How Can Food Hubs Catalyse Healthy and Resilient Local Food Systems in Victoria: Developing a Food Hub in the City of Casey

Report on Phase 2
July 2013
Setting the scene:
Background to the ‘Food Hub in Casey’ Project

- **June 2011:** An alliance of social enterprises and non-profits conducted a scoping study into the feasibility of a food hub/regional food initiative in the City of Casey.

- **3 primary priorities** were identified →

  **Critical Objective**
  
  1. Better marketing outlet and fair prices for producers
  2. Healthy eating for residents – more fruit and vegetables
  3. Skill development, community connection and job creation through new local enterprises

-A Food Hub for Casey - concept sketches

These computer modeled architectural sketches have been created to illustrate how a Food Hub at Casey could be simply designed to provide a mix of services for farmers and the general community. These designs are intended as conversation starters. A final Casey Food Hub design could end up being many times larger or much smaller depending upon the needs and desires for the local community.

- **Sufficient interest was generated to support a successful funding bid to take the project into a ‘feasibility study’**.

- **This project is being led by VEIL, and commenced in mid 2012** (funded by a VicHealth Innovation Grant).
Can ‘Food Hubs’ catalyse and support local food systems in Victoria and Australia?

1. Work with stakeholders to design and ‘establish?’ a Food Hub in Casey

2. Develop an effective framework for assessing / evaluating the impact of Food Hubs

3. Establish the Australian Food Hubs Network to share knowledge

**Staged over Two Years: 2012-2014**

**Phase 1:** Mapping of the ‘state of play’ in Casey’s local / regional food

**Phase 2:** Hub and system’ design work

**Phase 3:** Investigating feasibility

Each phase underpinned by knowledge dissemination and network building (Work Program 2).

This is a report on Phase 2 of the Project:

Overview of Phase 1
Completed December 2012

1.1. Who are the Stakeholders?

1.2. Spatial Mapping
   What and Where

1.3. Supply & Demand
   Who are the leaders?
   What do they think?

1.4. Barriers & Opportunities

Pathways for a ‘food hub in Casey’.

2.1. Establish Australian Food Hubs Network

2.2. Collaboratively develop and share knowledge

2.3. Research and Draw Upon Case Studies
Key Outcomes of Phase 1

W.P.1: Local Context – Outcomes

• Engagement with key stakeholders
• In depth ‘supply and demand’ interviews with producers and businesses
• Spatial mapping of the existing food system
• Preliminary survey of household demand

W.P.2: AFHN – Outcomes

• Initial development of AFHN website
• Research and collation of international and national case studies
• Established online ‘Community of Practice’ with Yammer network
• Created AFHN social media presence
1.1. Development of Food Hub/s proposal for discussion and co-design

1.2. Supply and Demand: What food do we have and when? Who wants to buy it? Where and how?

1.3. Key Partners: who can do what (logistics, distribution)

1.4. Finalised workable model/s with pathways for implementation


2.1. Extension of Australian Food Hubs Network

2.2. Document and share project processes and key lessons/reflections.

2.3. External Research: Develop a framework for food hubs in the Australian context

3. Proposed MVP (Minimal Viable Product) for testing
1.2. Supply and Demand

What food do we have and who wants to buy it?

Essential ingredients for a Food Hub:
- Farmers that want to sell more food locally
- People and businesses that want to buy it
1.2. Coordinating Supply and Demand:  
Key Stakeholder Forum

19th February 2013

- 40 stakeholders attended
- 11 farmers of varying types and sizes
- 17 retail/food service/processing, wholesale and hospitality businesses
- Diverse cross section from community organisations, aged care services, local government and community members.

Key Discussion Points

- Brief overview of findings from Phase 1 research
- Options for Phase 2 co-design
- Discussion of food hub models, stakeholder needs and ideas.

One of 2 participant maps from the forum: place in the food system.
1.2. Key Messages from Forum

Outcomes:

- Core group of committed growers, with large growers interested regardless of quantities: *‘It’s about diversity of options’*.
- Willing buyers of varying size
- Need to see a solid model - *‘Can’t review a film before you’ve seen it’*
- Support existing operators
- Let’s find out exactly what we’ve got (supply and demand)
- Concern over losing identity in aggregated system
- Seasonality with businesses- growers questioning commitment

Agreed Next Steps

1. Supply and Demand Stock take: what food do we have and who will buy it?
2. Development of a solid model for consideration.
1.2. Supply Stock take: What food do we have?

**The Stocktake Process:**
March – April 2013

Detailed engagement with core group of committed and engaged growers to:
- **Develop a detailed ‘supply document’:**
  - product range,
  - seasonal availability
  - quantity
- **Explore key barriers and needs including:**
  - minimal weekly income to make it viable for farm involvement
  - potential distribution location
  - order systems.

**Findings**
- Core group of 8 farmers ready and willing to supply
- Range of **50 different** fruit and vegetable products
- **Consistent 12 month supply** calendar with seasonal variation
- Diverse mix of **conventional and organic** produce
1.2. Supply Stock take: What food do we have?

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**Key:** Unlimited Supply, Limited Supply
1.2. Demand Stock take: Who will buy the food?

The Stocktake process
April 2013 – ongoing:

Detailed engagement with regional businesses and institutions to:
- Initiate and develop key demand relationship
- Explore detailed supply and logistic needs

Key Findings
- Unrealistic to develop a concise ‘demand’ stock take to mirror supply, due to the ever shifting nature of menus, procurement patterns and customer demand.

- Common priority issues for buying:
  - product quality
  - price
  - quantity
  - timing of deliveries.

- Key interested partners willing to:
  - ‘give it a go’ when FH pilots are launched
  - be involved in the final ‘nuts and bolts’ of design development
  - participate in pilots to inform further design

- All require produce to be delivered
1.3. Operations Design: The Where, What and How?

Where: Location and warehouse infrastructure
- Key partnership developed with Avocare: a social enterprise based in Dandenong.
- Operates a packing and distribution warehouse, including handling and packing of donated food for distribution to emergency food relief through the region.
- Provides work experience and training to local community members as part of employment/work ready programs.

The partnership enables the testing of the pilot with:
- Minimal upfront investment, whilst
- Developing skills and knowledge of potential employees, and
- Strengthening a social enterprise model that could then be transferred into Casey-Cardinia, following pilot ‘proving’ period.
1.3. Operations Design
The How: Distribution and Ordering Logistics.

**Online Trading**
Collaboration with Open Food Foundation allows:
- establishment of an online food hub.
- streamlining ordering/communication logistics through existing software, customised for local context.

**Regional Distribution**
- Key partnership formed with a Local Food Distribution business (based in Bunyip).
- Distributes into Casey, Cardinia, Frankston, Mornington, Gippsland and Melbourne 5 days week.

This allows the hub to ‘piggy back’ onto existing software projects and food transport infrastructure, keeping costs low while we test supply and demand.
3. The Proposal: ‘Test’ feasibility of a SE Food Hub by running one

The six-month pilot of ‘SE’ Food Hub ‘Lite’ will commence in September 2013, working initially with 6-8 farmers, 2-3 large buyers and an array of smaller buyers.

‘Light’ – requiring very little (if any) capital investment and only short-term MoUs, while viability is tested.

The trials will establish, utilise and develop:

- A strong brand and market expectation of ‘SE’ Food Hub;
- An online trading network – using the prototype Open Food Network (OFN) software;
- A weekly Food Hub order cycle, including ability for orders and payments to be handled online; and
- Food Hub warehouse and distribution operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmers &amp; Buyers</th>
<th>Cheffields</th>
<th>City of Casey</th>
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<tr>
<td>Offer and deliver to Hub</td>
<td>Discounted distribution and deliveries</td>
<td>Provision of funding to set up OFN software</td>
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<td>Buy produce</td>
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<td>Ongoing support through various relevant departments.</td>
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<td>Participate in core group meetings</td>
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<tr>
<th>Avocare</th>
<th>Open Food Network</th>
<th>Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (VEIL)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution and packing activities Dandenong warehouse</td>
<td>Provision of prototype Open Food Network</td>
<td>Facilitating and documenting ‘action research’ process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide employees, trainees and work experience personnel</td>
<td>Host, support and adjust software as the hub develops</td>
<td>Adjusting trials as viable pathways/alternatives emerge.</td>
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Put it all together...

MULTIPLE FARMERS OFFER VARIOUS

INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IS FOR SALE
FARMERS UPDATE PRODUCE DETAILS DIRECTLY, OR CALL
THE FOOD HUB AND INFORMATION IS CENTRALLY UPDATED

BUYERS CHOOSE WHAT THEY WANT AND PLACE ORDERS

FARMERS RECEIVE CONSOLIDATED ORDER

FOOD GETS MOVED FROM FARM TO

FOOD IS DELIVERED

RESTAURANTS CAFES MONASH UNIVERSITY SCHOOLS BUYING GROUPS HOUSEHOLDS YOU

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

FARMERS RETAIN THEIR IDENTITY THROUGHOUT THE CHAIN
1.B. Seeding Community Engagement: Initiating Conversation and Exploring Ideas to Inform Strategy

Sparking community conversation via:

- Discussions and engagement with local media
- Development of a ‘Food Hub in Casey’ ‘daughter’ website of the AFHN site
- Presentation at Regional Environment Dinner
- Engagement with community groups

VEIL delivery of a Bachelor of Industrial Design Studio at RMIT, Semester 1 2013 facilitated Jess Bird, VEIL and Stephen Mushin.

- 15 2nd and 3rd year Design Students consulted with local stakeholders (farmers and businesses) and Casey Council
- Students applied service design tools to develop proposals that can be built on as the Food Hub is piloted, and utilised in community engagement activity.
1.B. Community Engagement: Detailed Investigation of Food Relief Sector

Aims:
- Explore barriers to fresh food access by vulnerable people in the City of Casey and surrounding areas
- Understand the challenges and opportunities in connecting them fresh fruit and vegetables
- Explore opportunities and barriers to improved fresh food access through Food Relief

Activities:
- Desktop review of services
- Interviews with 8 service providers (approx. 50/50 Dandenong / Casey)

Research conducted by La Trobe University Intern Aiesha Grierson
1.B. Detailed investigation of Food Relief Sector

In addition to cooked meals, the type of services offered around food were: food coupons, hampers, community kitchens accessible for clients use and affordable food access such as a cheap coop.

Hampers and supermarket vouchers were used to distribute fruit and vegetables to clients.

Results:
- 7/8 services interviewed would like to work with a Food Hub to access local fresh produce for their clients – both donated and purchased
WP2: AFHN Development and Extension

- **Website development and launch:** consolidation of original design into an interactive website developed with case studies, resources, network details and blog updates

- **Ongoing dissemination of reflections and learnings** from the Casey project.

- **Development of resources** ranging from interview and survey templates to the evolving ‘food hub framework’ for the Australian context:

- **Public network:** growing the active Facebook page, with 227 ‘likes’, frequent comments and activity

- **Community of Practice:** Yammer network grown from 13 to 27 over Phase 2 as a platform for network discussion and project updates from across the country.
Key Outcomes of Phase 2

W.P.1: Develop Food Hub Proposal

- Detailed supply stock take, ongoing collation of demand
- Key stakeholder consultation to inform proposal design
- Formation of core partnerships for initial food hub operations
- Seeding community engagement: events, media, design studio, food relief research
- Development of MVP proposal for ‘testing’

W.P.2: AFHN – Outcomes

- Finalised website development and launch
- Development of resources to assist and inform the community of practice
- Ongoing dissemination of learning and reflection through two blogs: AFHN and South East Food Hub
- Expansion of the public profile and network and the practitioner forum and exchange.
Moving Forward - Phase 3:
Key Activities and Logic Flow

1. Action Research:
   Proposal and Evaluation

2. Cementing Key Partnerships and extending demand relationships

3. Co-Design and finalising proposal details and working logistics

4. Community Engagement:
   Strategy finalised and initial engagement activities for ‘buzz building’ commenced.

Evaluation frameworks and criteria developed and in place for proposal launch.

Live testing of ‘catalytic potential’ of food hubs

1. Extending and Deepening Australian Food Hubs Network

2. Development of broader national membership and food hub ‘mapping’ across Australia

3. Ongoing information dissemination and resource development through web, blog, social media and events.
Moving into Phase 3: Year 2 of the ‘Food Hub in Casey’ Project

W.P.1: ‘Testing’ a SE Food Hub

- Core Partner Gatherings work with core group to build relationships and commence trials
- Cementing key demand networks
- Evaluation Framework developed in tandem with Monash University Nutrition Student Placement Program.
- Strategic Community Engagement activities
- Pilot Launch – End of September 2013.

W.P.2: Growing the AFHN network

- Extension of network to canvas broader national activity that is not being recorded or ‘recognised’ as yet
- Strengthen and grow: Hosting a forum at Australasian Agrifood Research Network Conference XX to bring geographically disparate network together and grow membership:
  - Forum Topic: ‘Food Hubs’- distributing food, connecting communities, redistributing power to local economies’
- Raising the profile: Presenting at Australia’s first peri-urban conference, La Trobe University October 2013.