

MIDWEST FOOD ACTION GROUPS

Stakeholder Focus Group | Early Feedback Report



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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 | Midwest, Western Australia

The Midwest region is located north of WA's capital, Perth, covers 600,000 square kilometres and includes 22 local government authorities [1].

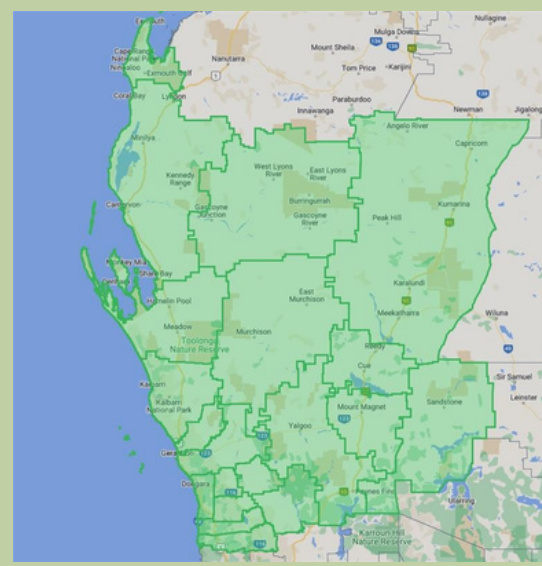


Figure 1. Midwest Western Australia [2]

Current Status

Midwest focus groups were held in May 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...

Shortened supply chain, reducing 'food miles' and increasing use of refrigerated trucks; expand shops in remote areas to make fresh food more accessible and support community gardens to boost local production and community involvement; optimising current food distribution network; community and industry collaboration including supporting initiatives such as the Food Industry Alliance

When the food pathway works, why does it work?

Community engagement, including with the Aboriginal community, sharing their practices which strengthens local food networks; pop up food stands and community pantries help distribute excess produce and reduce waste; access to local producers through farmers markets enhance fresh food availability; local processing adds value and reduces transportation inefficiencies; support efforts of Food Industry Alliance to elevate the profile and availability of local foods

Midwest Food Problems...

Limited local processing facilities; cost and affordability of food due to inflation; distance to affordable food outlets for remote communities; food quality concerns at affordable price points; limited access to locally grown fruit and vegetables; water constraints preventing expansion of agriculture in the region

Proposed Food Action Group Activities...

- Bring attention to food-related issues in the region
- Work towards decreasing the cost of food by implementing a holistic approach across all stages of the food pathway
- Support local agriculture to bolster primary production and support local farmers to increase the availability of local produce
- Educate retailers on quality control ensuring consumers receive fresh, quality produce
- Increase public awareness of food origins, quality and the benefits of supporting the local food systems

Proposed Structure...

Clear purpose and values; sustainable funding, government backed to ensure longevity; engaging stakeholders in a collaborative environment; setting specific, time-bound focus; adapt to context-specific issues e.g., weather; corporate sector engagement, connecting community benefits and investment opportunities

Stakeholders...

Transport sector; producers and manufacturers; retail representatives; Indigenous elders; diverse consumers; local government; knowledge specific experts; people with lived experience

Perceived Barriers...

Time constraints for volunteers; clarity of roles, avoiding duplication of efforts; engaging big supermarkets and producers; environmental factors e.g., weather; alignment of values, ensuring group's objectives resonate with individual and organisational goals

“You know, what's the purpose of a Food Action Group? Is it clearly defined, you know, what value will it create for those participants within the supply chain? That needs to be clearly identified to get reasonable buy-in...because what's the value to one part of the supply chain is not the same to another.”

Where to from here?

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

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



foodcommunity@ecu.edu.au



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www.foodcommunity.com.au

References:

1. WA Country Health Service. Midwest regional profile. From: <https://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Midwest/Midwest-regional-profile-2023>
2. Midwest Western Australia. Adapted from: REMPLAN MapBuilder, <https://mapbuilder.rempln.com.au/?link=10dcdc50-d04f-4b3f-bbf8-5ec1198b79db>