



# Appendices

# APPENDIX A: EPC INQUIRY RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

SUSTAIN  
the Australian food network

10<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Helen Ross-Soden  
Administration Officer  
LA Environment and Planning Committee  
Parliament of Victoria

By email: FoodSupplyInquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Helen

**RE: Environment and Planning Committee – Securing Victoria’s Food Supply – Questions on Notice**

Further to our submission and our evidence delivered on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, and in response to your email dated 29<sup>th</sup> May, we are pleased to enclose the corrected transcript of our evidence together with our response to the questions on notice.

If you require any further information please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**Nick Rose. PhD**  
Executive Director

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

**David HODGETT:** It is a bit separate to this, but I was fascinated when you were talking, Nick, about some of the benefits of improving food. You gave an example of \$182 million. I would be interested if you have done any work – and you can take it on notice if you like – around changing behaviour. I know I should probably eat better or drink less or exercise more, and doctors will tell you they keep telling that to their patients, but how do we actually change human behaviour? I just wonder if you have done any work around that, even if you want to take that on notice.

**Nick ROSE:** We can speak to it a little bit, but it might be good to take it on notice and get back to you with some actual references. But yes, it is critical, because that is ultimately what we are talking about here, a cultural change, if we are actually interested in a healthy Victorian population, which I think we should be. We have grown up in the last 50 or 60 years in a convenience culture, from TV meals through to fast food and now to Uber apps. Everything is on notice, and that is what is marketed and that it is what is promoted. As anyone knows that goes into a supermarket and into the aisles, what is on discount, what is on special, what is in line of sight and what is near the check-out is not fruit and veg. So yes, it is a huge challenge. That is why we say, and Kelly mentioned this, that there is great value in changing what people experience when they walk around their streets and their suburbs, seeing what used to be commonplace, which was veggie gardens and fruit actually growing – the living tree with fruit, the living veggie patch with herbs.

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

Statewide food systems planning

1. What do you envisage a statewide food system and security strategy encompassing?
2. What types of initiatives would you like to see included in a strategy?
3. Why is it important that local governments get involved in food system strategy?
4. How do you envision protections for agricultural lands featuring in a statewide strategy?

## 1. What do you envisage a statewide food system and security strategy encompassing?

The aim of a Victorian food system and food security strategy should be to provide effective governance and coordination of Victoria's food system to ensure its integrity and healthy functioning for current and future generations, guided by a shared vision and key principles.

### Key components and principles

These should include:

- **Participatory development**, foregrounding the perspectives of First Nations communities as well as those with lived experience of food insecurity
- **Whole-of-government and whole-of-system collaborative governance and coordination mechanism** (e.g. a Victorian Food Systems Committee) to guide implementation
- **Human and ecological health** as a core priority and guiding objective
- A **rights-based approach**, committing to the progressive realisation of the human right to good food for all Victorians
- A focus on food system **localisation and decentralisation** to strengthen resilience
- A focus on **regenerative and sustainable agriculture** to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of accelerating climate change as well as to reduce dependency on imported inputs
- **Mapping and auditing the Victorian food system and supply chains** to identify key vulnerabilities, gaps and inefficiencies
- A **supportive state planning framework** that prioritises food system considerations and public health (including production, distribution and sale of healthy food) as well as **protects vital farmland including in peri-urban areas**
- **Clear, measurable targets** with appropriate indicators and **regular monitoring and evaluation** to track progress
- **Ensure alignment with other key policy portfolios and key strategies** to ensure coherence across government (e.g. First Nations Treaty, environment and climate change, health, transport, infrastructure, regional development)

A good starting point for the Committee is [\*Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement\*](#).<sup>1</sup> Developed in 2021 by a collective of cross-sector organisations under the facilitation of VicHealth and launched in June 2022, the Consensus Statement sets out the following vision for Victoria's food system:

*“An equitable, regenerative, prosperous and resilient food system that ensures access to healthy and culturally appropriate food for all Victorians; a system that values nourishment, fairness, dignity, democracy, participation, inclusivity and stewardship of the natural environment.”*

The Consensus Statement also articulates **a set of seven principles to guide action by the Victorian government** as it engages with this vital area of public policy, namely:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vicfoodsystem.org.au>

- *Uphold food as a basic human right*
- *Value inclusion and self-determination so that historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups participate in decisions and activities to reshape the food system*
- *Provide healthy foods within planetary boundaries, focusing on diverse, nutritious and minimally processed foods*
- *Strengthen local and regional food economies, fostering social connection, diversification and resilience*
- *Cultivate food literacy in the broader context of eco-literacy*
- *Promote fair incomes and working practices for farmers and food workers*
- *Celebrate the traditional food practices of Victoria's multiple ethnicities and diverse communities*

To these principles we would add the following:

- *Uphold the aspirations of Victoria's First Nations to realise their aspirations for food sovereignty and connection to Country through the recovery of cultural food knowledge, plants and practices.*

#### Leverage points for effective action

The Consensus Statement **set out ten leverage points** that can **serve as a roadmap for the Victorian government** in taking the actions necessary to realise the Statement's vision. These leverage points are as follows:

1. Legislate the right to food to create an enabling policy environment.
2. Establish a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.
3. Establish a comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring framework for Victoria's food system in the State of the Environment Report.
4. Support the transition to regenerative farming and agroecological solutions.
5. Create a Local Food Investment Fund to strengthen local and regional food systems.
6. Support Victorian farmers and food businesses through mandatory public sector food procurement policies.
7. Invest in universal food systems literacy for all Victorian school students.
8. Mandate and resource the participatory development of local government community food system strategies through amending the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.
9. Amend the Victorian Planning Provisions to include health and environmental promotion as key considerations in planning decisions.
10. Develop a coordinated and collaborative food relief sector that prioritises dignified access to fresh and healthy food.

These 10 leverage points provide a good indication of the **scope for a Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Strategy. Coordination and governance (Leverage Point 2) are critical and must be adequately resourced by the State government.**

The need for a participatory, whole-of-system approach

The Committee will note that Leverage Point 2 speaks of the ‘**participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan**’. This commitment to participatory policy making and wide public consultation is vital to ensure that the Strategy reflects the needs and priorities of Victorian communities as well as their trust and confidence in its purpose and aims, as they will need to be involved in its implementation for it to be successful. A **participatory, collaborative and inclusive approach has been widely followed** in the creation and implementation of food system strategies, policies and plans, both in Victoria and internationally. Sustain has supported the community consultation, development and/or implementation of several food system strategies at the local government level in Victoria:

- [City of Melbourne Food Policy 2024-2034 \(endorsed 4 June 2024\)](#)
- [Community Food Strategy 2018-2026](#) (Cardinia Shire)
- [Food System Strategy 2020-2030](#) (Greater Bendigo)
- [Food Economy and Agroecology Strategy 2022-2028](#) (Mornington Peninsula Shire)
- [Urban Food Strategy 2023-2027](#) (Banyule)
- [Food System Strategy 2017-2024](#) (Merri-Bek – [now consulting on an extension to 2027](#))

These and other examples demonstrate the need for participatory approaches to the development of food systems and food security strategies and plans.

In addition to participation and inclusion, the complexity of food system issues requires a coordinated, whole-of-system approach. The Federal House Standing Committee on Agriculture’ 2023 report, [Australian Food Story: Feeding the Nation and Beyond](#), made several recommendations that, in our view, provide guidance to the Committee in terms of what a Victorian Food Systems and Food Security Strategy should encompass, including the following:

- Expand urban agriculture, including to develop skills and encourage careers in agriculture (Rec.10)
- Protect agricultural land from urban sprawl and non-agricultural uses (Rec. 13)
- Develop a Food Supply Chain Map, identifying key points of vulnerability (Rec.14)
- Develop a transport resilience plan focused on food security (Rec.15)
- Develop measures to eliminate food waste, including through improved data sharing across the supply chain and establishing regional food hubs (Rec.18)
- Develop and fund a research program focused on the development of a circular food economy (Rec.22)

- Develop and fund long-term research, development and extension to promote sustainable agriculture (Rec.25)
- Conduct surveys of household food insecurity every three years using the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module (Rec.29)
- Develop a school curriculum for food and nutrition education including basic cooking skills (Rec.30)

The NSW Environment and Planning Committee's 2022 report on its Inquiry into food production and supply similarly recommends the development of a comprehensive Food System Plan for NSW that addresses the food system as a whole, including:

- strategies to address food insecurity
- promoting equitable access to nutritious food
- consideration of food production, including urban agriculture
- any required changes to planning and development frameworks
- points of integration with local government and service providers

While state government food system planning and strategy development is in its nascent stages in Australia, it is well advanced in the United States and elsewhere. In its [Overview of State and Regional Food System Plans and Charters](#) (2021), Michigan State University's Centre for Regional Food Systems found that 'nearly 60% of US states have an active food systems plan or one under development.'

Best-practice examples at the state level in the US include the [Vermont Farm to Plate Plan 2009-2030](#). However there are a range of other examples at the state and national level from which to benchmark a best-practice approach:

- [Colorado Blueprint of Agriculture and Food 2017](#)
- [Food Policy for Canada 2019](#)
- [UK National Food Strategy 2021](#)
- [Alaska Food Strategy Taskforce / Statewide Action Plan 2022](#)
- [Good Food Nation Act Scotland 2022](#)

## **2. What types of initiatives would you like to see included in a strategy?**

We strongly encourage the State government to focus strategic actions towards systemic and structural changes that shape the food and commercial environments in which Victorians live, eat and make decisions about food. Research has demonstrated that policies and strategies targeting (for example) food environments and the commercial determinants of health are far more effective than policies focused on individual behaviour change.<sup>2</sup> It is also noteworthy that

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<sup>2</sup> Hagenaars, L. L., Schmidt, L. A., Groeniger, J. O., Bekker, M. P., Ter Ellen, F., de Leeuw, E., van Lenthe, F.J., Oude Hengel, K.M. & Stronks, K. (2024). Why we struggle to make progress in obesity prevention and how we might

public health policies that have had the greatest positive impacts on population health are those led and coordinated by government with little to no external influence from food and beverage industries.<sup>3</sup>

We would like to see several high-level as well as specific initiatives included in a statewide food system and security strategy. For example, the 10 leverage points in the aforementioned Consensus Statement as well as the roadmap (page 59) and recommendations in Sustain's 2022 *Growing Edible Cities and Towns* report (commissioned by Agriculture Victoria (see Appendix) offer high-level recommendations for changes needed to the state government planning framework and other critical needs for transitioning to a more resilient, sustainable and healthy food system. In addition to the recommendations in the documents above, we would like to see the following initiatives in a food system and security strategy.

Type of initiative	Recommendation	Rationale
<b>First principles</b>		
First Nations sovereignty	Foreground First Nations knowledge and culture in the food system	To ensure that food system investments and initiatives support connection to Country and economic self-determination for all Aboriginal Victorians.
The human right to food	Legislate food as a basic human right	Provide the strongest possible legal and moral grounding for the Strategy in core principles of international human rights law
Participatory policy approaches	Establish a whole-of-government Food Systems Committee to oversee the participatory development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy and Investment Plan.	To ensure the Strategy reflects the needs and priorities of Victorian communities as well as their trust and confidence in its purpose and aims.
<b>Effective resourcing and investment</b>		
Fiscal innovation and taxation	Create an Ultra-Processed Food and Beverage Act (similar to the Victorian Tobacco Act 1987)	To reduce the growing health harms from these products and to establish a significant fund from which preventative health and food system initiatives can be financed for the long-term. <sup>4</sup>
Fiscal innovation and taxation	Identify community food infrastructure (facilities for communal growing, cooking, eating) as part of the Essential	To ensure infrastructure needed for community food system resilience can be funded through existing fiscal mechanisms such as developer contribution schemes (including public open space

overcome policy inertia: Lessons from the complexity and political sciences. *Obesity Reviews*; Tseng, E., Zhang, A., Shogbesan, O., Gudzone, K.A., Wilson, R.F., Kharrazi, H., Cheskin, L.J., Bass, E.B. & Bennett, W.L., 2018. Effectiveness of policies and programs to combat adult obesity: a systematic review. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 33, 1990-2001.

<sup>3</sup> Ngqangashe, Y., Friel, S., & Schram, A. (2022). The regulatory governance conditions that lead to food policies achieving improvements in population nutrition outcomes: a qualitative comparative analysis. *Public Health Nutrition*, 25(5), 1395-1405.

<sup>4</sup> [Modelling released by the Australian Medical Association in June 2024](#) revealed that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages only would generate nearly \$4 billion over the four financial years (24/25 - 27/28). Proportional to population, that would equate to \$1 billion for Victoria, \$250 million per year – which could easily be doubled by extending the tax to ultra-processed and fast foods.



Type of initiative	Recommendation	Rationale
	Works List and open space facilities.	contributions, developer infrastructure levy and community infrastructure levy).  To create a planning framework that empowers local government to invest in community food system priorities (including food system localisation and security as well as social cohesion and ecological wellbeing).
Community food system investment	Develop and implement a community food projects scheme (akin to Agriculture Victoria's Small-Scale and Craft grants program).	To address under-resourcing in the Victorian community food sector.  To ensure local communities are supported to ensure the food supply needs are met at the local level.  A useful model is the USDA's <a href="#">Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program</a> .
<b>Planning reform</b>		
Community food system planning	Embed food system considerations into neighbourhood precinct planning.  Incorporate access to greengrocers and other independent food outlets as key liveability indicators in precinct planning.	To ensure precinct planning frameworks and processes encourage economic diversity of food retailing and access.  To embed, measure and monitor food retailing diversity in strategic planning for 20-minute neighbourhoods.
Planning reform	Mandate that public health and other food system considerations are incorporated in the state planning framework and must be considered in local planning schemes and decisions.  Implement planning controls on new convenience, fast food and takeaway outlets, particularly near schools and early childhood education.	To ensure that planning decisions enhance public health and reflect community food system priorities.  To tackle the dominance of unhealthy food in the urban landscape and mitigate the impacts on young people's food choices and their health now and into the future.
Planning reform	Integrate community food infrastructure (communal spaces for growing, cooking and eating) in all new social and public housing.	To ensure vulnerable and/or low-income households have good food access. A best-practice example of a thriving food infrastructure cluster is the Atherton Gardens Public Housing Estate (Fitzroy) which includes a community kitchen, community garden, kitchen equipment library, community bakery and low-cost weekly community market.
Urban agriculture	Recognise and support urban agriculture as a legitimate land	To support the diversification of Victoria's food supply. See Sustain's 2022 report <a href="#">Growing Edible</a>

Type of initiative	Recommendation	Rationale
	use in the state government planning framework.	<a href="#">Cities and Towns</a> for a detailed roadmap to support the Victorian urban agriculture sector (Appendix 1).
<b>Economic development</b>		
Regional development	Support cooperative models for food processing, distribution and retailing through public investment in shared food processing infrastructure in rural and regional areas (including small-scale abattoirs, storage/coolrooms, food hubs, commercial kitchens etc).	<p>To build greater economic diversity in the Victorian food economy.</p> <p>To revitalise regional food economies and strengthen supply chain connections.</p> <p>To strengthen the financial viability of smaller-scale food businesses in urban and regional areas.</p> <p>To encourage cross-sectoral and B2B collaboration in the Victorian food system.</p>
Food system diversification	<p>Provide incentives for greengrocers and independent retailers to have extended hours (e.g. stay open till 7pm).</p> <p>Incentivise empty commercial real estate to be used by independent food start-ups.</p> <p>Use precinct neighbourhood planning schemes to incentivise mobile and/or pop-up fresh produce markets, particularly in outer suburbs and neighbourhoods with empty high street shops.</p>	<p>To create more economic diversity in the Victorian food retailing landscape.</p> <p>To ensure diverse market channels for Victorian food producers and makers.</p> <p>To support urban and economic revitalisation at the local level.</p> <p>To improve and diversify access to healthy and fresh produce in outer suburbs, particularly where unhealthy food outlets are over-represented and/or healthy food outlets are under-represented.</p> <p>To retain existing independent food retailers by supporting them to compete with the supermarket duopoly.</p>
Public procurement processes	Work with procurement managers across the public service to map current arrangements and identify opportunities to progressively support Victorian food producers.	<p>To ensure diverse market channels for Victorian food producers and makers.</p> <p>To enhance the viability, sustainability and resilience of the Victorian food economy.</p>
<b>Food system capacity building, education and training</b>		
Capacity building in government	Invest in food systems professional development programs across local and state government departments.	To support government departments and policymakers with the skills and knowledge needed for effective food systems policy and action.
Secondary schools	Resume the Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund and incorporate a focus on urban agriculture.	To strengthen the urban agriculture sector while building agricultural literacy in young people across urban and regional settings.
Vocational training	Embed food systems knowledge in relevant free TAFE courses, e.g. cookery, hospitality, kitchen	To provide the foundations for a workforce that can support the transition to a secure, sustainable and healthy food system.

Type of initiative	Recommendation	Rationale
	management, agriculture, horticulture, etc.	To ensure vocational graduates working in food-related industries have the skills and knowledge to meet current and future food system challenges.
Higher education	Work with the higher education sector to embed food systems thinking into planning curriculum.	To ensure planning professionals are well equipped to understand the food systems implications of planning processes and decisions.
Adult education	Invest in the urban agriculture training and employment pathways.  Develop farmer incubator programs for young and new farmers.	To support the development of new and non-traditional entries into the agricultural sector.  <i>Examples:</i> Sustain's <a href="#">First Nations urban agriculture internship program</a> .

### 3. Why is it important that local governments get involved in food system strategy?

There are many reasons for local government to be involved in food system strategy development and implementation, including their obligations to develop Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans every four years and to give consideration to climate change at a local level. Recent research on local government food systems governance has articulated other reasons why local governments can and do play an active role in food system strategy:<sup>5</sup>

- their responsibility for policy areas that impact on, and are impacted by, food systems, including land use planning, transport, sustainability, waste management and community services;
- their management of public land which can be made available for community and / or commercial food growing as well as public assets and facilities (e.g. neighbourhood houses, commercial kitchens, storage facilities) which can support community-led food programs, social enterprises and initiatives;
- their ‘unique insights into local and community needs, enabling them to respond with targeted, place-based measures’;
- their role in facilitating ‘community participation to support deliberative forms of food system governance unavailable at state and federal levels.’

A survey of 64 local governments in Victoria and NSW conducted in 2021 found that many local governments are already engaged in a range of activities including food waste minimisation, social and cultural events and education programs, community gardening/verge planting, Meals on Wheels programs and, increasingly, food relief initiatives.<sup>6</sup> Much less frequent were actions or

<sup>5</sup> Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Reeve, B., Rose, N., & Charlton, K. (2022). Australian local government policies on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system: analysis in New South Wales and Victoria. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 46(3), 332-339.

<sup>6</sup> Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2023). Food system policy making and innovation at the local level: Exploring the response of Australian local governments to critical food systems issues. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 34(2), 488-499.

programs supporting urban and peri-urban agriculture, sustainable and regenerative agriculture and market gardening (e.g. through the provision of land).

While not all councils have food system strategies, many (in addition to those mentioned above) have recently supported the establishment of food system coalitions or networks at the local level to ensure strong partnerships between council and the local community. These include:

- [Local Food Coalition 2023-2025](#) (City of Ballarat)
- [Local Food Network 2024-2026](#) (Golden Plains Shire Council)
- [Food Systems Roadmap 2024](#) (Central Goldfields Shire Council)
- [Food Systems Collective 2024](#) (City of Melton)

#### Enablers of local government involvement in food systems work

A significant enabler (and funder) of this work has been VicHealth through its [Local Government Partnership and Modules flagship](#). Other key enablers of local government engagement in food system strategy development and implementation include:

- strong internal support and leadership (either from executive or elected officials);
- the creation and funding of dedicated food system or food security officer positions;
- strong local and regional partnerships and collaborations; and
- access to funding (state or federal).

#### Barriers to effective state government action

A recent study regarding the barriers to local government implementation of food systems initiatives identified the following issues: lack of human resources (81%), insufficient funding (70%) and organisational priorities (53%).<sup>7</sup> In particular, the authors offered these reflections on short-term, project-based funding as a barrier to local government food systems action:

*[Local governments] achieve policy adoption and implementation of activities but [often] cannot demonstrate positive impact or sustain programs of work prior to funding ceasing. **Dedicated long-term investment for food system work is essential at local, state and federal levels, including resourcing for governance processes** (e.g. data collection, community involvement and policy development) in addition to project implementation and evaluation.*

Short-term funding is not the appropriate financing mechanism when the goal is to achieve systemic change and impact. Funding must be for the long-term – such as the Vermont Farm to Plate Plan, now entering its 15<sup>th</sup> year and has at least another six still to run.

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<sup>7</sup> Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2023). Food system policy making and innovation at the local level: Exploring the response of Australian local governments to critical food systems issues. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 34(2), 488-49.

Other research focused on food system strategy and policy development and implementation in local government in Victoria has identified a range on systemic factors and barriers to effective local government action on food systems.<sup>8 9 10 11 12</sup>

*Organisational factors impeding local government action*

- Lack of commitment from senior leadership (this is linked to the lack of policy mandate at state and federal level mentioned below);
- Limited organisational capacity (funding, staffing and expertise);
- An institutional culture of risk-aversion;
- Lack of engagement in food systems outside community and health directorates;
- Loss of specialised knowledge through poor staff retention on food system initiatives (often resulting to short-term project funding);
- An overestimation by state government partners of local government's capacity to address systemic drivers of food system issues.

*Policy barriers that create a poor policy mandate for action include:*

- Lack of direction from, and coherence between, state and federal law and policy relevant to food systems, including a state planning framework that acts as a major legislative barrier to improving healthy food environments;
- Lack of political will and institutional interest to engage with evidence on a range of food systems issues;
- Lack of state funding supporting a whole-of-food-system approach, with most funding directed towards short-term projects and specific topics rather than core functions such as hiring staff (in contrast to the Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030, a statewide food system strategy supported since 2009 by 20 years of dedicated funding and backed by state government legislation);
- Limited ability of local government to increase its revenue streams to effectively resource food system policy initiatives;
- Lack of jurisdiction over taxation, advertising regulation or welfare policy;
- An overemphasis on individual behaviour that devolves responsibility to consumers while ignoring corporate actors in shaping food system behaviour;
- Unequal power dynamics and policy influence between corporate and community actors in the food system;

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<sup>8</sup> Carrad, A., Turner, L., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2022). Local innovation in food system policies: A case study of six Australian local governments. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 12(1), 115–139. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2022.121.007>

<sup>9</sup> Clarke, B. and Moore, J. (2015). An investigation of Victorian municipal public health plans for strategies that alleviate food insecurity: a qualitative case study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 1-16.

<sup>10</sup> Slade, C. and Baldwin, C. (2016). Critiquing Food Security Inter-governmental Partnership Approaches in Victoria, Australia. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 76(2), 204–220.

<sup>11</sup> James, S. W., Friel, S., Lawrence, M. A., Hoek, A. C., & Pearson, D. (2018). Inter-sectoral action to support healthy and environmentally sustainable food behaviours: a study of sectoral knowledge, governance and implementation opportunities. *Sustainability Science*, 13(2), 465–477. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-017-0459-8>

<sup>12</sup> Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2023). Food system policy making and innovation at the local level: Exploring the response of Australian local governments to critical food systems issues. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 34(2), 488-49.

- Onerous reporting and inflexible “approach to community, management, and accountability structures” in intergovernmental partnerships (state-local) on food system issues;
- An absence of systematic, comprehensive monitoring of food system issues at state and federal levels, impacting data available to local governments to plan, implement and evaluate their activities.

#### Recommendations to support local government involvement in food systems strategies

While the Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027 mentions food systems as a challenge and consideration for health and wellbeing, it presents several limitations for action. Although there are targeted strategies identified under each of the Plan’s ten priorities, there is no food system strategy at the state or local government level. This provides a weak mandate for investment and action.

Research supports the following recommendations for state government action to support local governments to engage more deeply and effectively in food system strategy development, implementation and governance:<sup>13</sup>

- A statewide, comprehensive food system and food security plan that set objectives and targets on priority food system issues.
- An explicit legislative and / or policy mandate for food systems [to] empower local governments to develop and implement food system policies and programs that promote positive health, environmental, social and economic outcomes for the community.
- Amendment of state government planning frameworks to enable local governments to encourage opening fresh food retail outlets and restrict new fast-food restaurants.

As regards the **critical issue of resourcing and capacity for local government and community organisations to engage in food system strategy development and implementation**, a useful model for the Committee and the Victorian government to consider is the recently launched [Regional Food System Partnerships grants program](#) of the US Department of Agriculture. This creates two streams of grants: 24-month Planning and Design Projects (\$USD100,000 - \$USD250,000) and 36-month Implementation and Expansion Projects (\$USD250,000 - \$USD1,000,000). Eligible entities include local governments, food councils / networks, not-for-profit organisations, First Nations organisations and producer cooperatives.

#### **4. How do you envision protections for agricultural lands featuring in a statewide strategy?**

There are several examples for the protection of agricultural land that could be embedded in a statewide food system strategy.

The [Ontario Greenbelt Plan \(2017\)](#) aims to protect the province’s most important and productive farmland through the following:

- Protecting against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supporting agriculture as the predominant land use;
- Providing permanent protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health;

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<sup>13</sup> Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2023). Food system policy making and innovation at the local level: Exploring the response of Australian local governments to critical food systems issues. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 34(2), 488-49.

- Creating an environmental framework for urbanisation in south-central Ontario;
- Supporting a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses; and
- Building resilience to and mitigates climate change.

The [British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve](#) aims to

- preserve the agricultural land reserve;
- encourage farming of land within the agricultural land reserve in collaboration with other communities of interest;
- encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of land within the agricultural land reserve and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

The City of Boston planning reform ([Article 89](#)) is an exemplar planning framework that:

- establishes zoning regulations for the operation of urban agriculture activities;
- provides standards for the siting, design, maintenance and modification of Urban Agriculture activities that address public safety and minimize impacts on residents and historic resources in the City of Boston.

With regard to specific changes to the planning framework, we defer to the expertise of planning expert Linda Martin-Chew and the recommendations in her own submission to the Inquiry:

1. Commit to land use planning regulation to prioritise peri-urban agriculture over other land uses. Apply the benchmarking principles (relating to food production, processing, distribution and waste management) in any review of planning regulation because they are specifically aimed at supporting a local, sustainable food system.
2. Government intervention is required to reduce the rate of conversion of agricultural land to residential use. Bring forward Action 16 from the Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land Action Plan to require parliamentary ratification to subdivide land below the minimum lot sizes in the Farming Zone and Rural Activity Zone within 100 kilometres of Melbourne. Noting this appears to require an amendment to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, investigate measures to prevent a rush of rural subdivision applications in the wake of the recent release of the Action Plan and prior to the implementation of this action.
3. Skills development in food systems planning and food literacy is needed at all levels of government so that long-term planning and policy actions promote a resilient, sustainable, healthy, and fair food system for Melbourne.
4. Sustainable agricultural practices that are associated with productive uses should be a specific inclusion in the purposes of each rural zone in Victoria. The support for "sustainable agriculture" in Victorian planning schemes could be strengthened, along with additional guidance on what attributes sustainable agriculture is likely to have. For example, agroecological production models are recognised as providing and supporting biodiversity enhancement, sustainable land management, and the retention of landscape values.

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APPENDIX

# Growing Edible Cities and Towns

A Survey of the Victorian Urban Agriculture Sector







Melbourne Food Hub (photo credit: Phoebe Powell)

Sustain thanks Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation for financial support towards report editing and design.

### Acknowledgements

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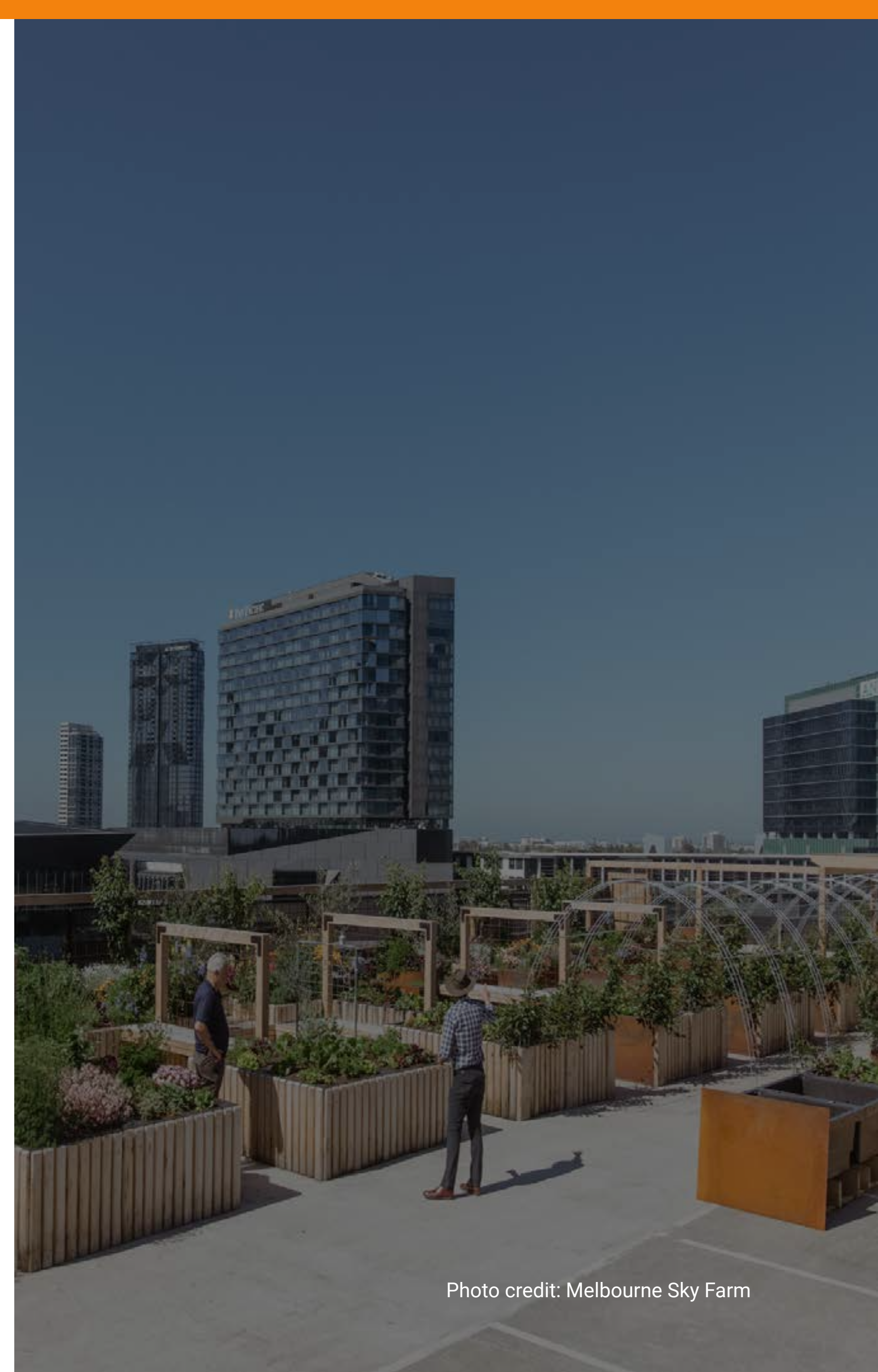
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SUSTAIN

# About Sustain

Sustain: The Australian Food Network is a national health promotion charity and food systems 'think and do network' that empowers communities, governments, and organisations to create food systems for healthy people and ecosystems.

We believe urban agriculture is a powerful mechanism for creating healthier, more sustainable and socially just cities and for building food systems and agricultural literacy in our communities. For this reason, we have been advocating for greater recognition and support for urban agriculture in Victoria and nationally since our establishment in 2016.

Urban agriculture is now a key area of focus for Sustain's research, policy and advocacy agenda, and community praxis. [Sustain's Pandemic Gardening Survey](#) report (2020) documents just how critical edible gardening was for the physical and mental health of gardeners across Australia during the pandemic. The report provides a strong evidence base for sector support as a legitimate investment in public and urban health.

Our urban farm in Alphington and our [Oakhill Food Justice Farm](#) in Preston are testament to the delicious abundance that urban agriculture can bring to our cities and their potential as spaces for nourishment, healing, community connectedness and food justice. Our biennial national [Urban Agriculture Forum](#) is an opportunity for practitioners, researchers and policymakers to connect, share knowledge and expertise and strengthen a growing movement for more edible cities and towns. Our annual [Urban Agriculture Month](#) nourishes this movement, as it brings together thousands of people across Australia to celebrate urban agriculture in all its diversity and build momentum for its greater adoption and expansion.

Sustain's research, practice and events have shown us that the seeds of change are being planted across Australia. Our commitment is to nurture them so they can flourish.

Photo credit: Sustain



# Our vision for a more edible future

**Sustain has a bold vision for the urban agriculture sector in Victoria. The roadmap presented in this report offers a pathway to help us get there.**

In 2032, Melbourne and Victoria's other regional cities and towns are considered global leaders in urban agriculture. Rooftop farms, edible median strips, neighbourhood farms and community/school gardens supply cities and suburbs with fresh, healthy food. These pockets of edible greenery cool the city, capture stormwater runoff and provide biodiverse habitat. They are lively spaces for cultural and intergenerational exchange.

Urban agriculture provides places for Aboriginal communities to connect to Country in the city and celebrate stories of belonging, both old and new. The cultural authority of First Nations' peoples guides the governance and design of edible landscapes.

Victoria's award-winning restaurants are celebrated for their seasonal, produce-driven menus and innovative collaborations with urban farmers. Strong connections between the hospitality sector, community composting initiatives and urban farmers are drivers of a thriving circular economy. Schoolchildren learn to grow food from a young age and are curious eaters with strong food literacy to support their transition into a healthy adulthood. Young people are excited by the possibility of a career in agriculture and have clear pathways to pursue this goal. All Victorians have access to spaces for growing food, should they wish, and can find urban food in their local businesses and communities.

**Neighbourhoods across Victoria are vibrant, convivial and inclusive because the principle of good food for all guides their planning and development. Thanks to a thriving local food system, Victorians enjoy better health and wellbeing than ever.**



# Executive Summary

Despite the diverse benefits of urban agriculture, there is limited research into urban agriculture as a sector in Victoria. This report presents findings from a survey of sector practitioners in greater Melbourne (including green wedge areas), Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong. The findings provide baseline data regarding the sector's composition, activities, market channels, challenges, needs and aspirations, as well as opportunities for its support and growth. The report also proposes a roadmap for addressing critical challenges that face the sector and for building on the strength of its social and environmental commitments, informed by the survey findings and relevant academic literature on urban agriculture.

This report's findings and recommendations are of relevance to policymakers at all levels of government, especially as food security, climate change, human and ecological health and urban sustainability emerge as key interconnected priorities in this challenging decade.

## Key findings

### A young, diverse and values-driven sector



Victoria's urban agriculture sector comprises an estimated

**600-650**

community organisations and commercial businesses.



Whilst community respondents tend to be clustered in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, **commercial operators are more prevalent in peri-urban areas.**



The sector attracts a younger demographic with **over 50%** of respondents under 45 years old.



One third of respondents are in the **establishment phase**, and almost half **plan to grow or diversify.**



**The urban agriculture sector engages in a diverse range of activities** from horticulture, livestock and apiculture to community education, community and school garden coordination, advocacy/facilitation and food relief.



**Social and environmental values are significant drivers for the sector.** Creating a healthy food system, contributing to healthy urban environments and enabling more self-sufficient communities, and responding to climate change were very or extremely important to over 90% of respondents.

# Key findings

## Economic snapshot



### Number of employees

**Community organisations tend to employ more people than commercial operators.**



### Revenue

70% of community organisations and 49% of commercial operators generate **less than \$50,000 annually.**



### Revenue streams

Commercial operators generate a **majority of revenue from sales and off-farm income.** The primary revenue streams for community operators are **government and philanthropic grants as well as sales.**



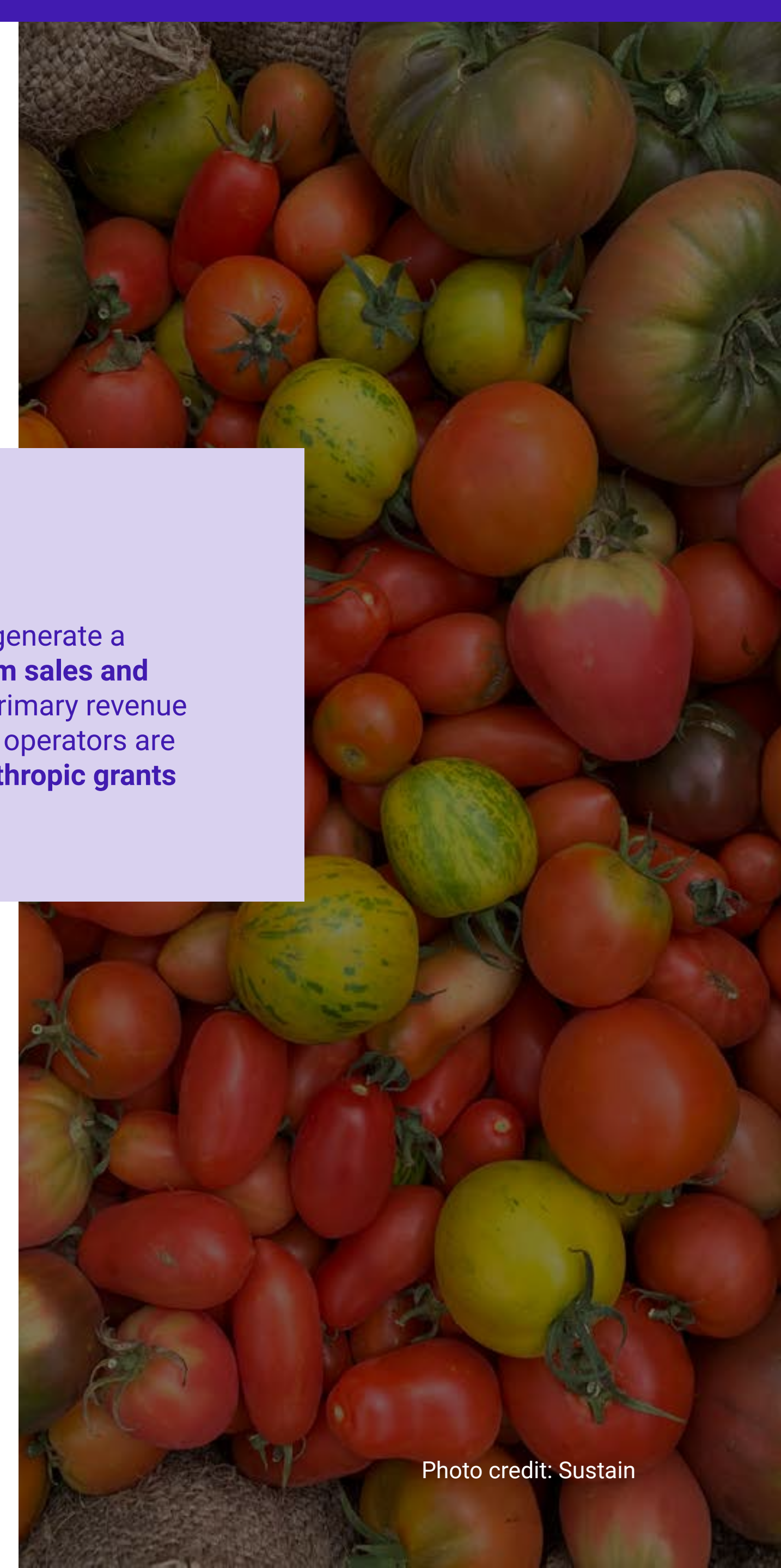
### Customer base

**There is a wide customer base for urban agriculture products and services.** Individual households and councils are important customers of urban agriculture products and services.



### Market Channels

Respondents showed strong interest in developing new market opportunities, including **urban food trails/agritourism, small-scale retail and direct-to-consumer channels.**



## Key findings

### Constraints and barriers

Respondents highlighted critical gaps that, if properly addressed, would greatly expand their own capacity as well as that of the urban agriculture sector as a whole.

The most common constraints include:

[Lack of grants tailored to urban agriculture](#)

[Over-reliance on volunteers or volunteer burnout](#)

[Difficulty accessing land or premises due to cost or insecurity of tenure](#)

Regulatory barriers were reported by 84% of survey respondents. The most significant are:

[Planning departments lack familiarity with urban agriculture](#)

[Urban agriculture is not recognised in the planning framework](#)

[Planning approval processes are complex and costly](#)

### Enablers, needs and priorities

Respondents emphasised several early enablers of success, many of which are the inverse of the identified constraints, including:

[Secure access to land](#)

[Volunteer support, particularly in the community sector](#)

[Supportive council/ policy frameworks](#)

[Access to capital and funding](#)

Respondents reported the need for further support with information and advice in the key areas of business skills, grant writing and marketing, branding and promotion.

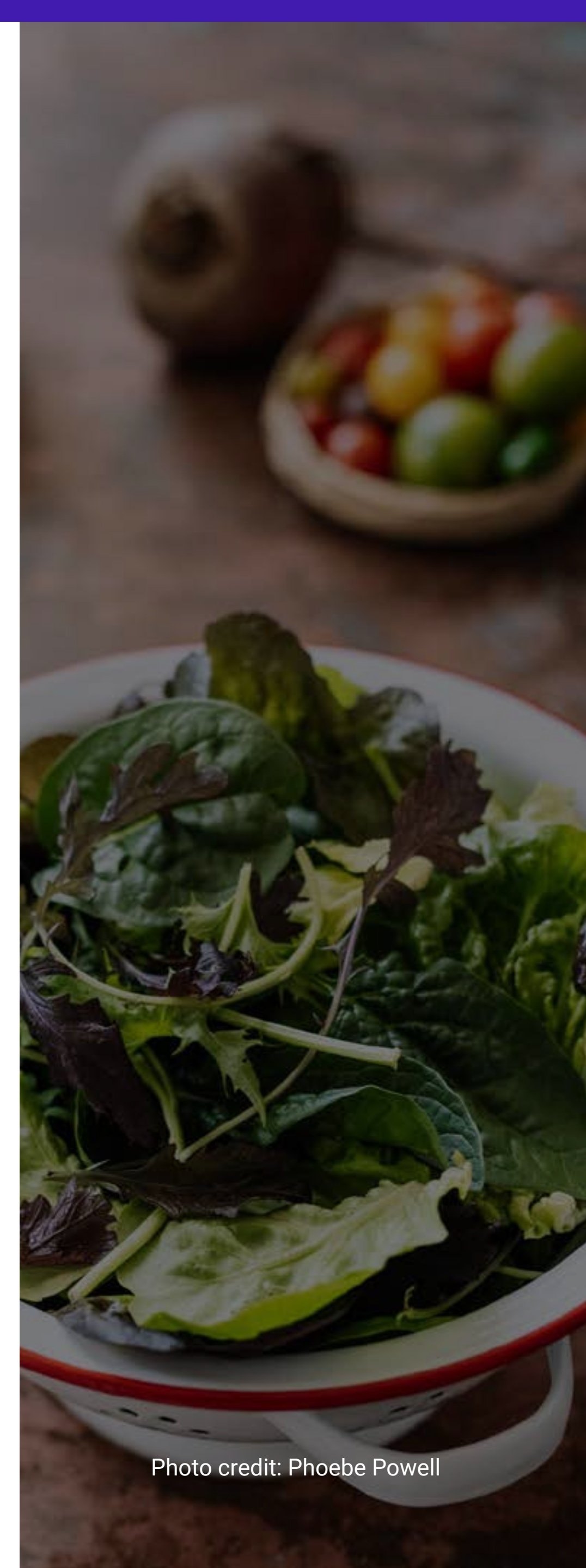
Both community and commercial actors reported strong agreement on key priorities for development of the urban agriculture sector. These priorities are:

[Identification of under-utilised urban land](#)

[Recognition of urban agriculture in state and local government planning frameworks](#)

[Investment in circular economies](#)

In addition to the tangible actions above, two-thirds of respondents emphasised the importance of participatory policy processes, especially given the diverse motivations and differing levels of social capital amongst sector participants.





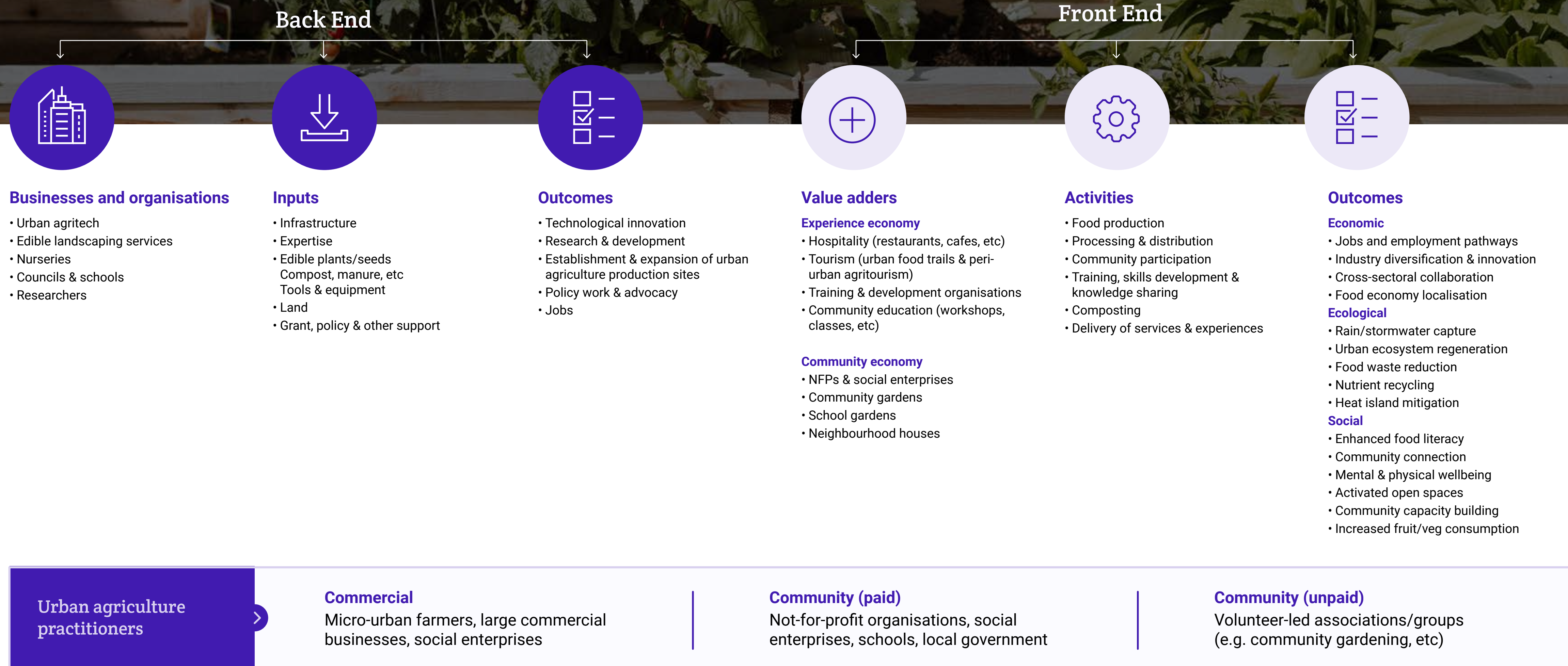
## Urban agriculture and Indigenous self-determination

Just as agricultural industries have contributed to colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal people, so has urban development.

Consistent with Agriculture Victoria's commitment to First Nations self-determination and the ongoing treaty process between the Victorian government and First Peoples, it is important that any policy and philanthropic support for the urban agriculture sector is guided by Traditional Owners.

Urban agriculture should provide opportunities to honour Aboriginal knowledge and cultural belonging, support urban connections to Country, and ensure Aboriginal organisations are enabled to play a leadership role in governance and practice.

# Urban Agriculture Sector Structure



# Roadmap for a thriving urban agriculture sector in Victoria: A summary



## Policies & plans

Situate urban agriculture in a **whole-of-government, cross-sectoral approach** to food system governance

Establish an **urban agriculture advisory council** to provide strategic guidance in aligning urban agriculture to existing legislative responsibilities and policy objectives

Develop an **urban agriculture strategy** with clear alignment to existing government commitments and identified areas of cross-departmental responsibility



## Urban planning & land use

Prioritise urban food production as **vital city infrastructure**

Identify **existing regulatory obstacles** to urban agriculture

Create a dedicated **urban agriculture zoning classification and 'as of right' use** in state and local planning schemes



## Finance & funding

Investigate options to **increase availability of land**

Resource an **urban agriculture fund** through innovative fiscal measures

Develop **participatory budgeting processes** and **grant programs**

Develop appropriate strategies for **resourcing Aboriginal leadership and participation** in urban agriculture



## Governance & coordination

Commit to a **participatory and inclusive approach** to urban agriculture policy and governance

Seek representation from the **First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria** on the urban agriculture advisory council

Support the formation of **urban agriculture cooperatives**



## Capacity building

Establish a **centre for urban agriculture** for research support, capacity building and leadership development

Resource **professional development opportunities** in urban agriculture and food systems for planning practitioners and government policymakers

Support a **mentorship program** to match new entrants and experienced practitioners



## Infrastructure & materials

Provide **'as of right' water connections** for approved community gardens and urban farms

Establish **community grant programs** to resource essential edible gardening coordination and equipment, prioritising low-income communities

Support **circular economy composting**