



A Community Food Hub Concept for Wangaratta

Summary of the Food Hub feasibility study conducted by Dr Jen Alden (Growing Change), Dr Nick Rose (Sustain), Nadine Ponomarenko (Australian Food Hubs Network) and Peter Kenyon, for the Wangaratta Community Food for All network.

VISION

The Wangaratta community will have a generous, thriving and transparent food system that cares for and respects people, values local food and local producers, and is empowering and collaborative. This will be a food system where food is grown everywhere, where no-one is hungry, and where everyone knows how to cook and eat well on low incomes. Wangaratta will be a place whose food system is integral to creating an energy and food efficient future, and in supporting young people into agriculture via increased employment and training opportunities

(Community Workshop participants' combined vision for the food system in Wangaratta, September 2016)

A Community Food Hub in Wangaratta can build on the work of the Community Food For All network to contribute to long-term community health, wellbeing and prosperity by:

- Contributing to food security for vulnerable communities, revitalising community partnerships in order to facilitate affordable access to healthy and seasonal local produce,
- Building community skills,
- Supporting and building the capacity of local producers and food businesses, while enhancing their long-term viability and ability to expand and diversify their enterprises with new value adding, warehousing and distribution options,
- Playing a central role as a health promotion and business incubation setting that enables significant and diverse health, social, environmental and economic benefits to the community,
- Providing new pathways to training, employment and social enterprise ventures.

The study concludes that a Community Food Hub in Wangaratta is, in principle, feasible. The study also concludes, based on the community engagement undertaken, that there is a need for the type of services and functions that a Community Food Hub could provide. Organisations in the health, welfare, community service and education sectors are keen to be part of a vision that moves beyond a foodbank model to incorporate life skills education, providing training and job opportunities.

Key assumptions for potential success of the Wangaratta Community Food Hub

1. The Community Food Hub is founded on effective and broad-based partnerships and collaborations, especially with the producer community; and leverages relationships with existing and well-established institutions and organisations, especially as regards access to infrastructure, logistics and funding
2. It is able to establish and maintain, from its first year of operation onwards, a diversified range of income streams, including: training and capacity building for local people and local producers; sales and logistics; warehousing and storage; a weekly People's Market; community kitchens and community lunches; food literacy programs and other forms of service provision
3. It is operated by experienced and capable staff, supported by an experienced and capable Board, and has a strong emphasis on social entrepreneurship in order to work towards a substantial degree of financial self-sufficiency through self-generated revenue streams

The findings of the **Economic Impact Assessment**, based on the REMPLAN modelling software, reveal that after 12 months of operation of the Community Food Hub 9 FTE jobs would be created and supported, there would be a \$1.22mn increase in total output to the Rural City of Wangaratta economy and a \$0.705mn increase in value-added to the Rural City of Wangaratta economy. After 5 years of operation of the Community Food Hub 21 FTE jobs would be created and supported, there would be a \$3.152mn increase in total output to the Rural City of Wangaratta economy and a \$1.794mn increase in value-added to the Rural City of Wangaratta economy.

A solid **Financial Analysis** based on modest assumptions sees the potential for business and financial strengths and viability of a Food Hub. It allows for a technological connector, such as the Open Food Network, to facilitate the preliminary phases of coordinating Food Hub activities. The financial modelling reveals the core activities of a Wangaratta Community Food Hub, namely education and training, storage and warehousing, marketing and distribution, and the operation of a commercial kitchen, could generate a net revenue of \$322,166 within five years.

There are five key areas that require initiation and investment regardless of the model ultimately pursued. These are:

1. **A Community Food Hub Project team:** The CFFA and other interested parties need to seek expressions of interest to form a core team of up to 6-8 individuals with a strong interest in taking forward the Community Food Hub project to the next stage
2. **Funding:** secure funding to progress all of the below
3. **Capacity building for the core team:** The core team should work with the Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE) in order to build their understanding of the social enterprise model in a rural / regional context, and work collaboratively, building on this feasibility study, to define, design and market research a business model for the operation of a Community Food Hub, including investigation of commercial expressions of interest and potential buyer and supply contracts
4. **Strengthening Partnerships:** As part of their work in designing and developing the business model, the core team will continue to strengthen regional relationships and build confidence and trust amongst key partners, especially producer, business and community networks
5. **Governance:** Formalise partnerships, governance and contracting models, identify suitable candidates for a Board, clarify roles and responsibilities

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The vision is that the buildings and space at The Close: Purbrick Hall, the grassed garden areas adjacent and Armstrong House, plus some open space will be available for use as:

- a People's Kitchen,
- a weekly People's Market,
- a food enterprise and service hub and
- various small scale community garden locations, complete with composting facilities for closed loop food waste demonstration projects and training.

Food storage and distribution will take place from refrigerated containers positioned adjacent to Purbrick Hall. The Wangaratta Food Hub will be a health and wellbeing precinct focused on food access and affordability, food literacy and social enterprise development via the novel organisational partnerships outlined in the study.





Benefits of the recommended model

- It builds on existing relationships and partnerships, such as those involved in the Community Food For All network and is underpinned by novel linkages such as the provision of infrastructure by a sympathetic organisation such as the Anglican Church.
- Motivation and commitment exists that will be essential to see such a strong concept move forward. It provides an ideal partnership to further benefit the Church's objectives in working towards community wellbeing.
- The proposal to utilise the unique infrastructure of The Close, owned by the Anglican Church in the Wangaratta CBD is important, as the location of a Food Hub is a critical decision in its establishment. The infrastructure and services offered by a community food hub should reflect the needs and priorities of the local community. The model proposed for Wangaratta is based on the extensive community engagement undertaken for this project.
- The site optimises beneficial outcomes for the community by addressing all aspects of the food system: growing, value-adding, distribution, and education; and by focusing on those experiencing disadvantage in the community. In addition to increasing access to fresh produce the proposed model can also support local employment and thus prosperity.
- The large commercial kitchen connected to a dining space can seat up to 100 people comfortably. A lawn area is suitable for market stalls and there is open green space for a community garden and demonstration food growing establishment. Storage requirements can be met on-site initially by coolroom space equivalent to two refrigerated containers and dry storage for ambient temperature goods for use in the kitchen. Access requirements can be met for small truck and long wheel base delivery van, clear of pedestrian traffic. Potential exists for logistics partnerships eg. back filling of producers and Foodbank and other food service delivery vehicles. Council zoning is appropriate to use for commercial business purposes and space exists for office and training areas.
- By providing opportunities for active transport when planning community infrastructure, such as the Community Food Hub, the Rural City of Wangaratta can plan for community facilities and their location that encourages cycling and walking. Access to the CBD via public transport was a determining factor in selection of the preferred Community Food Hub site for this study.
- The model offers an exciting and novel approach to improving food security in Wangaratta. The proposed enterprise can support innovative partnerships between agencies and local government to provide improved access to and affordability of fresh produce. It can also support local producers with new outlets for seasonal and affordable local produce. Partnerships could include not only the Anglican Church, with their Foodbank, but also agencies such as Pangerang Neighbourhood House, Gateway Health, Borinya Wangaratta Community Partnership, the Wangaratta Farmers Market, Rural City of Wangaratta, The Centre, GoTAFE, NESAY, ACRE, and a range of environmental, agricultural and community and volunteer organisations.
- The focus is on a sustainable funding model, with an increasing proportion of self-generated revenue
- The concept would benefit from planned capacity building for recruitment, training and management of volunteers, which would require a stand alone project, providing a template for future work in this sector.

These component activities are essential to the viability of a start up phase of 1 year and integral to a longer-term vision for the site. This model enables starting small and lean with available infrastructure and building up the model and activities as initial revenue streams are established.



Recommended model: A Community Food Hub located at the Anglican Close

