

Food dude seeds fertile North East food prospect

THE director of an American farm-to-market program that helped farmers in a small Upper East state almost double sales of locally-produced food in a decade will explore similar opportunities for Victoria's North East and its farm and food sector next month.

Vermont State Sustainable Jobs Fund Farm to Plate program director Jake Claro will lead a workshop at the Wangaratta Regional Study Centre on March 27 and outline strategies that lifted the value of Vermont's sales of local food from \$263 million to \$464m between 2010 and 2019.

Workshop co-organiser Peter Kenyon said the Vermont program offered communities a framework and support to take a co-ordinated, long-term and collaborative approach to building local food systems and sustainable cultural, economic, social and environmental values.

"I think it's significant that Vermont shares a number of key cultural, economic and geographical characteristics with Victoria's North East," Mr Kenyon said.

"It's rural, it has two main cities and numerous small towns and villages, it's much the same geographic size, and its economy and communities are highly reliant on agriculture and food production.

"The value of Vermont's annual farm production is \$1170 million, compared with \$790 in our North East.

"But since its state-legislated Farm to Plate program began in 2010 it has yielded very posi-

tive, measurable economic and social benefits in education, employment, agriculture, environment and health."

Mr Kenyon said these included a 77 per cent increase in sales of locally-produced food and the creation of more than 6500 new jobs in food-related enterprises.

It's also led to the development of 379 new food and farm businesses and a 26 per cent reduction in food insecurity – where people don't have enough to eat.

"Farm to Plate has grown from a broad collaboration between business, non-profits, government, education organisations and the public into a program that's giving rural communities real punch," Mr Kenyon said.

"It's entering its second, 10-year phase, and with all the work that's been done in the past three to four years in North East Victoria to develop a local food strategy, Jake's visit offers a great opportunity for us to explore what we can do to grow our farm food sector."

Mr Claro is speaking in a number of Australian regions as part of an extensive tour.

His participation in the Wangaratta workshop has been organised by Australian food network Sustain and the North East's Local Food Strategy action group – a collaboration between local health services, local government, and food and farm community representatives.

Tickets for the afternoon workshop are available for \$40 through Eventbrite.

GOTAFE will provide afternoon tea and CSU is providing wine and cheese after the event.

A second, casual get-together will be held at the Regional Study Centre between 7pm and 9pm so that others - who can't attend the afternoon workshop - can hear from Mr Claro.

Tickets for this additional event can also be booked through Eventbrite for \$10.



BOOK IT IN: On March 27, Wangaratta will host Jake Claro the insightful director of a successful Farm to Plate program in the United States.