

South West Food Community Project Update

2020



Key messages

- Food security relates to all people having physical, social and economic access to food and includes food availability, access, utilisation and stability elements.
- The South West Food Community (SWFC) pilot project used a six-stage process to map current initiatives supporting healthy food availability, access and use in South West WA (SWWA) in 2018-2019. The project included a key feature of co-designing suggestions to strengthen food security action to achieve system change.
- When reflecting on mapping results, SWFC participants and stakeholders proposed new food security initiative ideas required to fill existing gaps.
- An ECU Honours student evaluated the SWFC process in 2019 and measured a number of changes to practice within the system of initiatives.
- A tailored Food Community web platform has been created to support the network.
- The SWFC model has been refined and prepared for scale up to other WA regions and Australian states, and aligns with State and Local Government Public Health Plans.

Background

Food security relates to all people having physical, social and economic access to food and includes food availability, access, utilisation and stability elements (1). At a community level, this means that all community members can access healthy food from sustainable and resilient food systems that maximises equal access for all (2).

Western Australia (WA) is unique, with much of its population residing in urban areas (3). Beyond metropolitan areas, rural and remote locations experience poorer food availability, variety, quality and higher food cost (3). Inequitable health service provision, challenges with collaboration, and limited cooking and nutrition knowledge among some community members are other reported challenges (4).

Though, there are a number of opportunities to support equitable access to healthy food in WA, particularly in SWWA. A number of interventions reportedly contribute to improved community-level food security, such as farmers' markets, food swapping groups and social enterprises. However, prior to 2018, it remained unknown whether the current initiatives to increase food security were appropriate or effectively working as a system, and how their effectiveness could be enhanced. This briefing paper provides an overview of the SWFC pilot project, and outlines the project's next steps.

South West Food Community: An Australian-first pilot project

The SWFC pilot project followed a Systemic Innovation Lab process (5), developed by the organisation Wicked Lab, and has been piloted in SWWA since June 2018. The six-step phased process was based on the premise that complex issues such as food security will be better addressed through a place-based focus and by supporting systems of government and community initiatives to work in a collaborative manner. The project included mapping the existing initiatives in SWWA, that are working to support healthy food availability, access and use – three of the key pillars of food security (6). The availability category included initiatives addressing factors such as fresh produce availability (i.e. local government

strategic plans). The access category included initiatives focusing on factors such as social support (i.e. food swapping groups), while the utilisation category included factors such as nutrition knowledge and cooking skills (i.e. health promotion interventions).

The following project flow diagram illustrates the six-stage Form, Explore, Map, Learn, Address, Share (FEMLAS) project process (7):

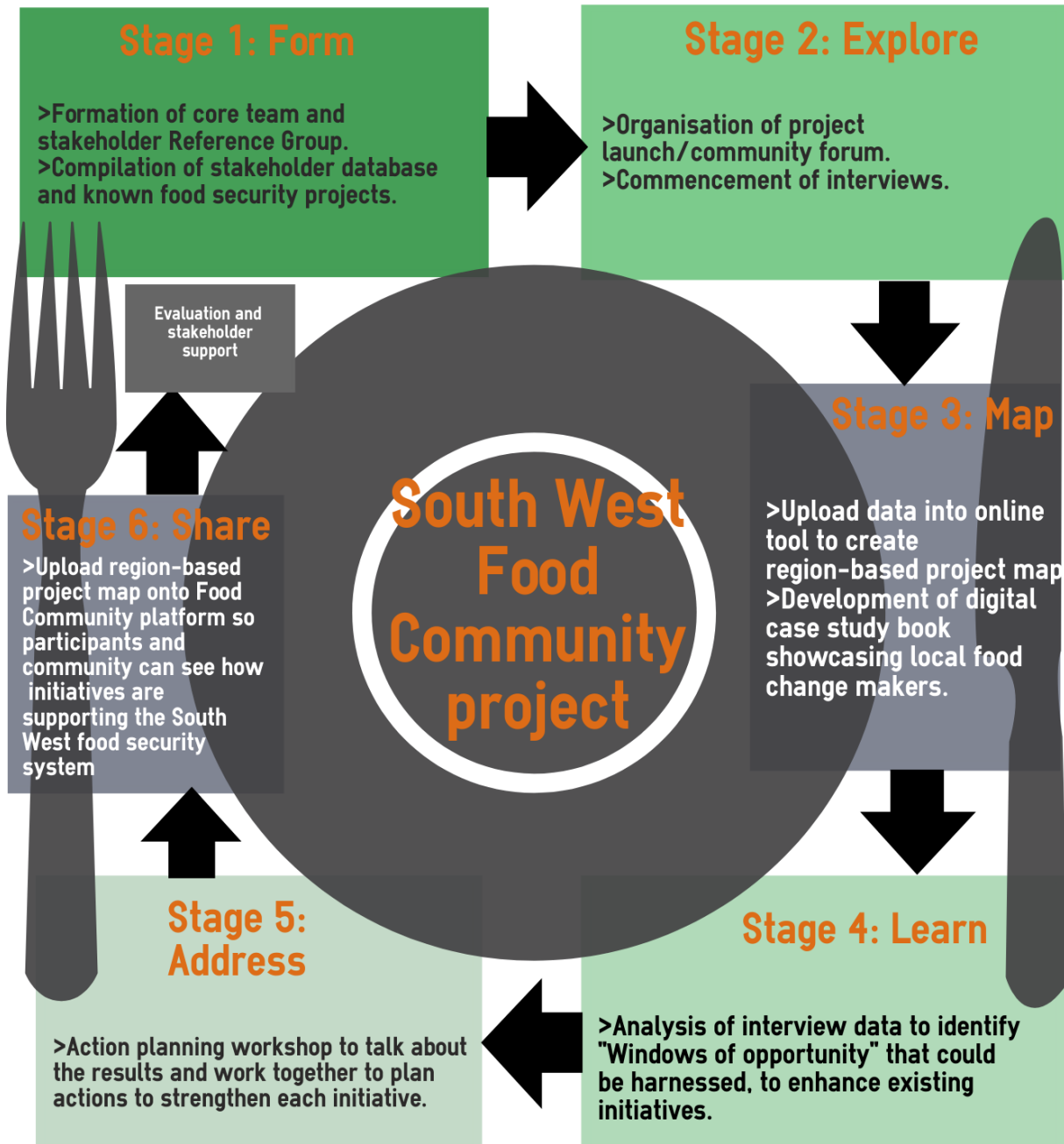


Figure 1: Food Community process – Wicked Lab’s FEMLAS (Form, Explore, Map, Learn, Address, Share) approach

The project then went a step beyond simply mapping the existence of these initiatives. Through interviews, we collected information about each initiative’s partnership network and evaluated each of the 52 participating initiatives against 36 initiative characteristics or attributes associated with moving to a more effective way of addressing a complex issue like

community level food security (8). These characteristics were embedded into nine Focus Areas (8), determined by the literature and collated by the organisation Wicked Lab. A plain language version of these Focus Areas includes:

Focus area 1 – Shaking up the current way of working

Focus area 2 – Moving to a new and better way of working

Focus area 3 – Organisations working in new and more effective ways with each other.

Focus area 4 – The new way of working becomes the dominant way of working among the organisations in the system

Focus area 5 – Helping to get information spread throughout the system

Focus area 6 – Helping the work undertaken by community organisations to align with government priorities

Focus area 7 – Creating government policies that are shaped by community organisations

Focus area 8 – Government using community knowledge and ideas

Focus area 9 – The government sharing information about community initiatives operating in their area.

Results

A total of 52 initiatives were captured in the project mapping, and spanned food availability, food access and food utilisation pillars of food security (Figure 2). No initiatives focusing on the stability dimension of food security were captured.

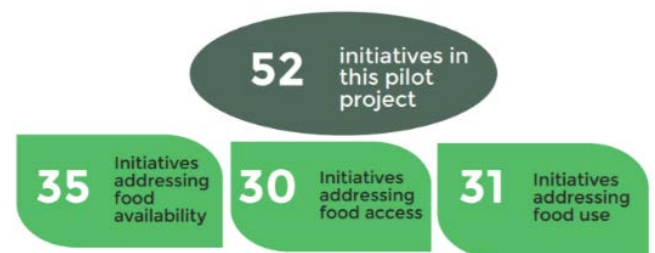


Figure 2: Project characteristics

The SWFC partnership analysis (Figure 3), indicates some projects have initiated connection/collaboration with multiple, interconnected partner organisations to facilitate delivery, whereas others have smaller networks. The project itself offers a range of opportunities to strengthen and extend these networks between initiatives.



Figure 3: South West Food Community initiative network analysis

The mapping completed at Stage 3 and analyses at Stage 4 demonstrated that Focus Areas 1, 2, 4 and 5 were already being well addressed by initiatives, but Focus Areas 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9 offered windows of opportunity to strengthen them.

The following results map of initiatives demonstrates the South West food security system (9), with red squares around the windows of opportunity in various Focus Areas:

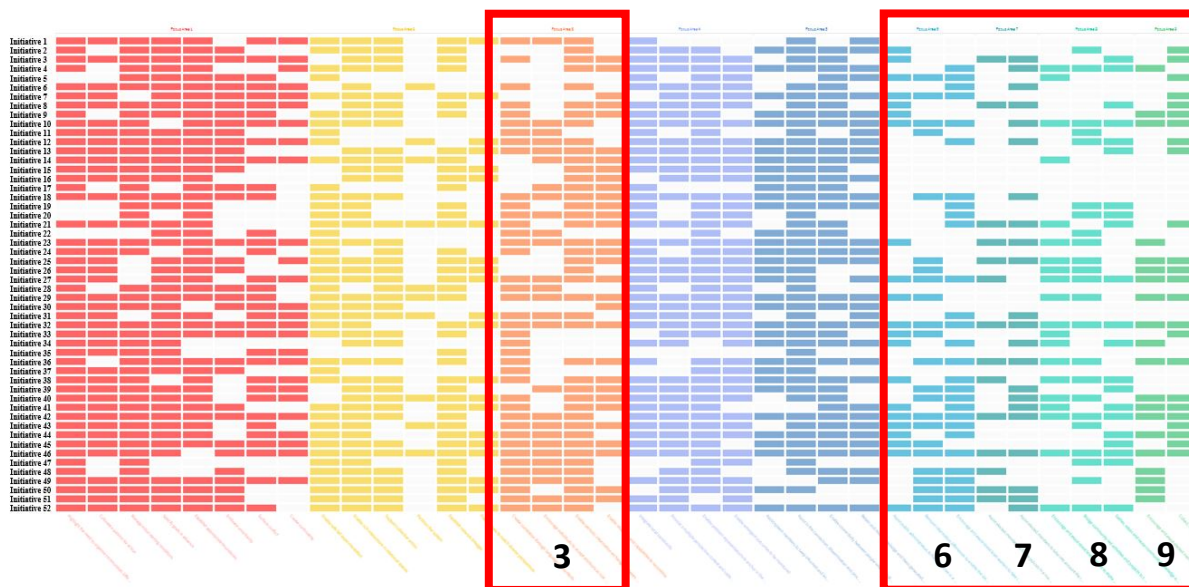


Figure 4: The map illustrates areas of strength and opportunity

We then provided all participants with their individual project report demonstrating which Focus Area characteristics their initiative met, and hosted an action-planning forum to work together to design some strategies initiatives might like to focus on, to address their identified ‘windows of opportunity’. The initial findings were published in early 2019 (9) with more in-depth project findings recently published (10).

Pilot Evaluation

In early 2019, an ECU Honours student was appointed, to evaluate the SWFC process and re-engage participants to determine if any changes outlined on their action plans had been implemented. Results are currently unpublished, however, the approach has identified system change in multiple Focus Areas. Further, the Honours project uncovered a greater understanding of the barriers and enablers associated with changing policy and practice. For example, barriers included limited resources, regulations, poor program attendance, and limited time. Enablers included funding opportunities, community and organisational support, and partnerships. Participants articulated the impact of the SWFC pilot process on their work, outlining that it increased their understanding of food security, not only in the context of their own role but also the bigger picture and how their work is contributing to community action to address food security. It also supported networking; participants were made aware of others working to increase food security and facilitated potential collaboration. The evaluation also provided insights into how we could refine the project for future scale up, and stakeholder needs for a purpose-built food security website.

Food Community website

Healthway funding was secured in 2019 to create a custom-built website to support the SWFC and future scale up of the project to other WA regions. This website, www.foodcommunity.com.au, was recently launched and connects network participants,

stakeholders and the wider community, offers professional development opportunities through webinars about food security, fact sheets, research infographics, a free advocacy training course to connect with funders and government, provides case studies on initiatives supporting healthy food availability, access and use across WA, and facilitates interaction between website users.

Next steps

Proposed South West Food Strategy

Local Government and community organisation interest is currently being sought, to progress a cohesive South West Food Strategy, which the SWFC project can inform. We now have an understanding of some of the local food initiatives happening across SWWA, and the new initiatives participants believe are needed in the region, with further insight to be provided into the local food system in 2020 through the new project above. However, we have no coordinated action. Mechanisms to progress a South West Food Strategy, including a consortium or alliance of Local Governments and organisations or a regional Food Policy Council, could be explored in 2020 and beyond. Sample models from Canada and Victoria have been scoped which show great promise. The Food Community website could also be a key support mechanism. The Food Strategy could align with Local Government’s Public Health Plans (PHP) and aligns with the State PHP.

Statewide scale up: Food Community

A funding application is currently being prepared, to roll out the SWFC pilot process to other WA regions. Support resources and tools have been refined as a result of the pilot and consultations, and some aspects of the methodology will be slightly adapted to suit the local place-based context of each region. The Food Community process aligns with numerous objectives and policy priorities within the State Public Health Plan, and thus, will compliment local government Public Health Plans.

Alignment with State Public Health Plan for Western Australia

Examples are provided below for how the project aligns with existing public health objectives and policy priorities:

Table 1: South West Food Community alignment with the State Public Health Plan (PHP)
(11)

State Public Health Plan Objective	State Public Health Plan Policy priority	South West Food Community alignment
<i>Objective 1:</i> <i>Empowering and enabling people to live healthy lives</i>	<i>1.1 Healthy eating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Food Community project facilitates information dissemination about food security and advocates for the provision of a healthy food environment. This has been through communication of results, community forums and the Food Community website. Actions outlined in individual project plans in the action-planning stage of the project included enhancing food literacy, increasing community skills to support healthy eating. The website includes research infographics with evidence to inform the need to increase access to affordable healthy food and provide practical tips for doing so.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The website includes a “groups” function which will connect various community and government initiatives, aiming to enhance their work supporting food security at a local level. The project has supported local governments’ PHP through scoping current food initiatives operating and collating desired new projects in the South West region that support healthy eating.
	<i>1.3 Curbing the rise in overweight and obesity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a paradox between obesity and food insecurity (12) and thus this project supports enhancing food security determinants, which could potentially play a role in supporting healthy food accessibility in WA. The project has supported groups working to enhance healthy food availability, access and use such as farmers’ markets, community gardens, food swapping groups, social enterprises, local government plans and food literacy projects.
	<i>1.7 optimise mental health and wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a small way, the Food Community project has provided a vehicle to enhance social connectedness, inclusion, and networks. This has primarily been due to the community forums and action planning components of the project, which has catalysed potential new partnerships/relationships amongst participants. The Food Community website contains a groups function which will play a networking role to increase virtual connections between groups and users across the region and state.
Objective 2: <i>Providing health protection for the community</i>	<i>2.1 maintain healthy built environments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Food Community project advocates for healthy built food environments, to ensure availability, access and use of food is maximised through increased efficiency of government and community initiatives.
Objective 3: <i>Improving Aboriginal health and wellbeing</i>	<i>3.2 Enhance partnerships with the Aboriginal community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project has included consultation with numerous stakeholders working with Aboriginal community representatives. The Food Community website includes resources tailored for community members living in remote Aboriginal communities, which will facilitate information sharing and the pooling of resources. The future state-wide scale up of the Food Community project will include expansion to other WA regions, thereby capturing information and aiming to support transformative change among initiatives in those areas.
	<i>3.5 Promote Aboriginal health and wellbeing as core business for all stakeholders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state wide scale up of the Food Community project will facilitate the opportunity for people working in the Aboriginal workforce to participate in the mapping of community food projects, action planning and the future direction of the network created through the project. The Food Community website will enable contribution of content ideas by the Aboriginal workforce and community.

Conclusion

Food security focuses on ensuring physical, social and economic access to food. At a community level, this focuses on access by all community members to healthy food, social justice and sustainable food systems. While community food security in rural and remote locations can be challenging to maintain, WA provides numerous opportunities. This project has investigated initiatives being implemented across SWWA, with the results mapped using an online tool. Stakeholders have been encouraged to collaborate to identify how current initiatives can be adapted to improve functioning or identify new potential initiatives to enhance community level food security across the South West. This briefing paper outlines achievements such as development of the tailored Food Community website and next steps

including the state-wide scale up to other WA regions and a proposed South West Food Strategy. Local Governments can benefit from the project's approach to enhance food security, in relation to addressing the State Public Health Plan objectives.

For more information

Please contact Dr Stephanie Godrich at: s.godrich@ecu.edu.au

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