ACT Government

Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy

2023-2028









Ngunnawal Acknowledgement

Dhawura nguna ngurumbangu gunanggu Ngunnawal
Nginggada dindi dhawura Ngunnawalbun
yindjumaralidjinyin
Mura bidji mulanggaridjindjula
Naraganawaliyiri yarabindjula.

Ngunnawal Language Acknowledgement Translation

This country is Ngunnawal ancestral, spiritual homeland
We all always respect elders, male and female, as well as Ngunnawal country itself
They always keep the pathways of their ancestors alive
They walk together as one.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra 2023

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from:

Director-General, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601.

Telephone: 02 6207 1923
Website: www.environment.act.gov.au

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues as accessible as possible.

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print, please phone Access Canberra on 13 22 81 or email the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate at EPSDDComms@act.gov.au

If English is not your first language and you require a translating and interpreting service, please phone 13 14 50.

If you are deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment, and need the teletypewriter service, please phone 13 36 77 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

For more information on these services visit http://www.relayservice.com.au

Table of contents

A message from the Minister **2**

Setting the Scene **3**

A new approach to agriculture policy for the ACT 4

Traditional Knowledge and use of native foods **5**

Context to this Strategy 7

Thanks you for your feedback 7

Key Stakeholders who have contributed to this Strategy 8

Global trends,local thinking **9**

Learning from other cities 10

Introducing the Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy **12**

Strategy Scope 12

Mapping the draft Strategy and existing ACT Government policies and priorities 12

Contributing to the ACT's wellbeing 14

Focus Areas 14

Our vision **15**

Goal 1. Increase local food production and consumption **16**

What's already happening 16

Challenges and opportunities 17

Focus Areas 18

Goal 2. Increase equitable access to local healthy food **20**

What's already happening 20

Challenges and opportunities 22

Focus Areas 22

Goal 3. Enhance social and economic outcomes through our local food system **24**

What's already happening 24

Challenges and opportunities 25

Focus Areas 28

Goal 4. Support sustainable urban and rural farming practices **30**

What's already happening 30

Challenges and opportunities 32

Focus Areas 33

Strategy implementation, and review **34**

Endnotes **35**



A message from the Minister

It is my pleasure to introduce the first draft local food strategy for Canberra and our surrounds. This Strategy heralds a new approach from the ACT Government to how we value local food production as part of delivering on our vision for Canberra as a vibrant, liveable, affordable and climate-resilient city.

In thinking about our food system - what we grow, where and how we grow it, and how it connects us as a community, including our local region - we know that we want to ensure that every Canberran has access to healthy, affordable, locally grown and sustainably produced food, and we want to support and grow our local food economy to achieve it.

Fortunately, we are blessed with all the right ingredients to achieve these goals. The agricultural land that surrounds our city enjoys strong environmental stewardship from our farmers, who are keen to grow more and connect better with local markets. Canberra is full of green spaces and green thumbs, and already we can see innovative backyard businesses growing and thriving, and there could be more.

And of course our community has a strong history and demonstrated passion for growing food – we have a wonderful network of community gardens, school gardens, backyard gardeners, food forests, seed savers and more, and enthusiasm to expand.

In creating a draft local food strategy, we can learn from other leading cities around the world such as Seattle, Toronto, Barcelona and Wellington who have invested in urban agriculture and connecting their cities to surrounding agricultural land and food production as part of their response to climate change, to achieve better health and wellbeing. In doing so they are creating jobs, supporting new and established food businesses, reducing climate emissions, and connected their population to local growers for healthier food. Local food systems create meaningful work, diverse business enterprises, and local pride.

These outcomes mesh beautifully with the ACT Wellbeing Framework. Taking steps to strengthen our local food system can build our individual and collective health, social connection, identity and belonging, and help prepare us for climate change while reducing our impact.

Canberra has an incredible opportunity. We can inspire and facilitate a sustainable food and agriculture system for the ACT and surrounding region. We are blessed with many innovative thinkers and doers in our city who are ready to work with us. Through the consultation on preparing this draft Strategy, I know many Canberrans are as excited as I am for the benefits we can deliver from building our local food system. Let's work together now through this Strategy to take the first steps.

Rebecca Vassarotti, MLA
Minister for the Environment

Setting the Scene

Food sustains life, shapes culture, tradition, customs and beliefs, brings community together, and is one of life's great pleasures. Where and how we grow our food, how far it travels to reach our homes, who is involved in its production and processing, who struggles to access nutritious food, and how we value and appreciate food in general, are all parts of the food system. All of these components influence whether food contributes positively or negatively to the health and wellbeing of our community and our environment.

WHAT IS A FOOD SYSTEM?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describe a food system as encompassing 'all the activities and actors in the production, transport, manufacturing, retailing, consumption, and waste of food, and their impacts on nutrition, health and well-being, and the environment '. The IPCC definition reflects shifting approaches in government policies globally away from conventional agriculture policy towards considering agriculture as a fundamental part of the broader food system.

To date, the ACT has not had an established policy or strategy that details its vision for the agriculture sector. Historically, the policy relating to agricultural land has primarily been considered as a land use matter, with little focus on the economic or social outcomes that could be achieved through agriculture. Starting with the forced displacement of First Nations people and the subsequent reclaiming of colonial farmland to build the nation's new capital, agriculture was a secondary consideration for Canberra.

Approximately 15% of the ACT is still farmland. Our rural enterprises largely still tend to produce wool, beef and lamb, echoing historic cropping choice. Their production today is sent interstate, some of which is then aggregated and processed and ultimately transported back to the ACT's supermarkets.



Locally, over time there has been some diversification into the production of poultry and eggs, vineyards, vegetables and small orchards and gourmet products, such as truffles. However, farming and market gardening has remained historically smaller and less diverse compared to other Australian city regions such as Sydney and Melbourne.

Canberra is also the metropolitan hub for the broader agricultural region encompassing South East NSW and ACT, including south-western slopes, Southern Tablelands, the South Coast, Snowy Mountains, and the NSW high country. The Canberra region hosts farms at all scales growing a diverse range of produce including beef, lamb, dairy and grain as well as boutique crops of fruit, vegetables, nuts and wine. The South Coast also supports a local fishing industry.

At present, many regional agricultural producers sell primarily into and through Sydney. This is in part due to the size of that market, and the markets it connects to, but also the supporting infrastructure available. Both boosting local demand and supporting delivery of relevant infrastructure will increase the amount of regional food supplying the Canberra market.

The 2013 study, Food in the ACT, noted that for a range of foodstuff and size of the population, the Canberra Region could in theory feed itself on local seasonal produce. This situation is not expected to be different today.[iv]

A new approach to agriculture policy for the ACT

As part of our journey to reconciliation, the ACT Government is taking conscious steps to work with respect, and in partnership with, the region's First Nations people in managing country. Our population has grown rapidly over the last two decades and has changed as new migrants have brought a wealth of different food cultures and knowledge to our city. Interest in local and regional produce has expanded hand-in-hand with population growth and diversification, strengthening economic and social networks with our surrounding region. In addition, Canberra region agricultural businesses have established a strong market presence domestically and internationally, with increasing demand for their produce, and some offer agri-tourism services. Community gardens and urban agricultural enterprises have been established across Canberra, with strong community interest to expand both.

The ACT has also become a national leader on action to address climate change, and in implementing government policies to support a circular economy, both key areas of policy relevant to food and agriculture. Our preventative health plan, 'Healthy Canberra' recognises the importance of every Canberran being able to access healthy food.

All these factors mean it is time to take a new approach to food and agriculture in the ACT, to fit with our contemporary characteristics, priorities and future opportunities. Drawing from international and national experience, the best approach is to focus on strengthening our local food system.

.

Traditional Knowledge and use of native foods

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold significant knowledge and skills around traditional plant use and bush foods. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge has contributed to commercial development of several native food species across Australia including macadamias, and Kakadu plums. The demand for native foods is growing in Australia, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face significant barriers to entering the bush food commercialisation system.

The ACT Government will look to empower and support the meaningful involvement of the Ngunnawal community and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the bush food and traditional plant industry in and around the ACT.

The Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee as well as some existing first nations food businesses were engaged during the development of this strategy to learn from their experiences. Both the University of Canberra and the Australian National University first nations portfolios also contributed to the development of this strategy.

There are challenges regarding access to Country and the commercialisation of bush foods and native plants in the ACT. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural Intellectual Property, business support, biosecurity and export, the environment and biodiversity, manufacturing and research. Development of a new industry in the ACT will need to consider these matters carefully and in partnership with the Ngunnawal community.

Work has commenced on partnering with the Ngunnawal Community to develop a Ngunnawal Cultural Resource Management Plan to guide the use of and access by Ngunnawal people to cultural resources on land managed for conservation. It will lay the foundation for enabling access to cultural resources across all Ngunnawal Country regardless of tenure or administrative borders.

The ACT Government has also been working with the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians to establish a series of Ngunnawal gardens for use by the Ngunnawal community for food and ceremony.

The ACT Government is further working with the traditional custodians to provide support and training for the potential establishment of business enterprises that utilise these resources.



Context to this Strategy

The Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy 2023-28 (the Strategy) is the result of two years of listening and collaborating. A discussion paper proposing a new approach to agriculture policy was available for community consultation via the ACT Government's YourSay Conversations webpage from December 2021 until February 2022, with feedback summarised in a Listening Report, published on the site. During this consultation period the ACT Government also held meetings with many stakeholders involved in every aspect of our food system.

Throughout our consultation there have been several key messages heard from our community.

- There is strong support for the development of a new agricultural policy and recognition of the importance of local food production. Many people noted that after bushfires, floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a good time to focus government and community attention on local food systems.
- The Strategy should prioritise supporting local food production and enterprises and increasing affordable and equitable access to fresh and nutritious food.
- The Strategy should bring together the many existing policies, programs, and operators relevant to food production and consumption in the ACT and the broader Canberra region, to target gaps and create real momentum.
- The Strategy needs an understanding of the ACT's current food production and consumption patterns and clear, measurable targets so that its success can be assessed.

Feedback to date has strongly informed the vision, goals and actions of this draft Strategy, and will be just as important for its finalisation.

Thanks you for your feedback

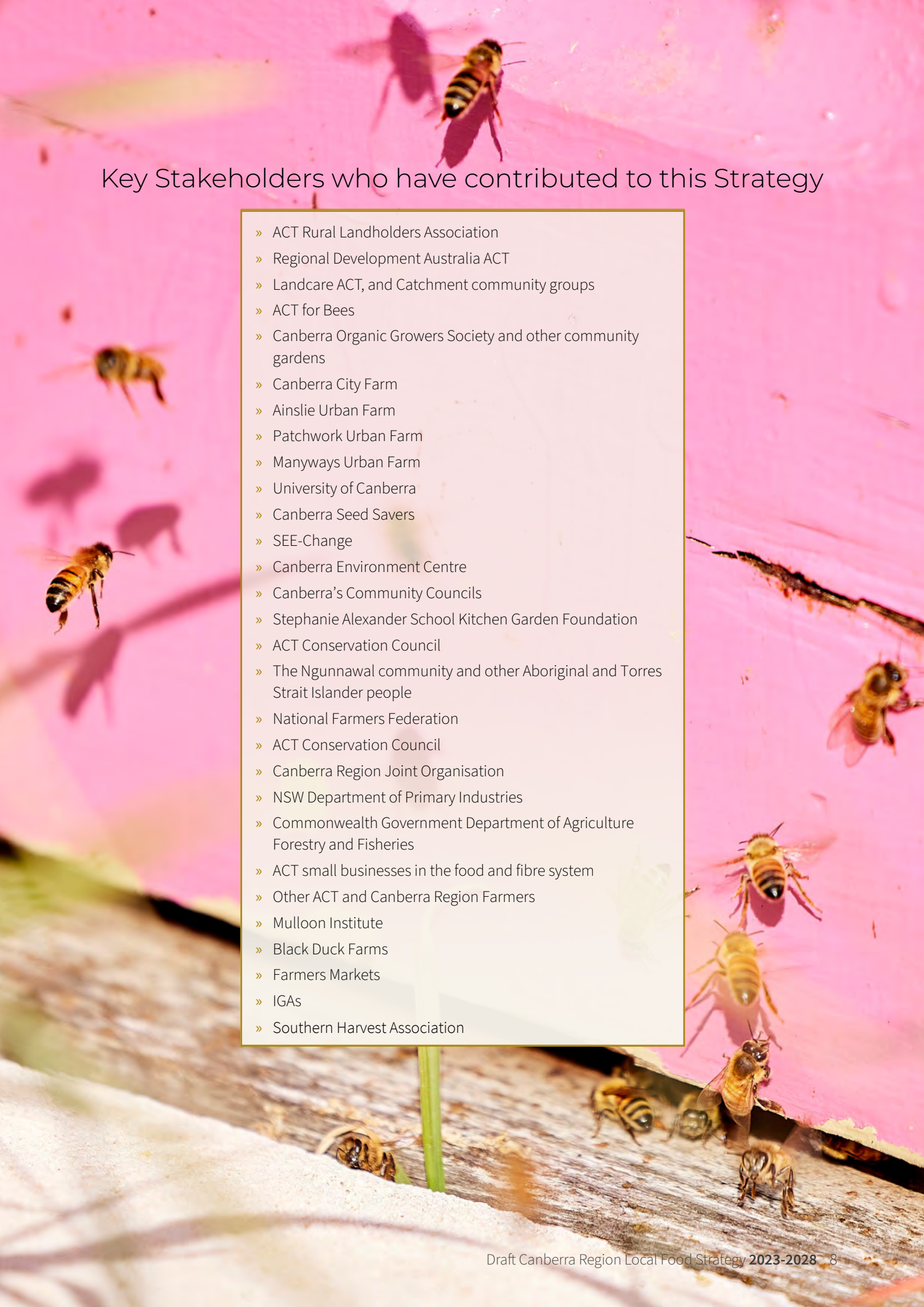
1,409 unique YOUR SAY visitors

We spoke to almost **170** individuals in workshops, interviews and presentations

We received **40** written submissions

16,200 people reached on social media

the discussion paper received **106** CONTRIBUTORS in Yoursay



Key Stakeholders who have contributed to this Strategy

- ACT Rural Landholders Association
- Regional Development Australia ACT
- Landcare ACT, and Catchment community groups
- ACT for Bees
- Canberra Organic Growers Society and other community gardens
- Canberra City Farm
- Ainslie Urban Farm
- Patchwork Urban Farm
- Manyways Urban Farm
- University of Canberra
- Canberra Seed Savers
- SEE-Change
- Canberra Environment Centre
- Canberra's Community Councils
- Stephanie Alexander School Kitchen Garden Foundation
- ACT Conservation Council
- The Ngunnawal community and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- National Farmers Federation
- ACT Conservation Council
- Canberra Region Joint Organisation
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Commonwealth Government Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries
- ACT small businesses in the food and fibre system
- Other ACT and Canberra Region Farmers
- Mulloon Institute
- Black Duck Farms
- Farmers Markets
- IGAs
- Southern Harvest Association

Global trends, local thinking

Canberra's strong population growth, focus on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation to a changing climate, mirrors global trends and priorities. With two thirds of the world's people expected to live in urban areas by 2050, it has been identified that cities will play an increasingly important role in addressing the challenges facing a world impacted by climate change.

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Bank has said that rapid global urbanisation means a new approach must be taken to agricultural policy and food systems, with cities at its heart.[v] The need for cities to take a lead in sustainable food systems has been recognised in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations has also noted that transforming our food systems will ultimately contribute to achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities – is particularly relevant.[vi]

In response to these calls for leadership, hundreds of cities of all sizes have introduced local food policies and plans, and there are a range of global networks that can be leveraged for peer support and inspiration.

In all these approaches, the importance of urban agriculture has become clear. City–regions like Canberra, that link a large and expanding urban population with its surrounding rural producers, townships, and farmland, have particularly valuable and important opportunities.[vii]



Learning from other cities

Canberra is well-positioned to learn from the experience of other similar cities that have implemented policies and strategies to strengthen local food systems. There are also other Australian city-regions that have embarked on local food planning. Some like Canberra are taking their first steps; others demonstrate the benefits implementing a local food plan can progressively deliver over several years.

Wellington, New Zealand

Te Anamata ā-Kai o Tō Tātou Tāone
Our City's Food Future

"[Wellington] Council is working to support a more sustainable, equitable, healthy, and resilient food system in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. The food system ties into the economic, environmental, cultural, and social health of the city."

Birmingham, UK

Birmingham City Council
Food System Strategy

"Growing the Birmingham food revolution."

Melbourne, Australia

Foodprint Melbourne, a collaboration of several local councils and research institutions to create a resilient food system for Greater Melbourne.

Calgary, Canada

City of Calgary Food Action Plan

"The goal of the Food Action Plan is to provide more places to grow food and sell local food so that more Calgarians can access local food and support our local and regional farms."

Bendigo, Australia

Greater Bendigo Food System
Strategy 2020-2030

"Cultivating local food systems can significantly enhance the health and wellbeing of communities; improve the availability of and access to nutritious food; strengthen the local economy; and revitalise urban and natural environments."


Commu
Garde

Introducing the Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy

Local food strategies aim to:

- Increase individual and community health and wellbeing through improved food literacy, greater access to locally grown affordable and culturally appropriate food, and greater connection and opportunities for participation in the local food system.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the food system through a range of measures including avoiding and reducing food waste, reducing food transportation emissions, and improving sustainable urban and rural agricultural practices.
- Strengthen and diversify the local food economy through support for local food production, shortened supply chains, increasing connection between local rural areas and the city, improved food and beverage manufacturing infrastructure, diversified business models and increasing local food procurement by public and private institutions.



For cities like Canberra, achieving these goals and benefits brings a strong focus on urban agriculture. This draft Strategy follows these core learnings from local food systems and urban agriculture policy approaches for the Canberra region.

Strategy Scope

The Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy is the first of its kind for the ACT, and thus it is a foundational document to guide a new approach by government and community. Whilst this is an ACT Government strategy, its scope and ambition are tailored to reflect both the reality of establishing a new way of approaching food and agriculture for the ACT and our region across the food supply chain. This requires engagement with the region and looking at complementary actions to support shared objectives. The final Strategy will be reviewed after **three** years of operation.

Mapping the draft Strategy and existing ACT Government policies and priorities

It is important that this draft Strategy does not duplicate, but complements and provides co-benefits to, other relevant ACT Government priorities. The following ACT Government initiatives are highly relevant to the Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy, and it can assist in delivering them.

The ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025

Conventional food production, consumption and waste disposal approaches produce significant greenhouse gas emissions. This draft Strategy will contribute towards achieving the ACT's climate change and emissions reduction targets, and specifically contribute to Goal 6A to reduce waste generation.[viii]

Shortening food supply chains as part of a stronger local food system can also help reduce the ACT's scope 3 emissions, as identified by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. This draft Strategy forms part of the Government response to the scope 3 report and recommendations.[ix]

ACT Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2025

The draft Strategy will link to objectives of the ACT Circular Economy Strategy. Under its Food and Organics objective, we will work together towards improving resource efficiency in food production, as well as food waste reduction and composting. Research also shows that the more people are involved in growing their own food and connecting to local growers the more conscious they are of food waste and likely to take steps to avoid it.

Promoting more local food production and supply can also help avoid packaging waste.[x]

Healthy Canberra: ACT Preventative Health Plan 2020-2025

Strengthening local food systems can assist to achieve the ACT Government's Preventative Healtht Plan goal of increasing healthy eating. Building greater choice and acccess to fresh locally grown produce and promoting opportunities for people to grow their own food has been shown to increase people's consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit.

Canberra Switched On

A draft local food strategy can contribute to the identified missions of Canberra Switched On of making Canberra a city of wellbeing and liveability, building a climate-resilient city and local economy, and fostering inclusive innovation and responsible investment.[xi]

Cities across the world have demonstrated that strengthening local food systems increase community wellbeing and connectedness through food growing and food culture, directly responds to climate adaptation and provides many opportunities for inclusive and clever economic development to help diversify the local economy, particularly social enterprises and small business focused around urban agriculture and local food and beverage processing and value-adding.

A regionally situated draft local food strategy also recognises the importance and opportunities offered by the ACT Government's participation in the Canberra Region Joint Organisation, that fosters regional collaboration on shared priorities, including agriculture and food supply chains.[xii]

Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal: A natural resource plan for the ACT 2022–2042

The ACT's Natural Resource Management (NRM) Plan outline pathways to protect and sustainably use natural resources within our region. The NRM Plan contains a vision for rural landscapes of

> *"Well-supported ACT land managers ensure maximum productivity and profitability in an ecologically sustainable way while protecting important ecosystems."*

It contains a series of actions to deliver that vision that recognise this draft Strategy and working with it in a complementary manner to deliver ecologically sustainable farming and land management. .

T2030 – ACT Tourism Strategy 2023-2030

Supporting local producers can contribute to the ACT's Tourism goals. As detailed in T2030 – ACT Tourism Strategy 2023-2030, Canberra's premium food and wine offering is a key component of our strong place brand – and will continue to attract visitors and provide exceptional experiences.



Contributing to the ACT's wellbeing

The Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy will contribute positively to several indicators in the ACT Wellbeing Framework:

Environment and climate change domain

Ecologically sustainable and resilient food production practices help create a climate resilient environment and community, increase connection to nature and contribute to improved environmental condition.

Social connection

Fostering involvement in local food through initiatives such as community and school kitchen gardens increases opportunities for participation and volunteering, and enhances a sense of social connection.

Health domain

Greater access to affordable, healthy and nutritious foods and more cultural and social inclusion opportunities improve quality of life outcomes through improved physical and mental health.

Economy

Strengthening local food systems can contribute to economic wellbeing indicators including economic diversity and employment.



Focus Areas

A wide range of potential actions have been identified in this Strategy support the achievement of each goal. Progressing each action will require considered prioritisation that takes into account the resource needed.

To support the planned and considered implementation of the Strategy, the government will develop an implementation plan that describes the order in which the actions will be progressed within existing resources, and those actions that will require government to give consideration to additional resourcing through future budget processes.

Our vision

Canberra is part of a global community of city-regions working to strengthen local food systems by fostering urban and regional agriculture. This will result in increased community access to fresh, healthy and affordable food. It will see our greenhouse gas emissions reduce, will diversify the local food economy, will reduce and repurpose food waste, and will strengthen community wellbeing.



Goal 1. Increase local food production and consumption



Increasing the amount of food produced in the ACT will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, shorten supply chains and increase access to affordable healthy local food. Our rural farms will be more viable and productive and better connected to the broader Canberra community. Fostering urban agriculture will help diversify and activate more communal urban green spaces, support urban biodiversity, and help keep our city cool.

What's already happening

While currently small, the ACT does have some urban and rural food production. Approximately 500 people are employed across the sector including our 160 rural landholders.[xiii] There is limited processing and manufacturing of smallgoods and beverages and businesses and charities working in food rescue, recycling and waste sectors. Consultation with organisations such as the Rural Landholders Association (ACT) revealed strong interest in increasing commercial local food production and selling direct to Canberrans.

The review of the ACT's planning system is providing the opportunity to ensure that rural land zoning and lease arrangements better reflect and facilitate the goals of supporting more local food production. Similarly, the review is also considering how to appropriately support urban farmers and gardeners to expand food growing in the city.

Challenges and opportunities

Knowledge and information

The last comprehensive research into the Canberra region's food system was completed in 2012. There is a need to obtain and share up to date information on food production and consumption patterns within the ACT. This data is key to government planning and will also inform local food producers and other growers of existing market gaps and opportunities.

Increasing broader community awareness, appreciation and knowledge on where to buy and support local food is also important. This also extends to providing knowledge to businesses such as Canberra restaurant's and supermarkets on where they can source local food. There may be opportunities to leverage existing Canberra branding to enhance the visibility and therefore access and demand for locally grown food.

With an increase in locally produced food, also comes a need to ensure that this food meets food safety requirements under the *ACT Food Act 2001* and isn't to the detriment of the health of consumers. Close engagement with ACT Health will help manage the risk of this unintended consequence.

Making clever use of our land

The availability and affordability of land for food production was noted by many as a key barrier for increasing food production in the ACT. Some of this was attributable to a misunderstanding or lack of clarity about what activities are permitted through the ACT's planning system and Land Management Agreements.

With 15% of the ACT already zoned to permit agriculture, there is no need to dramatically expand land for food growing, but rather make better use of what we already have. We can also look at how we co-locate agricultural businesses and farming with complementary sites. One such opportunity is exploring heritage buildings located within heritage landscapes.

The ACT Government can assist rural farmers and aspiring urban farmers to better understand permitted uses and opportunities for increasing their food production by providing accessible information relevant to their land. Facilitating connections between leaseholders and those looking for smaller lots to sub-lease is another opportunity to catalyse better use of our rural and urban land.

Some underutilised and vacant public land may be suitable for commercial urban agriculture, particularly as urban agricultural enterprises do not necessarily always need access to good soil. Including the potential for urban agriculture into Government strategic thinking and decision-making can facilitate such opportunities.



Enabling infrastructure to shorten supply chains

Growing more food locally helps us to build resilience in our local economy, can provide some limited protections from price shock by diversifying our food supply. It is recognised that this will require scale to support significant infrastructure investment.

New collection, processing and transport solutions are needed to direct the Canberra region's produce into the ACT in a cost-and time-effective manner and to shorten supply chains.

Responses to such infrastructure challenges do not necessarily need to be large-scale in the first instance to drive positive change. For example, the ACT Government can safeguard its regulatory environment to support livestock producers accessing mobile butchering services rather than seek to build or support a new regional abbatoir.

Another opportunity is to identify and facilitate better access to existing commercial food storage and processing facilities, such as cold storage, commercial kitchens and bottling and packaging facilities.

> The Canberra Region Joint Organisation (CRJO) is an existing forum for enhancing economic cooperation across the border. Its MoU sets the framework for collaboration between the ACT and NSW governments with the intent to support a successful and sustainable future and pursue a borderless approach to services and outcomes for the Canberra region. It provides an appropriate avenue for longer-term discussions and opportunities with regard to topics such as food supply infrastructure, local food production, processing and distribution.

Building a strong local food system cannot focus on the supply side alone. Increased production must be matched by actions to make it easier for community members to identify and choose to buy local food.

Most of the ACT's food is purchased from supermarkets. Some independent supermarkets already stock local produce, but currently focus on high-value items like beverages and cured meats. Initial consultation for this draft Strategy indicated a desire to offer a wider range.

There is an opportunity to facilitate connections between producers and local food retailers to increase market access and the community's ability to buy local food. Supporting diverse local food business models, can also assist to connect Canberrans directly with local growers (see Goal 3).

There is an opportunity for the ACT to work through the Canberra Region Joint Organisation (CRJO) to explore raising the profile of Canberra region branded food and beverages.

Focus Areas

Knowledge and information

- Research and map current local food production, distribution, and consumption patterns as an update to the 2012 Food in the ACT report, including identification of opportunities to strengthen the local food system.
- Provide easily accessible information and guidance to rural leaseholders and urban food growers to enable greater local agricultural production and diversification.
- Facilitate connections between Canberra region food producers and food retailers and restaurants with demand for local food.

Making clever use of our land

- Ensure that rural leaseholder Land Management Agreements are fit for purpose to support greater local food production.
- Explore innovative land-sharing platforms and whether they can be applied in the ACT, including for under-utilised and vacant public land.

Enabling infrastructure to shorten supply chains

- Through the Canberra Region Joint Organisation (CRJO), identify opportunities to facilitate greater market access for regional producers into Canberra.
- Engage with local food retailers to identify ways to increase local food in the ACT's retail system and address barriers to diversification.
- Through the CRJO explore the options to promote regional produce to local and interstate markets.



Goal 2. Increase equitable access to local healthy food



Many cities have invested in increasing access to healthy food via local food systems because of the co-benefits for improved community health and well-being. Canberra has similar opportunities to build better community health and equality through a strengthened local food system. Embedding a goal of equitable access to healthy local food is critical to ensure that local food production does not skew in favor of small-scale production of high value boutique products and away from broader community access. Access to local healthy food can come from growing your own, via community and school-based gardens, and government actions to facilitate greater access to affordable healthy local food.

What's already happening

Canberra has a well-established and passionate culture of backyard and community-based urban food gardening. When last surveyed in 1992, 41% of Canberrans were involved in backyard or community food growing, exceeding the national average of 36% at the time .

There is little reason to think that Canberran's enthusiasm for growing their own has subsided, with demand for community gardens for example exceeding supply and the strong support for community organisations such as the Canberra Organic Growers Society, the Canberra City Farm, Canberra Seed Savers, SEE-Change and the Canberra Environment Centre.

The ACT Government's Healthy Canberra Plan has a specific goal of increasing vegetable consumption; and strengthening urban design for community gardens, fruit and vegetable outlets, and healthy food and drinks.

These goals align strongly with the goals and actions outlined in this draft Strategy and demonstrate opportunities for cross-government collaboration to increase equitable access to local food.



Challenges and opportunities

Supporting more people to grow their own

While the backyard and community gardening movement is strong in Canberra, there are many more people potentially interested in learning to grow their own food who need help to start out. Increasing and diversifying ways to access information and support on how to grow food in Canberra's unique climate, and facilitating more people to connect to our local food groups is a vital part of increasing access to local healthy food.

Demand for community garden space in Canberra currently exceeds supply, and some newer residential suburbs are currently underserviced in this area. There may be opportunities to identify new sites for community gardens or expand existing ones.

The ACT's new partnership with Grow It Local will help to reach new audiences interested in learning how to grow their own food and support them on their journey from first time grower to being connected in with local food groups.[xv]

Programs like Grow It Local are well-placed to reach new audiences interested in learning how to grow their own food and support them on their journey from first time grower to being connected in with local food groups.[xvi] They offer an opportunity to support the shared goals of this draft Strategy and Healthy Canberra in increasing access to healthy local fresh food.

Investigating local procurement

Many cities and regions use institutional food procurement to build local food systems and increase community access to locally grown food, and evaluations have found such programs are effective.[xvii]

The ACT Government Procurement Framework already includes several legislative, policy and spend targets that encourage increased engagement with Canberra and region business and small-to-medium enterprises. However, data to support the development of a food specific procurement-related policy is limited.

There is an opportunity to build an evidence base for local food procurement as part of this draft Strategy and explore linking with further goals and actions as part of Healthy Canberra Action Plan. For example, Fresh Tastes[xviii] is a free ACT Government service that gives schools access to services and resources to make healthy food and drinks more accessible. Similarly, Healthier Choices Canberra[xix] works with junior sporting clubs across the ACT to create healthier food and drink environments. With proper evidence and support such programs may offer opportunities to connect to local growers and increase equitable access to locally grown healthy food.

Focus Areas

Supporting more people to grow their own

- Identify suitable sites for new community gardens and support the creation of new school kitchen gardens.
- Support community facilities and institutions to establish food gardens.
- Encourage more Canberrans to grow and eat local food.

Investigating local procurement

- Undertake a data analytics project to explore the feasibility of institutional food procurement in the ACT.
- Work with ACT Health and the wider health portfolio to link healthy eating programs to opportunities for local food growing and procurement.



Goal 3. Enhance social and economic outcomes through our local food system



We cannot grow our local food system without investing in our community and businesses to increase opportunities for participation and growth. There is a strong interest in local food from growing your own to establishing and growing food enterprises. Access to education and training are key for amateurs and aspiring farmers and food businesses alike. Supporting local food groups and helping people new to growing food strengthens community participation, connections and wellbeing. Helping aspiring and established food producers and enterprises connect, collaborate and creating spaces to share knowledge will increase economic opportunities and resilience for our local food system.

What's already happening

Canberra's local food system continues to grow through community enthusiasm and small business innovation. Interest in establishing new urban agricultural enterprises and local food start-ups linking local growers and eaters is high, as is the enthusiam for broadening opportunities for social participation for parts of our community who do not yet have access to established initiatives like community gardens. Consultation to prepare this draft Strategy has already assisted a diverse range of food groups to network and colloborate more, and to identify where targeted government support would be most effective to strengthen the local food system.

The ACT Government funds a range of programs to support innovation in the food industry and provide advice to businesses, including through the Canberra Innovation Network and the Canberra Business Advisory Service. The ACT Government is focusing on inclusivity in buiding the Territory's business ecosystem and this approach extends to food and agriculture. For example, the government is already working to make the co-operative business structure easier to both understand and access.[xx] Many examples of food co-operatives that provide healthy food in affordable prices exist in Canberra.

The ACT already has a profile as a knowledge economy. Canberra's education institutions such as the Australian National University (ANU), University of Canberra and the CSIRO already act as local and national sources of agricultural and food-system innovation, amplifying their Research and Development efforts and building a national reputation. We already have highly innovative start-ups, such as Nourish and GoTerra, in the ACT, and more are being incubated in the ANU–CSIRO Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology.[xix]

Challenges and opportunities

Skills and training

Getting more people involved in agriculture and food production is a key prerequisite for the success of this draft Strategy. For this to happen, we need to provide education and training, and a variety of opportunities for entering the local food sector.

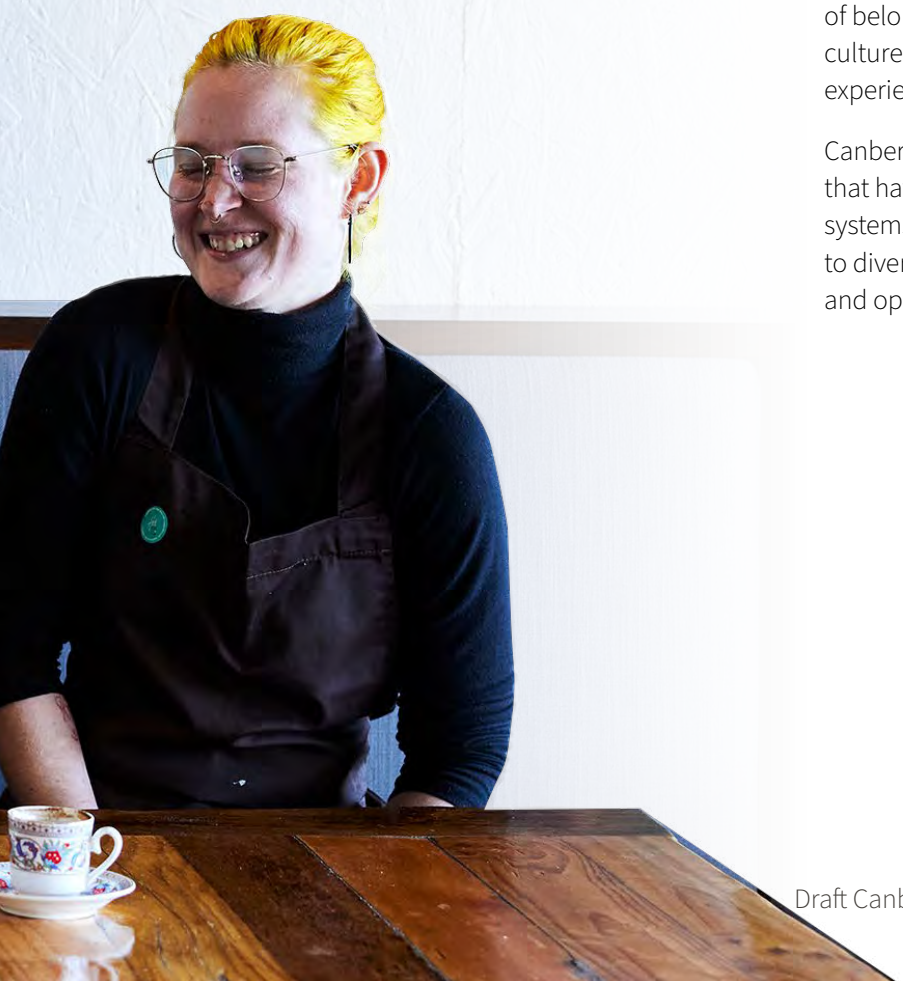
Very few existing or aspiring urban farming and other local food start-ups have experience or training in agriculture or entrepreneurship. This is an identified gap in available training and skills building to support local food systems.

University-based education offerings do not offer practical skills and experience and are not fit-for-purpose for people wanting to start out businesses such as urban farming enterprises. Similarly current vocational education courses do not explicitly cater to particularly small-scale agricultural enterprise, and there are also no formalised educational courses or training support for teachers running school kitchen gardens.



How to fill this gap was investigated through a Churchill Fellowship by Canberra local urban farmer, Fiona Buining, supported by the National Farmers Federation.[xx]

These education and training gaps are not unique to Canberra, they are a national issue. The ACT can learn from other cities and countries that have designed and successfully implemented training programs as part of building their local food system. This presents an opportunity for the ACT to leverage its reputation as a knowledge economy and develop skills and training courses to support people to become urban food producers or similar small-scale agricultural enterprises.



Building stronger networks

Local food systems grow and thrive best and fastest through collaboration. Canberra's diverse community food organisations, businesses and sector-based organisations are effective and sustainable, but often work in silos. They have now grown to the point that mechanisms to formalise collaboration are needed to help realise shared goals including those for this draft Strategy.

Some parts of our community who want to be involved in local food, such as Canberra's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, are also missing out without assistance to participate socially and economically.

There is unharnessed potential among Canberra's cultures for diversification of food products that are locally grown, healthy, incur low 'food miles', and facilitate connections and social cohesion across our population. There is evidence that working, training, learning and collaborating on city farms or in community gardens can generate a greater sense of belonging to a place, and inclusion of diverse cultures, age groups, community groups and people experiencing disadvantage.[xxi]

Canberra can learn from the examples of other cities that have found results in strengthening local food systems and building formal support systems as a way to diversify and deepen socio-economic participation and opportunities.

Supporting collaboration

The food production and agriculture sector has adopted various cooperative models, and there are many in Canberra already. Some of these are subscription-based models, providing produce to their members. As a city approaching 500,000 people, Canberra is the ideal size for business to innovate, and to collaborate to trial new ideas. Existing examples of circular economy principles in the agriculture and food sector include Canberra's own Capital Brewing, which has joined forces with GoTerra, to turn their brewing waste into animal feed and fertiliser.[xxii]

Collectives, cooperatives and Community Supported Agriculture business models support shorter food supply chains and are examples of ways that growers and other food enterprises can collaborate for mutual benefit including sharing costs and profits. The Canberrra region already has highly innovative social enterprises and food collectives such as Southern Harvest[xxiii] and Mulch.[xxiv]

Other innovative food and agriculture-based businesses based on more traditional models are also important parts of Canberra's food system. Encouraging and supporting collaboration for mutual benefit between local food businesses is one way we can assist our local food system and supply to grow. For example, collaboration can support efficient use of key infrastructure such as commercial storage and processing and distribution hubs that benefit multiple businesses and the broader community to access local food. While we have a visible food business community, the ACT can aspire to increase the quantity and reach of traditional food businesses as well as social enterprises, not-for-profits, food co-operatives and other collective business models that will diversify and strengthen our local food system.



Focus Areas

Skills and training:

- Investigate the feasibility and pathways for aspiring urban and small-scale food growers.

Building stronger networks:

- Work with ACT research and education institutions to encourage a focus on ACT specific research projects and local issues that help strengthen the local food system.
- Establish a community reference group to guide the implementation of this draft Strategy.
- Alongside stakeholders, co-design government support to facilitate community networking, business collaboration and opportunities to strengthen the local food system.
- Establish a formalised mechanism for the ACT Government to liaise with local rural landholders to better support producers.

Supporting collaboration:

- Support access to information and existing government support for food enterprises wishing to set up cooperative and other collective business models.
- Encourage food and agricultural business' participation in existing ACT Government innovation and business support programs.
- Support the establishment of more community gardens to help more sections of our community to benefit from establishing a garden.
- Identify mechanisms to support greater collaboration between agriculture and food enterprises, and that increase community economic participation in Canberra's local food system.



Goal 4. Support sustainable urban and rural farming practices



Sustainable farming practices at all scales are part of the solution to the twin emergencies of climate change and biodiversity loss. By supporting our farmers and food enterprises to adopt practices that regenerate soils and store carbon, restore and support biodiversity, use and reuse water wisely, and avoid and repurpose waste, our local food system can help make sure the ACT and its region build stronger climate resilience and protects its biodiversity.

What's already happening

Support for rural farmers

ACT's farming community already works with the ACT Government and other associations to care for the land. For example, the ACT Natural Resource Management's (ACT NRM) Sustainable Agriculture program31 supports healthy farm ecosystems and improves productivity and farm income by assisting landholders to address a range of challenges including:

- Drought and climate change adaptation and resilience.
- Soil erosion, riparian erosion and soil acidification.
- Loss of biodiversity, particularly in fertile lowland grasslands and box gum grassy woodlands.

With support from the Australian Government, the ACT is preparing a Regional Drought Resilience Plan to guide strategic decision-making and build drought, flood and broader climate change resilience for our agricultural producers. Implementation of the Plan will be supported through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

Every rural lease in the ACT is required to have a Land Management Agreement (LMA) in place. The principal objective of these agreements is:

> *"to establish appropriate sustainable agricultural management practices and good farm biosecurity for the subject land while maintaining ecological and cultural values present on the land and protecting the environment from harm".*[xxxii]

The ACT Government's Biosecurity and Rural Services team administers these LMAs and assists leaseholders with managing invasive weeds and pest animals.

Support for urban farmers

The ACT Government's strategies and allied policies to address climate change provide valuable data and guidance for urban agriculture. For example, the "Everyday Climate Choices" suite of programs, provide information on sustainable gardening, from composting to plant selecting, and the Suburban Land Agency's Climate Wide Garden Design Guide for Canberra includes a section on edible gardens.[xxv]

Community gardening experts have also developed a wealth of knowledge garnered and tested over many years on appropriate fruit and vegetable varieties for Canberra's climate, as well as locally specific planting guides. For example, the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc (COGS) provides a forum for growers to exchange information and encourages the adoption of organic growing methods for private as well as community gardens; and Canberra Seed Savers offers advice, gifts and low-cost access to climatically suited vegetable seeds.



Challenges and opportunities

Climate change adaptation and resilience

Urban and rural farmers need access to accurate local data on changing climate conditions, and how these changes will impact key factors for growing food. The ACT Government is fortunate in having access to the NSW and Australian Regional Climate Modelling (NARCliM) initiative that generates detailed climate projections and data for NSW and the ACT. This data will inform the development of the ACT Regional Drought Resilience Plan and provides an opportunity to develop climate change specific information for urban farmers as well.

Both urban and rural farmers need greater information and support from government to explore climate-adapted water use strategies and practices. Through the Office for Water, there is an opportunity to provide a water vulnerability assessment for the ACT, provide clearer guidance on water licensing, and investigate the potential for water reuse for agricultural purposes.

Restoring and protecting on-farm biodiversity

The new ACT NRM Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal Plan will provide an investment framework to continue to deliver programs that embed ecologically sustainable agricultural production in urban and rural settings. It is an opportunity for the ACT Government to partner with farmers to focus on farming practices that suit the ACT's environmental and climatic conditions, and restore, maintain and protect ecological health and biodiversity. Such programs include integrated pest management and regenerative techniques that ensure on-farm biodiversity is an asset for sustainable production.

Supporting better on-farm decision-making

Farmers need practical and dynamic plans for their farms that integrate environmental and business considerations into a single document and practical approach for daily application. A recent review of Land Management Agreements (LMA) found they have become outdated and do not support daily farming decision-making. The ACT Government has committed to reforming LMAs so that they better support holistic farm planning and implementation to achieve sustainable environmental and profitable farming outcomes.



All changes are compared against a baseline climatology for the region based on the year 2000.

Focus Areas

Support for rural farmers:

- Continue to engage the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and other First Nations peoples to work in partnership with us to understand, learn and adopt their knowledge of the land around us.
- Develop and implement the ACT Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program.
- Conduct a strategic review of the ACT's biosecurity risks and preparedness and support **urban and rural** farmers to adapt to increasing threats from invasive species and plant and animal diseases.
- Through the Office of Water, undertake an ACT water vulnerability assessment to inform future water management and availability for **rural and urban** agriculture.
- Streamline the administration and delivery of the ACT's rural Land Management Agreements so they continue to be fit for purpose and support sustainable farming practices and income.
- Investigate environmental stewardship and biodiversity payment opportunities and other financial incentives suitable for the ACT's rural landholders.

Support urban farmers:

- Develop an urban farming guide with local climate, soils, and water-specific advice for prospective urban growers.
- Support better on-farm decision making.
- Increase understanding of ACT water systems and administrative arrangements to enable better decision making by food producers.
- Investigate the use of treated and recycled wastewater and non-potable water for agricultural purposes, including establishing on-farm demonstration sites to test feasibility.
- Through the next ACT NRM program, build community capacity to improve farm biodiversity, the health of soils and catchments, and sustainable productivity.
- Support integrated pest management and where possible phase out environmentally harmful agricultural and veterinary chemicals.
- Investigate opportunities for demonstration sites to pilot and educate about new ideas for sustainable food production including information and support on a path to market for producers in the ACT.

Strategy implementation, and review



Completing identified actions to fill key knowledge gaps is a first important part of implementing this Strategy. This will then allow for the setting of meaningful and measurable targets. However as part of consultation on this first draft local food strategy for Canberra and our region, we are seeking community and expert stakeholder input on what are a small number of meaningul targets we could set for measuring its success.

A more detailed implementation plan will also follow the release of this draft Strategy. To ensure the intended outcomes are fully realised, we will develop a Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Plan as a part of the implementation plan. The MERI Plan will identify the ways to measure incremental, transitional, and transformational progress towards successful final Strategy delivery.

In recognition that this draft Strategy is foundational it has a shorter timeframe of five years, and progress will be reviewed after three years.

Endnotes

i. Chapter 5 : Food Security — Special Report on Climate Change and Land (ipcc.ch)

ii. CBR-Region-Industry-Profile-Agribusiness.pdf (canberraregion.com.au)

iii. Food in the ACT – Study by University of Canberra and Fenner School, ANU

iv. Authors of the study, personal communication. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/454961511210702794/pdf/Food-systems-for-an-urbanizing-world-knowledge-product.pdf

v. https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/sdgs

vi. https://www.fao.org/in-action/food-for-cities-programme/approach/need-for-sustainable-and-resilient-crfs/en/

vii. https://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1414641/ACT-Climate-Change-Strategy-2019-2025.pdf

viii. https://envcomm.act.gov.au/latest-from-us/acts-scope-3-greenhouse-gas-emissions/

ix. https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/policy-programs/act-circular-economy-strategy

x. https://www.act.gov.au/cbr-switched-on/content/canberra-switched-on

xi. https://www.crjo.nsw.gov.au/Home

xii. https://www.awe.gov.au/abares/research-topics/aboutmyregion/act

xiii. 20120815 - Food in the ACT - study by UC and Fenner School

xiv. Home - Grow it Local

xv. Home - Grow it Local

xvi. Relevant research is summarised in: EWT-Local-Food-Procurement-What-are-the-cobenefits-for-local-and-regional-economies.pdf (eatwelltas.org.au)

xvii. Fresh Tastes ACT Health

xviii. Healthier Choices ACT Health

xix. Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology (ceat.org.au)

xx. Fiona Buining - Churchill Trust

xxi. Stories from the Garden - The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney (nsw.gov.au)

xxii. Towards a no waste tap room with Capital Brewing - Goterra

xxiii. https://southernharvest.org.au/

xxiv. HomePage - Marymead | Children, Families, Community

xxv. Suburban Land Agency | News | Our Climate Wise Garden Designs booklet is here! (act.gov.au)

