

# WHEATBELT FOOD ACTION GROUPS

Stakeholder Focus Group | Early Feedback Report



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## This report can be cited as:

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

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## 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 | Wheatbelt, Western Australia

The Wheatbelt region is located east of WA's capital, Perth, covers 155,256 square kilometres and includes 42 local government authorities [1].

### Current Status

Wheatbelt focus groups were held in April 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.

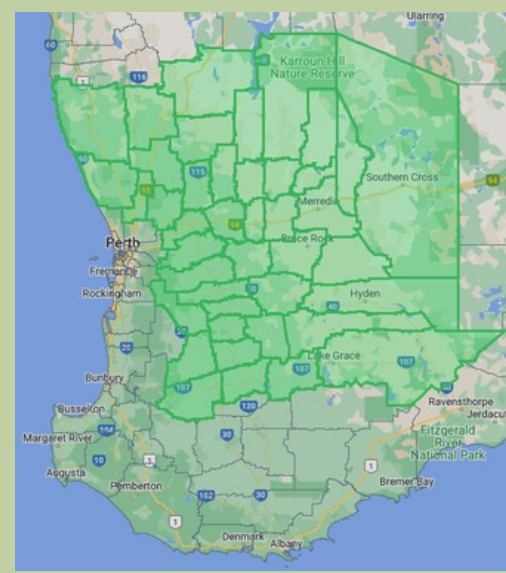


Figure 1. Wheatbelt Western Australia [2]

## What we heard...

### What a good food pathway looks like...

A local food system that includes all components of the pathway (e.g. primary production, processing, distribution, access, consumption to waste) and ensures food is accessible for all; functional supermarkets in smaller towns; a local organic waste collection and processing system.

### When the food pathway works, why does it work?

Good climate; lots of food produced in terms of volumes of commodity crops; numerous transport options, (trains and trucks); Gnarojin community garden and their produce market; some direct food sales (e.g. local honey, Agricultural College eggs); community members express desire for more access to good food; mobile fish truck and access to Manjimup potatoes.

### Wheatbelt Food Problems...

Commodity producing region (Wheat, canola, livestock), limited ready-to-eat, fresh foods or opportunity to process food locally (e.g abattoir or flour mill); no FOGO (food waste) system; small, non-functional supermarkets in small towns and no 'bread-run' to transport locally grown food throughout region.



## Proposed Food Action Group Activities...

- Increasing accessibility of locally grown fruit and vegetables.
- Investigating opportunities for farmers to process or re-use their own green waste.
- Advocating for more local food processing facilities, like abattoirs for meat.
- Increasing education around food choices and waste, connecting schools and hospitals to collaborate on worm farm and composting initiatives.
- Lobbying for change or relax local laws to support increased access to locally grown foods, outside of supermarkets (e.g. through roadside stalls or veggie boxes).

## Proposed Structure...

Satellite groups across local governments; include government and not-for-profits with some volunteers but balance with paid staff to implement activities; operate with a committee and address all components of the food pathway.

## Stakeholders...

Shires, DPIRD, Great Southern Waste, CBH, WACHS (WA Country Health Service), retailers, schools, Narrogin Agricultural College, tourism and community members.

## Perceived Barriers...

Shire bylaws and staff resourcing limitations; relying on volunteers and their time restraints; lack of required expertise (e.g. grant writing); funding and conflicting economic views for land use regarding food production or commodity crops (e.g. profit).

“ *...the region is known for being commodity producers... lots of crops and livestock... but you know they're value added outside of the region... I think there's... some innovation that can happen around that value add space... could we mill our own flour instead of... sending it all away to be processed because you know that not only from a... food miles perspective... but also from a provenance point of view of stamping... this is... regionally produced food and we know in our consumer market that people are looking for that experience.* ”

## Where to from here?

We are now looking into our findings from the Wheatbelt 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 Wheatbelt.

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



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www.foodcommunity.com.au

### References:

1. WA Country Health Service. Wheatbelt regional profile. From: <https://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Wheatbelt/Wheatbelt-regional-profile>, 2021.
2. Wheatbelt Western Australia. Adapted from REMPLAN MapBuilder, <https://mapbuilder.remplan.com.au/?link=10dc50-d04f-4b3f-bbf8-5ec1198b79db>