

FOOD ACTION GROUPS

Project Overview



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BACKGROUND

To be food secure, people need healthy, affordable, quality food in sufficient amounts. However, it can be challenging for some people to have guaranteed physical, social and economic access to healthy and affordable food.

ECU is leading the Food Community project, which aims to identify, map, evaluate and strengthen initiatives supporting physical, economic and social access to healthy food. For sustainability, a governance approach is required to drive focused food security action once the mapping, evaluation and co-design work has been completed. Food Action Groups offer an excellent 'where to from here' solution to this problem.

WHAT ARE FOOD ACTION GROUPS?

Food Action Groups are a mechanism to bring cross-sector stakeholders together to co-create local solutions to local food problems. These types of groups, often known as 'Food Policy Councils' or 'Local Food Partnerships', have been operating for up to 20 years in countries like the USA and Canada, and in the UK. No such Food Action Group model exists in Western Australia. This is a clear gap that presents us with an opportunity for innovation.

WHAT ACTIVITIES DO FOOD ACTION GROUPS IMPLEMENT?

In other countries, Food Action Group activities have included:

- Increasing food equity, e.g. creating alternatives to charitable food, like social supermarkets;
- Increasing knowledge and/or demand for healthy food, e.g. food education programs with children and adults;
- Increasing food access, e.g. advocating for food objectives in government policies;
- Prioritising environmental sustainability, e.g. promoting low-waste food items on café menus;
- Increasing economic development, e.g. creation of jobs along the food supply chain from production to consumption;
- Increasing food system resiliency, e.g. getting locally-grown food into hospitals, prisons, aged-care centres.



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WHAT IS THE FOOD ACTION GROUPS WORK ABOUT?

The Edith Cowan University Food Community team is coordinating a three-phase project:

1. Undertake a systematic scoping review of international Food Action Groups, to collate evidence for effective food activities across high-income countries.
2. Conduct community and food system stakeholder focus groups across regional towns in Peel, South West, Wheatbelt, Great Southern, Goldfields, Midwest, Pilbara and Kimberley regions. During these focus groups we will ask questions such as what the local food problems are; when the food supply chain works well, why it does so; their vision of a good food pathway (food supply chain); share high-level information about what Food Action Groups are, and seek participants' perspective on whether these groups could work in regional WA; which stakeholders should be involved; and how these groups could be structured to maximise potential impact on local food systems to benefit communities.
3. Collate the international review findings, and the regional WA findings and seek funding to pilot test ideal models suited for regional WA contexts, in desired regions.

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS MIGHT BE INVOLVED?

Stakeholders could span the pathway from farm to mouth (food supply chain), including:

- Food producers;
- Wholesalers;
- Retailers;
- Local and state government;
- Education, health and built environment professionals; and
- Community members.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR THIS PROJECT?

The international review was completed in February 2023 and is awaiting publication. Statewide focus group consultations are in progress April - October 2023. Phase 3 is anticipated to be completed in 2024.

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION?



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