



Report on Food Matters Events

February 2021
Alexandrina Council



The Food Embassy, Liz Sanders, Email: Liz@thefoodembassy.org
Website: <https://www.thefoodembassy.org/>

Contents

Background	pg 3
Event overview	pg 4
Evaluation	pg 5
Recommendations	pg 10



Background

The food system challenges we face are complex and addressing them will require collaborative efforts by many over a long time. What is required is a coherent and collaborative approach by multiple actors aligning their diverse skills, experience and actions around a shared agenda for change. This is known as collective impact^[i]. One of the key steps in this approach is informing the community of the issues and challenges with the food system.

The Food Matters program does just this – build an informed community around the food system.

Food Matters is a community-based program on food systems literacy adapted from the Flinders University, two-week online course, Food System Matters (FSM)^[ii]. The FSM course examined the food system through three lenses: environmental sustainability; fairness and equity; health and nutrition. Forty-seven participants completed the course and evaluation showed knowledge and attitude to improve significantly^[iii].

The Food Embassy was given the intellectual property of the FSM course (with acknowledgement of its origins) and in partnership with Green Adelaide and local partners City of Onkaparinga and Adelaide Sustainability Centre have successfully run 4 courses and 3 taste of Food Matters events .

In September 2020 the Food Embassy was engaged to deliver an Online taste of Food Matters event and a follow up 4 week course for Alexandrina council. The taster was delivered in September but due to Covid the course was delayed until 2021 and re-formatted to a series of 4 events. This report details the outcomes of these events.

Event overview

The Food Matters taster was a one hour session held on 23 September 2020. The objective of the session was to critically examine the food system and discuss why an alternative food system is urgently needed. The session provided interactive activities to immerse people in the topic and used the food democracy framework^[iii] to show how taking action is possible. This one hour session was run online for the Alexandrina community. Following the taster, the Food Matters course was run as a series of events for the Alexandrina community.

Food Matters Course Objectives

1. To increase participants' knowledge of a local, sustainable food system considering social, economic and environmental factors.
2. To increase confidence in engagement with the local food system.
3. To improve attitude to sustainable food choices.
4. To encourage personal and community action around local food systems.

An overview for the workshops is detailed below:

Event 1 : Food and Country : Explore connections between people, places and food with Ngarrindjeri woman, Jade McHughes at Port Elliot Institute on 11th February, 10:00-12:00pm.

Event 2 : Food Freedom – Hear a farmer's (John Butler, Heirloom Harvest) perspective on local food sustainability. Our small-scale farmers are poorly paid, yet they are the backbone of the country - how did this come about? At Strathalbyn Neighbourhood Centre, 25th February, 6:30 - 8:30pm.



John with Liz, facilitator and 3 participants

Event 3 : What is your food print?- Explore practical ways to reduce your impact through food while maintaining a healthy diet - plus a cooking demo with guest Kerrie Mc Neil from Two Hills and a Creek At Strathalbyn Neighbourhood Centre, 25th February, 10:00-12:00pm.

Event 4 : Building your local food community – What's your role in a sustainable food system in Alexandrina? Hear from previous participants, Manuela Brockelmann about how they have been active in building an alternative food system, and connect with other like-minded people to support your own actions. Held at Goolwa Library, 25th March 6:30 -8:30pm.

Each event had an introduction to the concept of food systems and why it is important to be informed about the food system. The introduction looked at the food systems through the lens of health, environment, economic and social considerations of the food system and each event reflected a particular lens.

Guest speakers are a key feature to the success of the events linking participants directly with producers, environmentally sustainable practices and personal experiences.

Using a food democracy framework⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ each guest speaker's presentation was followed by interactive discussion or activity that enabled people to connect and explore how they could take action in and around this area of the food system.



Kerrie cooking

Another key feature of each event was a shared table of resources, including local library books and local produce. All participants were encouraged to contribute to this if possible. Following each event, a summary email including a call to action was sent to all participants.

Evaluation

Target Audience

The target audience for the Food Matters taster and series of 4 events was the general public of Alexandrina council.

Food Matters taster event

The session was run online and had 15 registrations; 7 people attended the live session and 5 watched the recording. Feedback was positive although numbers were very low at 3 responses out of 12 participants.

- 3/3 agreed or strongly agreed that the event helped them to understand that their actions can make a difference.
- 3/3 agreed or strongly agreed that the event built on their knowledge about how to eat more sustainably.
- 2/3 agreed or strongly agreed that the event helped to develop their own ideas to do things better.
- 3/3 agreed or strongly agreed that the event connected them to people and places to participate in a sustainable food system.
- 3/3 agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the session to someone else.

One of the key outcomes from the taster was that provided feedback to the organisers format and time, location would work for the events.

Food Matters course (4) events

One-hundred and eleven people registered for the 4 events and 74 participants attended in total.

Approximately 19 people attended each session and only one person attended all 4 events and 4 people attended 2 events. More people attended multiple events at the Strathalbyn site as there were 2 events there.

Due to Covid there were restrictions on numbers and two of the events booked out.

Eventbrite was the platform used for selling tickets. The Alexandrina libraries handled all of the local promotion. The Food Embassy also promoted the events through their networks, as did the Alexandrina Council Community Health and Wellbeing project officer through her networks. Additional methods of promotion included posters in relevant locations and targeted emails to potentially interested groups.

Limited demographic data was obtained from Eventbrite but the majority of participants at each event were woman with a maximum of 5 men at the Food Freedom event. The average age of participants appeared to be over 50 years, with younger people attending the Food and Country event. Eventbrite data showed that the majority of participants were from Adelaide but this may reflect people not choosing to nominate their specific residence.

Additional process evaluation obtained through a simple one page survey at the end of each event showed overwhelmingly that the majority of participants (over 80 %) would attend another workshop but this was not reflected in actual attendance. The main reasons for not attending multiple events were clashes with work and location.

The majority of participants (73 %) reported finding the course useful to very useful.

When asked what they liked most about the course participants mentioned:

- gaining knowledge and insight,
- the shared table and tastings,
- the guest speakers and meeting and,
- sharing ideas with like-minded people.

Some quotes from the feedback are presented below:

“ I liked meeting many interesting and like minded people.”

“Excellent facilitation” and “Enthusiastic presenters.”

“ I liked the involvement and encouragement.”

Specific feedback was sought on improvements that could be made to the course. There was consistent request for night as well day-time alternatives, some request for more hands on activities and broader advertising to get younger people involved.

Impacts of the course

A two-page retrospective pre-post questionnaire was given to participants at the end of the event asking them to reflect on knowledge and attitudinal changes^[iv]. Fifty-seven out of 72 participants (79 %) completed the evaluation, with an average of 16 participants per event. Unfortunately, due to time pressures which constrained clear instructions, several questions were not fully completed, in particular, the knowledge and attitude questions.

Knowledge

Food and Country

There was strong positive improvement in knowledge about Indigenous food and country for the 8 people who correctly completed this question.

Food Freedom

There was strong positive improvement in knowledge about food freedom for the 9 people who correctly completed this question.

What is your Food print?

There was slight improvement in knowledge for 8 participants.

Building a local food community

There was strong positive improvement in knowledge for 9 participants.

Attitudes

Food and Country

There was strong positive improvement in attitudes about valuing Indigenous perspectives on food, and slight improvement in attitudes about feeling more connected to their community, for the 8 people who correctly completed this question.

Food Freedom

There was slight improvement in attitudes about feeling more connected to their community for the 5 people who correctly completed this question.

What is your Food print?

There was slight improvement in attitudes about feeling more connected to their community for 8 people.

Building your local food community

There was slight improvement in attitudes about importance of making sustainable food choices for 8 people, and slight improvement in attitudes about feeling more connected to their community for 10 people.

New ideas gained

As part of the evaluation participants were asked what is one new idea that they have gained. These responses are reported according to the event and listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Food and country

- The importance of taking an Indigenous perspective
- Native gardens contacts
- Pig face is edible

Food Freedom

- The challenges for farmers, increasing the carbon in the soil is important, the challenges of scaling up
- *“buy from the farmers instead of the supermarket”*

What is your food print?

- Reducing red meat or changing the type of meat eaten and eating more plant based foods

Building your local food community

- There was a consistent new idea of the importance of working with community and some surprise at the number of activities already available in the community.
- The bigger picture of the food system
- *“Better appreciation of council interest”*
- *“The importance of advocacy in creating gardens and council support ”*

Actions

The events worked with a food democracy framework^[iii] and key to this was supporting participants to take action in their community. Participants were asked what is one thing they would do following the workshop. The responses were varied and dependent upon the event theme and so are reported according to the event and in order of frequency mentioned.

Food and Country

- Introduce local bush foods to my garden
- Visit the local Indigenous garden
- *“Share my learning and learn more”*

Food Freedom

- Grow more of my own veg
- Improve my soil and compost more
- *“Spread the word and give more food away “*

What is your food print?

- Eat less red meat
- Buy local and visit markets
- *“ think before buying “*

A key issue discussed at this event was the challenge for many living on their own to eat well. There was discussion at the end between one participant and the Strathalbyn Neighbourhood Centre about starting a men’s cooking group.

Building a local food community

- Seek out and buy local food
- Stay connected – one participant spoke to a council worker after the event about how good it would be to continue the conversations and connections.

Barriers to taking action

Overall barriers to taking action were similar across all events. The key ones being time, funding or cost and age.

Additional Outcomes

The festival and events officer from the City of Victor Harbour attended the first Food Matters event and has since enquired with the Food Embassy about running the series of events in Victor Harbour area. The Food Embassy has since met with key Victor Harbour council officers and funding is being sought to run the series of events in August 2021.

Feedback from partners

Kylie Markow, Community Health and Wellbeing officer, Alexandrina Council - “ Thank you to Liz and the Food Embassy for facilitating the workshop series and tailoring it so well to our community, involving local guest speakers and so skilfully creating the opportunities for people to connect with each other at the workshops.”

Karen Barrett, Library program and Volunteer support officer, Alexandrina Council - “I found the community ready, willing and passionate to engage in the Food Matters program content. The participants valued hearing directly from the farmer regarding issues and solutions on food production and its associated waste and the trials of selling locally. The producer sessions were inspiring and the Ngarrindjeri session was informative, inclusive and welcoming. All in all, the community seemed to value the direct connection they made when learning about Food Matters issues directly from the people most closely associated.”

Local producers (guest speakers):

Kerrie McNeil “ *It was great, I really loved doing it*”

John, Heirloom Harvest “ *I really enjoyed it, very happy to do more* “

Participant action outcomes:

At the time of writing this report, the single participant who attended all sessions has contacted The Food Embassy to obtain contact details for another participant she was keen to connect with, and she has also taken the initiative to start growing vegetables in a unused garden bed at the back of Whalers Way in Goolwa.

Alexandrina council has provided some funding for a mentoring program to support FM ‘graduates’ to improve their local food system and 15 people applied to join this program.

Discussion /Learnings

- The new format of the Food Matters program as a series of events was well received.
- In spite of the events being attended singly instead of as a package of 4, for most people, there was nevertheless positive shifts in knowledge and attitudes,.
- Connection to the community was a consistent attitudinal shift for all events.
- The evaluation method needs to be simplified and explained clearly to participants, especially retrospective pre-post questions^[iv]. Additional evaluation questions need to be added to the Eventbrite booking page, for example, ‘how did you hear about the event?’ and some simple demographics namely, age and gender.
- The order of events can be changed to reflect a progression from individual action to community action and regional action. 1. Food and Country; 2. What is Your Food print?; 3. Food Freedom; 4. Building a Local Food Community.
- There is demand for an ongoing community network in Alexandrina working on food system ideas arising out of the Food Matters course. All participants were encouraged to join the SA Urban Food Network and the Food Embassy network and mailing list although we are not sure on numbers that have. The follow-up mentoring project funded by Alexandrina Council will commence with a meeting with the 3 successful mentees to commence action on their ideas to improve the local food system.

Summary and Recommendations

Food Matters is a community education and engagement series of events providing an overview of the existing industrial and alternative food systems. It considers a range of factors within local food systems such as economic development, environmental sustainability, equity, social justice, health and wellbeing. Utilising an action-based format the program enables participants to identify personal and collective actions at individual, community and regional levels that will contribute to a more just, equitable and sustainable food system.

This program contributes to a coherent and collaborative approach with multiple partners (Local government and Green Adelaide) aligning their diverse skills, experience and actions around a shared agenda for change^[v].

Event evaluation showed strong satisfaction with the events and positive improvements in knowledge and attitudes in line with event themes.

The key recommendations from this report are:

- Putting a small ticket price on the events could assist with participants valuing the event more and thus following through with registration to attendance. This might rectify the problem of non-attendance. In addition to pricing the events, holding the events at a similar time ie. evening or daytime time may also assist although it may also exclude certain groups ie. the elderly not wanting to venture out at night.
- Further work is needed to ensure increased numbers of participants complete the evaluation.
- Longer term follow up with participants would be of use to understand actions taken and behaviour change.
- Having the opportunity for a second stage of Food Matters supported community action around building local food communities appears of interest to community and critical in building community leadership.
-



References

-
- i. Collective Impact, <https://socialoutcomes.com.au/toolkit/collective-impact/> ACCESSED 1/6/2021
 - ii. Mehta, K., Rohrlach, H., Woodman, R., Coveney, J., Ward, P., & Booth, S. (2020) A critical food system program in South Australia and the effects on consumer knowledge and attitudes. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. DOI: 10.1002/hpja.370
 - iii. Booth, S. and J. Coveney (2015). *Food democracy: From consumer to food citizen*, Springer.
 - iv. Drennan, J. and A. Hyde (2008). "Controlling response shift bias: the use of the retrospective pre-test design in the evaluation of a master's programme." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* **33**(6): 699-709.
 - v. AMLR Natural Resource Management 2019 <https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/get-involved/urban-sustainability/south-australian-urban-food-network> ACCESSED 23/07/2019