Central West Gippsland

Food Security Recommendations Report

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Acknowledgements

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All information in this report was correct at the time each part of the study was conducted throughout 2007-2012.
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1.0 Executive Summary

Food security can be referred to as an individual or communities ability to access healthy, affordable and appropriate food. Food insecurity can therefore be defined as having limited or irregular access to safe and nutritional food from a non-emergency source.

There are many interrelating determinants influencing a community or individuals food security. Such factors include transport, financial situation, low socioeconomic community, lack of availability, lack of knowledge and skills and high density of fast food outlets and low density of supermarkets selling affordable fresh fruit and vegetables.

This report builds on the previous five years of food security investigation in Central West Gippsland. The region has undergone investigative research, in-depth food access and transport mapping, healthy food basket surveying, and extensive community consultation. The individuals found to be most affected by food insecurity in Central West Gippsland include people on low incomes, older people, young people and people living in isolated areas.

Due to the high level of food insecurity found in the region this report has been collated to identify interventions and make recommendations for interventions to improve food security within our local area. This report is based on ‘Food for All Tasmanians’, A food security report which focuses on increasing access and supply of affordable and nutritious food through community driven approaches.

There are four priorities recommended to address food insecurity at a local level. These include:

- Increasing food access and affordability
- Building community food solutions
- Regional development and supporting food enterprise
- Planning for local food systems

By using a social inclusion perspective, focusing on vulnerable people and places a community action plan can be constructed to reduce food insecurity in Central West Gippsland.

Central West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership recommends that Councils, Health Services, Emergency Relief providers and other key stakeholders use the information presented in this report to guide how they address food security in their local areas.

To fully address food security a collaborative, multi organisational approach must be taken by key stakeholders. This collaborative approach must recognise that no one intervention will address food security, and to successfully tackle the issue multi strategy interventions must be implemented to ensure that food security is addressed at all stages of the intervention continuum, from the provision of an emergency food parcel to the planning of ‘Food Sensitive’ shires.

The Central West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership has been dedicated to addressing food security in our local area, and will continue to support agencies to work collaboratively on the issue for improved food security outcomes for all members of our community.

2.0 Introduction

The Victorian Population Health Survey (Department of Health, 2008) identified Latrobe City and Baw Baw Shire as having a higher incidence of food insecurity 6% in comparison to the Victorian state average of 5.8%. Despite the fact that Australia has an abundant food supply, there still continues to be groups in our communities who are vulnerable to food insecurity.
The Victorian Government identified “promoting accessible and nutritious food” as a health priority (2007-2012) and subsequently, the Central West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership (CWGPCP) adopted food security as a priority in 2007.

The purpose of this report is to identify points of intervention for improving food security and make recommendations for intervention options within our local area. This report will focus on:

- Food access issues
- Strategies that target individual education and skill development
- Local solutions to increase access to affordable and nutritious food for all residents in CWG but in particular, those most at risk.

This report addresses food security from a social inclusion perspective and in particular, focuses on vulnerable people and places in addition to the more usual aspects of food security such as access to food, affordability, good nutrition, building resourcefulness and resilience in communities. From this, a community action plan can be constructed to help alleviate food insecurity in the CWG community.

2.1 Food Security Overview

Food security can be defined as “When all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and health life” (VicHealth 2012). Food insecurity is therefore having limited or irregular access to safe and nutritional food from a non-emergency source (Ball, Timperio & Crawford 2009).

Having adequate food to eat is one of the basic elements of human rights and it contributes more than just the consuming of nutritious food, it encompasses cultural, economic, physical, mental and social factors in buying, preparing and sharing of food with others (VicHealth, 2005). Without appropriate access to nutritious and affordable food, physical and mental wellbeing is compromised and it increases individual risk of chronic disease (Gundersen, 2009).

Access to healthy food has consistently been shown to be more difficult in lower socio-economic areas; factors in this include higher density of fast food outlets, lower density of supermarkets or convenience stores selling a range of good quality affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, lower rates of private car ownership and more limited access to public transport. (4)

2.2 Local Context - Background

Over the past 5 years the PCP has produced many valuable pieces of work that have been undertaken in collaboration with the community and partner agencies. These reports and timelines are outlined below:

2007 – The Impact of Food Security in a Rural Area report completed
2008 – Victorian Healthy Food basket Mapping was completed in CWG
2009 – CWG mapping of food and transport availability
2010 – CWGPCP - Getting Grub in Gippsland report completed
2011 – WGHG – Erica/Rawson Community Consultation Food Security Report completed
2011 – LCHS – Moe Heights Community Consultation Food Security Report completed
2011 - LCHS – Morwell East Community Consultation Food Security Report completed
2012 – WGHG – Drouin Community Consultation Food Security Report completed
2012 – Current report is looking at recommendations to decrease food insecurity in CWG
2012 - Victorian Healthy Food basket Mapping will be updated in CWG

After 5 years of investigative research, in-depth food access and transport mapping, health food basket surveying, and extensive community consultation we can now make recommendation on how to best intervene at the community level. These reports showed significant signs of food insecurity due to numerous factors including high food costs, low economic access and low population socio-economic status (Favre, 2010).

Community consultations results have shown:

- Drouin respondents to be food insecure with moderate hunger
- Erica/Rawson respondents to food secure but with limited public transport options.
- Morwell East respondents to be food insecure with severe hunger
- Moe Heights respondents to be food insecure with severe hunger

We know that households in Central West Gippsland are going without food to meet essential living costs including electricity, rent, transport and medications. Families are rationing food, substituting more expensive items such as fresh fruit, vegetables and meat with low cost and low quality food, and going without food all together. The people most at risk of food insecurity and the focus of these strategy recommendations include:

- people on low incomes, especially households dependent on government benefits and allowances
- older people, especially those who are isolated or living alone- young people, especially children of single parent low income households
- isolated places, especially ‘food deserts’ where healthy food is difficult to get or absent.

3.0 Interventions to improve food security

As food security is a complex issue, it must be recognised that achieving community food security will require multiple collaborative strategies. Community food security is dependent on all components of the food system. Strategies addressing food insecurity are largely environmental though health and nutrition education has been shown to improve knowledge and skills that can potentially reduce a person’s risk of being food insecure.

Due to the nature of food security, no single initiative will solve the problem. Food security initiatives need to be considered across the continuum, from addressing the need for emergency assistance in times of severe food insecurity to ensuring people who are currently food secure remain food secure. In order to address food security, interventions need to involve a multi-strategy approach, ranging from upstream initiatives such as increasing sustainable local food supply options to downstream initiatives such as emergency relief. Previous research on possible food security interventions that have been successful in either reducing food insecurity or maintaining food security are included in the 4 priority areas below.

Adapted from Food for all Tasmanians there are four priorities recommended to address food insecurity;

- Increasing food access and affordability
- Building community food solutions
- Regional development and supporting food social enterprises
- Planning for local food systems

These four priority action areas are discussed in detail below.

3.1 Increasing food access and affordability;

From the extensive research completed in Central West Gippsland food accessibility and affordability are key areas which need to be addressed as households are currently going without. Making food affordable is not necessarily food being low-cost or cost –effective. According to Anglicare Tasmania (2011) it is both the ability to pay without suffering hardship and to be able to purchase at an adequate level to meet individual or household needs. Food items are therefore affordable if once bought, the individual can afford to meet all their basic living costs.

To enact real and sustainable change both modifications to the community food supply as well as peoples access to food needs to be addressed. Suitable interventions to increase food access and affordability should also incorporate a capacity building approach so that at risk groups can develop and use important skills required to reduce their risk or food insecurity.

The following interventions can successfully increase food access and affordability;

- Street Harvest
- Emergency Food Relief - Healthy Options
- Soup Kitchens
- Community Cafes - staffed by volunteers
- Meals on Wheels to housebound people or those with limited mobility or transportation
- Food Co-ops
- Fruit and Vegetable Home Deliveries

**Street Harvest**

Street harvest aims to seek and share excess fruit and vegetables from residential gardens to emergency relief providers. Street Harvest was originally developed in Albury Wodonga and in the first six months provided 1400kg of excess produce and was donated to initiatives such as the local school breakfast project, and emergency relief providers. Not only does Street Harvest reduce waste, it also builds community engagement, creates social cohesiveness and provides opportunity for communities to become more locally sustainable. Street Project harvest Kit has been developed and is available for use. (3)

**Emergency Food Relief Healthy Options**

Emergency food relief services provide support to address immediate needs in a time of crisis. Emergency food relief is a vital part of the food security initiative but it cannot be relied on to address food security. Recent reports have highlighted the importance of quality and nutritious emergency food relief choices. As emergency food relief is accessed by numerous people in a time of crisis we support and encourage collaboration between Emergency Food Relief providers, food distributors and food producers to improve access for consumers. By partnering with food distributors and producers, it allows for healthier food options to be available for community if they require it and also supports the local food distributors and producers (Tas Food for all). By strengthening or developing these partnerships it can improve the coverage and access of emergency food relief in Central West Gippsland.

**Soup Kitchens**

Soup Kitchens, similarly to Emergency Food Relief provide support to address immediate needs in a time of crisis. Soup Kitchens don’t address food insecurity but rather provide a service to those in a crisis situation. Soup Kitchens provide free prepared meals at a central point and provide an opportunity for social contact for those who attend (Food security Options paper NSW).

**Community Cafes Staffed by Volunteers**

Cafes can provide meals to people in need through the use of donated food or redistributed food from greengrocers or supermarkets. This can be taken to the next step by the incorporation of volunteer workers in the cafes who can assist with the preparation of the meals to decrease staff cost, learn new skills, contribute to the community and gain a sense of achievement, and also engage in the consumption of the meals to enhance the social aspect of dining out with people.

A similar intervention was implemented by North Yarra Community Health and the City of Yarra, the Café Meals Program provides homeless people with a café meal from participating cafes at a low cost and at a time that suits them. People are referred to the Café Meals Program when they cannot prepare their own meals and the prepared meal options in the community are not suitable for them (Subsidised Café Meals Program: more than “just a cheap meal”).

**Meals on Wheels to Housebound People or those with Limited Mobility or Transportation**

Meals on Wheels is a common concept for isolated elderly people. However this concept can be extended to the broader community to incorporate people who may be in temporary accommodation with no cooking facilities, have poor cooking skills and/or no transportation to food outlets. A Meals on Wheels initiative of this type could also act as a referral service in attempting to link accessing people with cooking classes, programmed activity groups, volunteer cafes, community gardens and so on. This would provide an avenue for isolated hard to reach people to be identified within our community and slowly re-integrated into the community through community groups which will address more than just their issues with food security.
Food Co-Ops
The Melbourne Food Co-op is an ethical trader that has been running in Melbourne. The co-op provides affordable, low packaged (bulk) food, fruit and vegetables, health and eco-cleaning products. Their aim is to provide natural, organic produce that is grown and prepared locally by small companies and producers. Food co-ops have the potential to increase food access and affordability as well as provide opportunities for local farmers and food producers. [http://www.melbourne.foe.org.au/?q=co_op/home](http://www.melbourne.foe.org.au/?q=co_op/home)

Fruit and Vegetable Home Deliveries
Another intervention which could be incorporated into the region is fruit and vegetable home deliveries. Fruit and vegetable home deliveries are usually operated by the grower or small co-operative to add value and to also support the local food economy. Fruit and vegetable home deliveries aim to provide community members with access to fresh local produce delivered to their house or an easily assessable location. This would increase access to individuals who do not have private transportation or limited public transport from their house to the shops. Many people who are reliant on inadequate public transport often struggle to access healthy food option so by providing fruit and vegetable home deliveries it reduces barriers faced by those with limited access.

3.2 Building Community Food Solutions
Building community food solutions focuses on community engagement as a critical component to reduce food insecurity. The encouragement of community connectedness and involving communities in decision making about issues that affect them is the key to the success of this strategy. It is also recommended to either utilise an already developed community group or develop a working group with representatives from local governments, schools, neighbourhood houses, community organisations and local businesses.

The following interventions can successfully build community food solutions;
- Community Kitchens
- School Breakfast Programs
- Edible Landscapes
- School Education programs
- Gardening initiatives operating at community level, across multiple schools or households, including Community Gardens

Community Kitchens
A Community Kitchen is a group of individuals who gather regularly to socialise and cook affordable and nutritious meals. Community Kitchens are shown to have a positive impact on individual life skills, and knowledge in healthy cooking, shopping and budgeting. They also develop confidence, self-esteem, leadership, teamwork skills, literacy and numeracy as well as access to healthy food. [http://www.communitykitchens.org.au/About/](http://www.communitykitchens.org.au/About/)

School Breakfast Programs
One intervention which has been shown to maintain food security is a school breakfast club where a nutritional breakfast is provided to school children at sub-cost or no cost (Bartfeld, & Ahn, 2011). This intervention allows children to start the school day with a nutritious meal. It provides a meal to children who may otherwise have had to go without. It also frees up food resources which could go to other family members and reduce uncertainty surrounding availability (Bartfeld, & Ahn, 2011).

Edible Landscapes
City of Greater Dandenong/VicUrban Meridian Development has developed integrated edible landscaping in the area. Edible Landscapes are where Public Orchards are planted on council land rather than the more conventional decorative trees and shrubs. The food produced by these Public Orchards is free to all members of the community to access at their own convenience. Councils can support the development and maintenance of these initiatives by ensuring town plans incorporate open spaces, parks and gardens and nature strips (Montague, 2011).
School Education Programs

Education programs can involve students and their parents in learning activities around preparing safe, affordable and nutritious food. Activities can be linked to classroom activities and numeracy and literacy. These types of initiatives can produce a greater engagement with families and communities when a settings-based approach is adopted.

One such initiative was implemented in Brooks High School called ‘Sustainability in the Suburbs’. The initiative included an afternoon tea for elderly residents, tasting new foods and creating smoothies for the whole school using garden produce, cooking classes for community members, learning about food in other cultures and produce bags for students to take home.

Gardening Initiatives including Community Gardens

One intervention which has been successful in educating, changing attitudes and improving access to healthy food is community gardens. A community garden is where individuals come together to grow, care for and compost their own produce (Community Planning and Development Program, 2009). This allows individuals without the space or skills to come together to learn and increase social connection. Research has shown that Urban Community Garden participants reported an increase in their consumption of vegetables and people involved in ‘Community’ or ‘Home’ gardens reported saving money and improving their diets. Community gardens increase access to nutritious food, provides physical activity, teaches people new skills, social support and connectedness and have been shown to improve relations between local governments and citizens (http://communitygarden.org.au/blog/2007/10/11/benefits/).

City of Darebin and Maribyrnong City Council support gardeners in their communities by providing discount prices on compost bin, sustainable gardening workshops, supporting the development of a Community Garden Network, establishing a community gardens webpage on the Council website, resourcing garden development in low cost housing sites and supporting existing communal gardens in low income areas. Other similar gardening initiatives can be undertaken in pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, TAFE and university campuses to further the scope of the initiative.

3.3 Regional development and supporting local food social enterprises;

The Central West Gippsland region is well known for its high quality food production. By supporting local entrepreneurs and innovation, including social enterprise in this area there is potential for improved local food systems. The Central West Gippsland region needs to have a diverse and sustainable community economy in order to remain viable. To improve food security in our region, our community needs to be connected with their local food supply.

The following interventions can successfully support regional development and local food social enterprises;

- Farmers Markets
- Local Food Production
- Support to facilitate the redistribution of excess domestic food production eg. food swaps & food rescue donations
- Economic development programmes to support establishing grocery stores in areas that lack easy access to such stores

Farmers’ Markets

Farmers’ markets are an initiative which increases local food supply, simulate local economies and create small scale enterprises. Farmers’ markets provide locally grown and sourced food to the community which is fresh and usually cheaper than the supermarkets. They have been shown to create community vibrancy, shorten ‘food miles’, provide sustainable, local fresh food, provide a new market for producers, and develop relationships between urban residents and agriculture, including education about food production.
(Enns et al. 2008). Mobile farmers markets can also be implemented within existing setting such as schools. This allows parent access to fresh produce in a setting they are visiting already, hence eliminating the barriers of access and distance.

**Local Food Production**

To increase local food production, Local Governments can provide flexibility for applications of Food Act requirements to enable production and sales of products such as jams and juices from fruit farms. As well as providing cheaper food safety training programs and flexibility in registration of farm kitchen for food production.

In relation to the economic environment, local government can support urban food production by providing practical and financial infrastructure with support for the provision or availability of composting bins, water use (tanks, hoses and pumps), soil preparation (soil analysis, labour support, compost or topsoil provision, fertiliser) and growing (raised beds, seeds, seedling, tools). Councils can also provide support through;

- The promotion of local food trails, “buy local” campaigns and agritourism initiatives
- Providing jobs, skill development and economic opportunities related to food (for example training for small food producers and opportunities to sell locally)
- The adoption of food procurement policies by hospitals, local government, schools and other institutions
- Urban planning and land zoning changes to increase the production or retail of nutritious foods

In relation to the natural environment, Councils can support the development and maintenance of urban food production by:

- Planning work to ensure food production is incorporated into development and maintenance open space, parks and gardens, nature strips
- Advocacy to vary zoning regulations to facilitate urban farm development
- Variations in the local application of water regulations to support food growing

**Support to facilitate the redistribution of excess domestic food production.**

Food swaps & food rescue donations, such as community connect, works by connecting food outlets/distributors with emergency relief services. Supermarkets and other food outlets can have an excess amount of produce that can be re-distributed rather than disposed of. This food is most often thrown away rather than re-distributed to food relief outlets or soup kitchens. The support needed for a successful ‘food swap’ between businesses/organisations is the addition of a facilitator to successfully facilitate the discussion around the re-distribution of food. Including negotiating the term of the food procurement, for example the food re-distributed can only be given away and not sold for profit. The facilitator can also act as advocates for the food relief agency who are often too time poor to negotiate these partnerships themselves.

**Economic development programmes to support establishing grocery stores in areas that lack easy access to such stores.**

There is evidence that the introduction of ALDI supermarkets has been shown to have a significant effect on prices of food in the area both through its own low pricing policy and the lowering of prices among its competitors. SGS Economics & Planning (2011) is a guiding document to assist planners in the development of supermarket diversity by rezoning sites as necessary and being aware of lobby against the entry of low cost competitors by existing supermarkets (4).

3.4 Planning for local food systems.

Local Food Systems are where food is grown in the general locality in which it is consumed. Local food systems are important because they enable people to contribute to their own wellbeing through localised sustainable solutions grounded in local contexts.
Many of the issues contributing to food insecurity can be addressed by better planning of physical space. This can include land use planning, transport planning and infrastructure planning. When planning is done well it can improve local food systems by preventing productive land being used for non-food uses, reducing barriers (community gardens and farmers markets) improving access to food (improve transport) and allowing decisions about food to be made by those most affected.

**The following interventions can successfully support planning for local food systems;**
- Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (FSPUD)
- Transport changes in transport services for consumers or community members to food retailers
- Open Space Planning - Ensure that the potential for food production options in communal open space
- Landshare Australia
- Increasing sustainable local food supply options (eg; mobile fruit/vegetable stalls, farmers’ markets and community gardens)

**Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (FSPUD)**
The FSPUD is a resource which lays out a framework of ideas for planners and other important decision makers to encourage a shared understanding of what is meant by food sensitive planning and the important contribution it can make to the liveability and sustainability of our towns and cities. The FSUD matrix is a tool for exploring the integrated nature of planning and food objectives.

**Transport**
In the Central West Gippsland the lack of both private and public transportation has been identified as a key factor influencing food security in our region. Lack of public transportation and or infrequency of public transport was significant in the areas most at risk of food insecurity such in Moe Heights and Erica/Rawson. Local government can take action in relation to modes and patterns of transport, action could be taken in the areas of:
- Providing community based transport to key food retail outlets
- Encouraging food retailers to provide transport or delivery services
- Ensuring walkability or cyclability to local fresh food outlets

**Landshare Australia**
Landshare Victoria aims to bring people together who have a passion for growing their own food, connecting those who have land to share with those who need land for cultivating food. Landshare began in 2009 in the UK now has more than 57,000 growers, sharers and helpers across the country. Recently Landshare was established in Australia and its website claims 1,140 members. Landshare is for people who: want to grow vegetables but don’t have anywhere to do it, or have spare land to share, and/or can share knowledge or tools. Resources, toolkits and further information can be accessed from [http://www.landshareaustralia.com.au/](http://www.landshareaustralia.com.au/)

**Increasing sustainable local food supply options**
This has been covered in previous sections with regard to the specific initiatives (for example mobile fruit and vegetable stalls, farmers’ markets and community gardens). However it is important to note that support from Local Government or other local agencies are a vital component for the success and sustainability of these types of initiatives. For example some food distribution policies may need to be revised to ensure that Farmers Markets can operate when and where they may need to within the specific community (ie: schools).

For Local Governments wanting to initiate food security initiatives and planning the following resources are recommended to be used as a guide for such planning:
4.0 Limitations

The evidence suggests that there would be possible limitations surrounding reducing food insecurity in Central West Gippsland. The main limitation would be due to food insecurity mainly affecting those more vulnerable groups such as the aged, significant on-going management and resource support is required. Without on-going support from collaborative organisations, initiatives to increase food security couldn’t reach their full potential.

Many interventions have not been rigorously evaluated for their effects on food security. This is due to the complexity of food security and the fact that one initiative acting in solitary may not influence food security. To overcome this limitation it is recommended that multi-strategy initiative be implemented in the same area for a period of time and then the specific area be re-evaluated for its food security status (as conducted in 2011-2012 in CWG). This information will not provide us with information specific to each initiative but it will provide us with an overall picture of the effects that our collaborative work is having in the food security space.

5.0 Priority Actions

The priority action areas coincide with the four key strategies as mentioned earlier in this report, and are supported by the Food for all Tasmanians strategy adopted by the Tasmanian State Government.

Increasing food access and affordability recognises that having food security underpins the most basic human rights. Food then needs to be appreciated for its role in our social interaction, our health and our economy.

Priority actions areas for increasing food access and affordability are:

1. Support collaboration and partnerships between Emergency Food Relief providers, food distributors and food producers to improve local coverage and access for consumers.
2. Develop/Support sustainable, local coalition food security models that connect local government, schools, children, families and older people to local, low cost and nutritious food.
3. Conduct regular Victorian Healthy Food Basket Surveys in Latrobe and Baw Baw LGAs to monitor food price and availability in our local communities.

Building community food solutions identifies the need to engage the most vulnerable community groups of food insecurity in policy development and initiative design. The environment people live in needs to support the exercise of choice and responsibility in relation to food for these vulnerable groups.

Priority actions areas for building community food solutions are:

4. Develop/invest in local produce networks to support community, school and home gardens.
5. Continue to identify innovative and collaborative solutions to address food security, which are appropriate to our local needs.

Regional development and supporting food based social enterprises includes supporting local food production social enterprise and develop job readiness and business skills of participants to decrease food insecurity. To increase food security, the local food system needs to be viable and sustainable. Local food enterprises can contribute to local food supply, food knowledge, skills and affordability.

Priority actions areas for regional development and supporting food based social enterprises are:

6. Support collaborations and initiatives that increase opportunities for Gippsland consumers to buy locally produced food.
7. Promote social procurement by all tiers of government through contractual arrangements which preference social outcomes for local food systems.

Planning for sustainable local food systems aims for effective planning, urban planning decisions and the use of public spaces to improve food security. These priorities need to be addressed at a local government level and if adopted will provide a sustainable impact on food security within Central West Gippsland.

**Planning for sustainable local food systems priority areas are:**

8. Local Municipal Public Health Plans should incorporate food security within the existing planning framework.

9. Local Shires should invest in food sensitive planning strategies for their Local Government Areas.

10. Strengthen the evidence base for food security policy, planning and programs.

### 6.0 Conclusion

The extensive research undertaken by CWGPCP, LCHS and WGHG over the past 5 years has found food insecurity to be a major concern for the residents of Central West Gippsland. Findings from the community consultation research have identified that food insecurity is present and a concern for the residents of CWG in particular for those living with children and/or on a pension or health care card. Interventions need to be put in place in order to allow individuals to improve their food security.

In order to decrease food insecurity in Central West Gippsland multi-organisational and a multi-strategy approach needs to be taken. Food insecurity initiatives should be focused on the four priority areas that were addressed earlier. Those four priority areas being increasing food access and affordability, building community food solutions, regional development and supporting food social enterprise and planning for local food systems.

Central West Gippsland PCP is committed to continuing to support local agencies to improve food security within our communities.
7.0 References


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