 1. Great Southern, Western Australia [2]

Current Status

Great Southern focus groups were held in June 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 be involved in its creation, potential barriers, and funders.

What we heard...

What a good food pathway looks like...

Growing and selling organic food locally; teaching organic farming; community building focused on environmental sustainability; initiatives like dairy goat breeding to contribute to local food supply; establishing community supported agriculture to enhance food security; local government policies to support urban farming; sustainable farming practices; successful farmers markets providing real income to farming families.

When the food pathway works, why does it work?

Farmers market contributing to the local economy and providing access to locally grown food; active food relief organisations distributing food to those in need; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) supporting local producers through box schemes; small businesses e.g. AVEG supporting local food as an alternative channel to major supermarkets; securing local food supply and existing structures that support this, including primary production, processing and health initiatives that contribute to the local food system.

Great Southern Food Problems...

Threat of mining could lead to loss of agricultural land and impact organic food production; local producers struggling to find plastic-free packaging solutions that satisfy health regulations; lack of education and training focused on local food processing to enable producers to meet certification requirements; increasing processing and distribution costs; region is overly reliant on outside sourcing which affects the cost of local food and could impact sustainability of small family run businesses.

Proposed Food Action Group Activities...

- Increase affordable food options, including for those with special dietary needs.
- Enhance food accessibility for everyone in the region.
- Reduce food miles, ensure food is sourced locally.
- Reduce food waste and packaging.
- Reduce chemical use in production.
- Support mechanisms like the small business centre to boost the regions self sufficiency.

Proposed Structure...

Government interaction is important; similar model to Torbay Catchment Group, but focused on food; advisory group embedded within the Albany Small Business Centre.

Stakeholders...

Albany Health Department; City of Albany, including town planning; Albany Public Health; Albany farmers markets; Albany Small Business Centre; Torbay Catchment Group; chefs/food processing experts; Aboriginal community; community members with lived experience of food insecurity.

Perceived Barriers...

Funding challenges; members expertise/skills e.g. project management; risk of burnout among active members; legal and regulatory navigation.

> *You know, what's lovely about the area, there's also farmers and markets in Denmark... and that's what you want. You want really local... you want your food to be grown within, say, 30 kilometres.*

Where to from here?

We are now looking into our findings from the Great Southern 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 Great Southern.

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

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References:

1. WA Country Health Service. Great Southern regional profile. From: https://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Great-Southern/Great-Southern-regional-profile , 2021.
2. Great Southern Western Australia. Adapted from REMPLAN MapBuilder, https://mapbuilder.remplan.com.au/?link=10dcdc50-d04f-4b3f-bbf8-5ec1198b79db