

Hills & Fleurieu Local Food Futures

Building a resilient regional food system

Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia
Kurna, Peramangk and Ngarrindjeri Nations



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Themes

Local food systems | Climate resilience | Regional development | Circular economy | First Nations leadership | Governance | Supply chains | Community wellbeing | Regenerative

Summary

The Hills and Fleurieu region is a major food-producing landscape facing growing pressures from climate change, rising costs and fragile supply chains. From 2023 to 2026, the Local Food Futures project brought together councils, producers and community partners to explore a more resilient, locally connected food system. Through relationship-building, on-ground trials and storytelling, the project strengthened regional collaboration and demonstrated clear demand for local food. It showed that while strong foundations exist, coordinated investment and infrastructure are needed to unlock a thriving regional food economy.



Context and Challenge

The Hills and Fleurieu region is well positioned to lead the transition toward more resilient, locally connected food systems.

With a strong agricultural base, committed producers, engaged communities and proximity to major markets, the region has the ingredients for a thriving and resilient local food system. However, structural challenges are constraining that outcome. Local producers are navigating a complex mix of economic, environmental and social challenges, while communities are seeking greater access to healthy, locally produced food.

Key challenges in the region include:

- **Fragmented supply chains** limiting market access for local producers
- **Lack of aggregation, processing and distribution infrastructure**
- **Rising costs and climate risks** impacting farm viability
- **Ageing farmer population and wellbeing pressures**
- **Limited access to land and opportunities** for First Nations and new farmers
- **Low visibility and coordination** across the local food system

The Local Food Futures project was established to test how targeted coordination and collaboration could unlock the potential of local and regenerative food systems.

The opportunity is not just to protect what exists, but to **reimagine and strengthen the regional food system** so it can thrive in a changing world.

Approach and Partnerships

A collaborative, place-based approach

The Local Food Futures project was designed as a regional collaboration, recognising that food systems are complex and interconnected.

The project focused on:

- Building relationships across the food system
- Creating shared understanding of challenges and opportunities
- Testing practical, on-ground initiatives
- Connecting strategy with action

First Nations leadership

A First Nations Advisory Group was established, with representatives from Kurna, Peramangk and Ngarrindjeri Nations.

This group provided cultural guidance and shaped key aspects of the project, including:

- Co-design of Local Food on Country events
- Strengthening relationships between producers and First Nations communities
- Increasing visibility of food sovereignty and cultural knowledge





Partners

The project brought together a diverse group of partners, including:

- Local and state government (Alexandrina, Mount Barker, Onkaparinga, Yankalilla)
- Regional organisations (Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board, RDA AHFKI)
- Enterprise, Not for profits and philanthropy partnerships (Sustainable table, Engage Change, Regen Labs)
- Local producers and food businesses (Fleurieu Food, Mel Hollick - Peninsula Providore, Ben Ryan – Tent Rock Farm, Karri Nott – Common Acre)
- Community organisations and networks (Cittaslow)

Governance and process

A multi-partner steering committee guided the project, ensuring shared ownership and alignment. As well as funding partners, the committee included local farmers and the Co-chair of Fleurieu Food.

The project was delivered over 2.5 years, supported by a part-time Local Food Activator (averaging 0.4FTE). This dedicated position was responsible for convening stakeholders, supporting initiatives and maintaining momentum across the region.

Seed funding was provided by not-for-profit Sustainable Table, which catalysed investment into coordination from other partners.

Regen Labs also funded the Local Food Activator through its WEAVE project. This enabled further collaboration with food system actors in other places and supported local activation. It provided seed funding and expertise to advance fundraising initiatives for two food hubs further catalysed through Regen Labs' 2025 Regen Economy Activator Program (REAP).

The work evolved iteratively, responding to opportunities, funding and emerging priorities, with a strong emphasis on learning by doing. Core principles were relationality, integrity, resourcefulness, collaboration and integration.

Outputs

The project delivered a wide range of activities spanning relationship-building, system mapping, on-ground trials and storytelling.

Building the regional food network

- Established a cross-sector **steering committee and partnership network**
- Engaged **60+ stakeholders** across the food system
- Developed the **Lay of the Land report** to map challenges and opportunities

Increasing demand for local food

- Delivered **two Local Food on Country events** (440+ attendees, 13% First Nations participation)
- Connected **20+ producers** to new sales opportunities, averaging \$30K/year increase in sales
- Developed a **regional local food map**

Strengthening supply chains

- Piloted the **Cool Road Collective logistics trial** (4 producers over 6 months)
- Undertook a review of **small-scale meat processing**
- Explored **food hub and aggregation models**
- Investigated integration of local food into a **social supermarket model**

Supporting farmer wellbeing

- Delivered **three mental health sessions** (40 participants)
- Facilitated peer connection and knowledge sharing among producers

Storytelling and advocacy

- Co-produced the **Local Food Stories** documentary
- Delivered **three community screenings** of Local Food Stories (270+ attendees)
- Contributed to national advocacy, including input to the **National Feeding Australia Strategy**
- Shared insights into food systems convening with activators in NSW and community convenors across the **ChangeFest network**.



Outcomes and Impact

The Local Food Futures project has helped to shift the regional food system from a collection of disconnected activities toward a more connected, visible and collaborative ecosystem.

Strengthened First Nations engagement

The First Nations Advisory Group supported **deeper cultural connection and visibility of Indigenous food knowledge.**

- Co-designed culturally grounded events
- Strengthened relationships with producers
- Elevated conversations around food sovereignty

Stronger relationships and regional coordination

The project built trust and connections across producers, councils and organisations. The activator role became a key enabler, **linking people, opportunities and ideas.**

- Increased collaboration across sectors
- Greater awareness of who is doing what across the system
- Stronger relationships between producers and institutions

Emerging new national partnerships

Partnerships emerged with intermediaries like Regen Labs to catalyse collaboration, capability building, and food system initiatives in the region. Regen Labs' brought its Regen Economy Activator Program (REAP) to the region, with an aim being to activate gaps identified by the Hills and Fleurieu Local Food Futures Project.

Improved market access for producers

Producers accessed new markets, buyers and collaborations, leading to **increased sales and business opportunities.**

- New local supply arrangements (e.g. catering, wholesale connections)
- Increased direct-to-consumer engagement
- Expanded producer networks

Increased visibility and demand for local food

Events and storytelling **brought local food to the forefront** of community conversation.

“ **Food on Country was a fantastic chance to connect with the local Fleurieu community about the importance of direct relationships between the grower and the eater.** ”

– Chris Day, Cockatoo Creek Farm

Environmental and efficiency gains

Biodiversity grants supported producers to add pollinator habitat to their farms, while the Cool Road Collective demonstrated that collaboration can reduce costs and emissions.

- Up to 80% reduction in transport emissions
- Significant time savings for participating producers

“ You can get very silo-like in your own business ... to be working with other people has reinvigorated that passion for all things local. ”

– Kate, Smiling Samoyed

“ It freed up a whole day for me... giving me back time to grow my business. ”

– Phil, Choice Mushrooms

Social and wellbeing outcomes

The project contributed to stronger social capital across the region.

- Improved peer support among producers
- Increased confidence and connection
- Greater sense of shared purpose

Project Overview

2.5
years

Project duration

0.4
FTE

Delivery resourcing

13

Partners and
Collaborators

Investment and Return

\$198k

Total project
investment

\$146k

Additional
funding leveraged

\$1.6
per \$1 invested
Estimated return
on investment

\$176k

Estimated
additional regional
economic activity

Community and System Impact

2 large scale
events
Community
events delivered

400+
participants
Total attendance

13%
First Nations
participation

60+
Local food
system stakeholders
engaged

Performance and Value

The project delivered strong outcomes relative to its scale and investment.

Value delivered

A modest investment enabled:

- Regional coordination and leadership
- New economic activity and market connections
- Improved supply chain efficiency
- Strengthened partnerships and shared direction

Return on investment

- The project returned an estimated **\$1.6 for every \$1 invested**
- Total project investment: **\$198K**
- Additional funding leveraged: **\$146K**
- Estimated additional regional economic activity: **\$176K**

“ The value goes beyond dollars – it’s the relationships that will continue to ripple. ”
– **Steering Committee representative**

What worked well

- A **collaborative, partnership-based model**
- A dedicated **activator role** to coordinate effort
- Combining **practical trials with strategic work**
- Strong community and producer **engagement**

“ Extraordinary effort and outcomes with a very lean budget. ”
– **First Nations representative**



What's Next

The project has created strong momentum, and a clear understanding of what is needed next.

Priority next steps

To move from pilot to system-level impact, partners have identified:

- A Regional Food Strategy to align action and investment
- Regional Food Hubs to support aggregation, storage and distribution
- A Regional Food Systems Coordinator (1 FTE)
- A Food SME Investment Fund to support local enterprises

Immediate opportunity

The next step is to develop a regional investment prospectus to define these opportunities and attract funding.

What is needed to enable this

- Dedicated coordination and leadership
- Alignment across councils and regional partners
- Investment in enabling infrastructure
- Ongoing First Nations partnership and leadership

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration works – but it needs coordination. Even a small, dedicated role can unlock significant impact.
- Relationships are critical infrastructure. Trust and connection underpin successful system change.
- Demand for local food is strong – but supply systems need strengthening.
- Without structure and investment, small scale producers and local food systems are vulnerable.
- Need to recognise local food systems as a critical way to address climate adaptation and resilience goals across regional plans



Credits and Links



MOUNT BARKER
DISTRICT COUNCIL



FLEURIEU PENINSULA

Engage
Change



An Australian Government Initiative



CITY OF
ONKAPARINGA

THE
FOOD
EMBASSY



SUSTAINABLE
TABLE



ADELAIDE HILLS, FLEURIEU
AND KANGAROO ISLAND
Local people creating local opportunities.



LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
HILLS AND FLEURIEU



Partners

Alexandrina Council | Cittaslow |
City of Onkaparinga | Engage Change |
Fleurieu Food | Hills & Fleurieu
Landscape Board | Mount Barker
District Council | RDA AHFKI | Regen
Labs | Sustainable Table | Yankalilla
Council

Contributors

Local producers, First Nations Advisory
Group, community participants

Further Information

thefoodembassy.org/hills-and-fleurieu-local-food-future-project

