

**South East Food Hub
Summary of Food Relief Consultations
(Undertaken March – July 2013)**

The aim of this research is to provide insight into the barriers faced by people in the low socio economic status (SES) groups in the City of Casey and surrounding areas, and to understand better the challenges and opportunities in connecting them to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Consultation with Emergency Food Providers was conducted to provide a link to understanding their clients' lives and barriers faced, while understanding better the role a Food Hub could play in connecting Emergency Food Providers to fresh local produce.

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Executive summary

Key terms - this report will use the terms: Emergency Food Providers, and Service Providers intermittently throughout the document, as a means to describe organisations that distribute Emergency Food Relief. The term, Food Recovery Agencies will also be used to describe organisations that locate and redistribute food that would otherwise be wasted by manufacturers, wholesalers or retailers.

NB. Since these consultations were undertaken, the project has been renamed the South East Food Hub (rather than the Casey Food Hub).

Melbourne University is undertaking research into the localisation of food systems in South East Melbourne. The project, driven by the Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (VEIL), a research unit in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, aims to reconnect residents with local farmers and food manufacturers, in the form of Food Hubs. The City of Casey, a peri-urban area that is expected to double in population rate by 2035 is the focus region of this study. The primary priorities behind the rethinking of food distribution systems in the City of Casey are three pronged: 1) to maintain farmer viability in the region, by supporting farmers to secure better marketing outlets and fair prices; 2) to increase healthy eating for residents and 3) to increase skill development and community interaction through new local enterprises.

The findings contained in this report focus on addressing the second and third priorities of the project. How Casey Food Hubs can best respond to the needs of the people that are 'doing it tough' in the area, and do not currently have enough access to healthy food, and how a Casey food hub or related 'spin off' project could assist in creating jobs and providing skills to residents.

The consultation consisted of a desktop review and interviews with Emergency Food Providers. The objective of the interviews was to: 1) understand better the lives of people in low socio economic status (SES) groups; 2) understand the challenges and opportunities in connecting low SES groups to healthy food; and 3) understand the challenges and opportunities in connecting Emergency Food Providers to farmers.

Both the desktop review and consultation with Emergency Food Providers indicated a lack of mobility of residents as being a significant barrier to the access of healthy food (City of Casey 2010). There are train lines running through some suburbs, connecting them to each other, however in most suburbs in the City of Casey, the public transport available is limited to infrequent bus services.

Unemployment rates in the City of Casey have been identified as being extremely vulnerable to changing economic conditions (City of Casey 2010). Intergenerational disadvantage and long-term unemployment in Doveton and Eumemmering expose the complexities of some of the established suburbs. While the many newly established or built-up suburbs on the periphery of urban development, present new emerging zones for socio economic disadvantage (City of Casey 2010).

Consultation with Service Providers showed an increase in the working poor; as people living week-to-week are squeezed by the rising costs of rent, mortgage repayments and living expenses. Service Providers felt the increase in Asylum Seekers and Refugees accessing emergency food relief, especially with the new community detention policy for the processing of Asylum Seekers in the City

of Casey and Dandenong. Consultation also raised concerns over a rise in mental health related illness in the area triggered by stress.

Findings showed that the increasing demand for emergency food relief was not met by an increasing supply. Service Providers commented on how the supply of free and cheap food is declining from food recovery agencies, such as: Foodbank, Fairshare and Secondbite, due to greater efficiency in food retail, packaging, and an increase in number of charities and organisations distributing emergency food.

Seven out of the eight Food Providers consulted indicated that they would like to buy food directly from farmers if it was made possible.

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

All Service Providers listed the matter of transporting food as a significant barrier to their capacity to distribute food. Some Service Providers commented on how their lack of staff and appropriate transport prevented them from accessing free food that was donated to them. Lack of adequate storage was also a concern to some of the Food Services, as was the concern of handling fresh fruit and vegetables – due to risk of it perishing before it could be distributed.

Some Service Providers were interested in the idea of an affordable community market, for their clients to access directly like the Myuna Market (see page 14 for further explanation of Myuna Market); client mobility was a concern however, in access of the market.

The recommendations of this report include a Mobile Market on the back of a truck that could service key Service Providers, providing a market accessible to clients, and in the same trip delivering an order of fruit and vegetables for cooked meals served by the Service Provider. Mobile Market vouchers would be available for sale to Emergency Food Providers to give to their clients. Three Service providers indicated the efficiency of using the voucher system, explaining that they were able to distribute large quantities of fresh food to clients without having to transport it, handle it, or store it.

Another recommendation of this report is to harness the capacity of the unemployed, and skills of new arrivals in Australia, in community building initiatives around food. Considerable opportunity lies in the cross-cultural exchange of people's stories around food - by capitalising on the rich new food cultures arriving into the area, a deeper connection to food could be ignited within the wider community through training and collaboration. An example of a similar model can be seen with the food tour and cooking classes organised by the Benevolent Society in Dandenong (see page 20 for further explanation of the Benevolent Society classes).

1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to provide insight into the barriers faced by people in the low socio economic status (SES) groups in the City of Casey and surrounding areas, and to understand better the challenges and opportunities in connecting them to fresh fruit and vegetables. Consultation with Emergency Food Providers was conducted to provide a link to understanding their clients' lives and barriers faced, while understanding better the role a Food Hub could play in connecting Emergency Food Providers to fresh local produce.

Three primary research areas to be investigated were identified as:

A. Community snapshots – getting to know the stories of people accessing emergency food relief, who they are, their stories.

B. Challenges and opportunities in connecting residents to fresh fruit and vegetables - understanding the types of challenges and barriers people in low SES groups are facing in accessing food including fresh fruit and vegetables, in order to overcome them and maximise on possible opportunities in the design of Food Hubs.

C. Challenges and opportunities in connecting Emergency Food Providers to farmers - understanding what their potential involvement in a Food Hub could be.

2 Methodology

Consultation included a Desktop Review and Interviews.

2.1 Desktop review

A desktop review was carried out to understand healthy food access among low SES groups further, and therefore understand which area the VEIL research into Food Security in the City of Casey and surrounding area should focus on. The following reports focusing on Food Security in the City of Casey, City of Dandenong and across Australia, were reviewed: Greater Dandenong Food Alliance (2012) Improving Food Access in City of Casey: A Health Service Referral Directory; Anglicare (2012) When There's Not Enough to Eat: A National Study of Food Security among Emergency Relief Clients; City of Casey (2010) Food Security in the City of Casey; City of Casey (2011) Submission Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health; City of Casey (2011) Submission Inquiry into Live-ability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne.

A database was created (see figure 1) in order to list as many Emergency Food Distributors and Food Recovery Agencies in the City of Casey as possible, and to set up a system where by to be able to log the quantitative data that would be gathered. In addition to contacts already established by VEIL, new contacts were added from information gained from web searches; Secondbite, the City of Casey Council and local information services.

The database focused mainly on listing groups operating within the City of Casey, however some models operating within the City of Dandenong were also listed, to enable the research to encompass

more established or particularly progressive models outside the focus region of Casey. Engagement with certain organisations in Dandenong was seen as important to enable VEIL to continue building relationships with key stakeholders in the surrounding area and to be able to learn from particular models specialising in the service of clients in low SES groups.

2.2 Interviews

Seven Emergency Food Providers and one Food Recovery Agency were interviewed in full, to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

Detailed quantitative information was gathered on the services offered, such as what type of service was offered and the times and frequency that each service was offered. The database was uploaded into Google Drive, and the locations of the Emergency Food providers were listed on Google Maps.

The interviews also included qualitative questions to improve understanding of the requirements of residents in low SES groups; to explore whether the Food Hub could help. A questionnaire was designed and tested before interviews were conducted. Twenty Emergency Food Providers were shortlisted to be invited to participate in the research, with a number of eight finalised for interviews of 40 – 60 minutes in length.

3 Findings

3.1 Desktop review

The desktop review found strong evidence that food insecurity and lack of fresh food, particularly among disadvantaged groups, is a significant and growing concern in the City of Casey and surrounding areas. For example:

- According to a 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey 8% of Casey residents compared to a Victorian State level of 7%, admitted to have run out of food and to have been unable to afford to buy more food in the last year (City of Casey 2010).
- 51.9% of Casey's population do not meet fruit and vegetable dietary guidelines, compared to 48.2% of all Victorians (City of Casey 2011).

Entrenched socio-economic disadvantage and lack of mobility (City of Casey 2011) were identified as barriers concerning resident access to adequate and nutritious food.

2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey showed that 25% of residents living in the City of Casey had experienced transport limitation in previous year, due to lack of access to a private vehicle and lack of access to public transport (City of Casey 2011).

Furthermore Casey's population is expected to almost have doubled from 2011 to 2036 (City of Casey 2011), raising concern over the strain the extra population will have on the area, including Casey's vulnerability to rising unemployment levels.

Existing barriers to the access of adequate and healthy food, as well as the projected strain on the area with increased population rates and escalating job instability, point to a significant need to address the issue of food security and to explore more efficient models of food distribution.

3.2 Interviews

7 Service Providers and 1 Food Recovery Agency were interviewed enabling extensive data to be collected on the types of food services offered. The Food Recovery Agency along with 3 of the Service Providers were located in Dandenong, the remaining 4 Service Providers were spread between Endeavour Hills, Cranbourne and Doveton. The specific information on services offered was then logged into the Google drive data system (see Figure 1. for screen shot of the Service Provider Database).

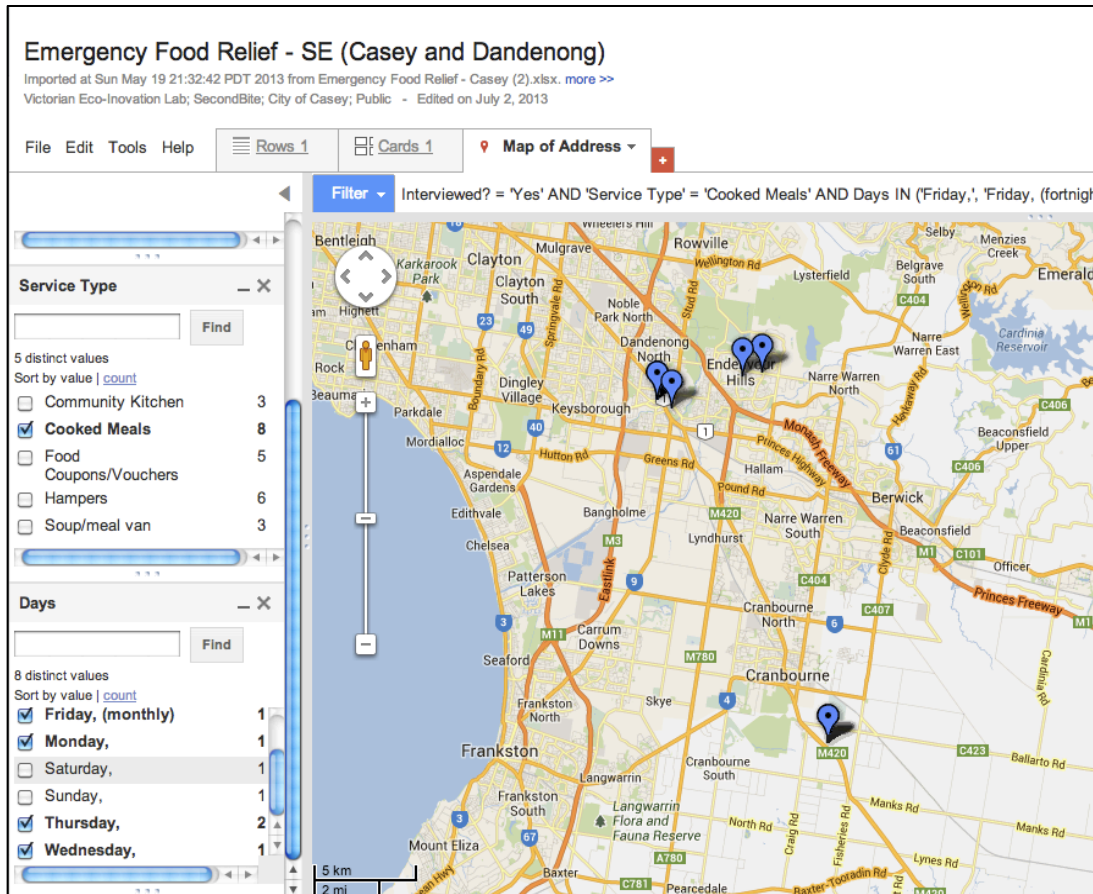
Many of these organisations provided more than one service with different levels of access. Cooked meals were accessible to everyone that showed up, ranging in regularity from once a week to up six days a week. Food hampers and vouchers were offered after registration and consultation with Service Provider staff on particular days. Across the 7 Service Providers mapped, we were able to identify:

- 4 Service Providers out of the 8 Service Providers offered cooked meals at least once a week with 1 Service Provider offering a monthly cooked meal.
- 3 out of the 8 Service Providers offered vouchers irregularly.
- 6 out of the 8 Service Providers offered hampers at least once a week with one Service Provider offering hampers fortnightly.
- 2 out of the 8 Service Providers offered a community kitchen some days of the week.
- 2 out of the 8 Service Providers offered an education/nutrition programs, open weekdays.
- 1 of the 8 Service Providers offered a cheap food Coop open weekdays.

From consultation with the interviewees it is evident that between the 5 Service Providers that serve cooked food, there was a free meal provided every day of the week, however the locations of the Services Providers were spread from Dandenong to Cranbourne (see figure 1). Figure 1. shows the geographic spread in location of the Service Providers, making it clear that if mobility is an issue for clients in Cranbourne it could be difficult for them to travel up to Endeavour Hills and Dandenong to access emergency food relief. On the other hand, clients located in Endeavour Hills and Dandenong may find it easier to travel between Dandenong and Endeavour Hills to access emergency food relief, as the geographic distance is less. However mobility between Dandenong and Endeavour Hills may still depend on whether the clients are housed in the vicinity of an efficient bus route, linking the two suburbs.

It was also clear that services continually change, one month a program might be operating and then it will be cancelled the next, due to funding loss or volunteer loss.

Figure 1. Google Drive Database, showing the location of Cooked meals offered between the eight Food Services during the week.



The focus of the qualitative part of the research was: 1) To provide insight into low SES groups in the City of Casey, and increase understanding of the types of barriers clients face in providing food for themselves; 2) To understand better the types of challenges Service Providers face in delivering emergency food relief; and 3) To understand the challenges and opportunities that lie in connecting low SES groups and or Service Providers to farmers.

- **Community snapshot**

Consultation with Service Providers showed diversity in clients circumstances and three key emerging trends were identified as: 1) Stress impacting on mental health; 2) Increase in the working poor; and 3) Increase in Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Diversity in client stories

It was clear that the types of people finding themselves in need of emergency food relief are very diverse. Ranging from long-term unemployed, short-term unemployed, homeless people, people with physical, intellectual or mental disabilities, asylum seekers, refugees, people suffering substance addictions, people suffering behavioural addictions, pensioners and teenagers. The following include some descriptions of situations faced by clients:

“...single parenting, domestic violence, relocating from other places, and just needing a bit of help” - commented a Service provider as a cause of food insecurity. “...and of course there are the ones that have addictions, alcoholic abuse and drug dependence and that sort of thing” she continued. “...we have a few who are older, on the pension and the bills that they are paying don’t quite match up with the amount of money that they are getting...” - commented a Service Provider.

“...people who lack daily living skills, so people who might not be great at getting up every morning and having a shower, or putting on clean clothes” - illustrated a Service Provider, making reference to clients that are really struggling to integrate into society and work. He continued: “Sometimes people might present or manage to keep the façade up, for the quarter of an hour it takes to deal with us, but then they wouldn’t be able to manage that for a forty-hour week in a work place”.

Stress impacting on residents’ mental health

Another aspect made evident by one service provider in particular was that many people - young and old - were not coping with the stress and isolation in their lives, and were losing their jobs and capacity to function in society due to mental illnesses. For example: “there was a man who was severely bullied at his work, to the point where it caused depression and he wasn’t able to function at his work anymore, so he came to access food support to fill in the gap”. Another example given: “One lady that I was just talking to today... she worked in the community welfare area and she’d had a nervous breakdown and burnt out”. “There was another man, he came in devastated because his wife of 48 years had just walked out on him and he was extremely depressed” was a further example.

Steve is single parent with three teenage sons. He works hard in the construction business, and gets promoted to foreman positions quickly. Steve also suffers congestive heart failure – when his symptoms flare up, he winds up in intensive care for weeks on end. Steve gets paid at a casual rate so when he is sick he doesn’t get paid. This month his medication and parking bills at the hospital, really tip him over the edge financially, he is in rent arrears and is stressed about being evicted. Some weeks he doesn’t have much money to put food on the table to feed his sons, so he tries to arrange a hamper from a local charity. Steve’s main goal is to support his sons in getting a good education and eventually stable professions.

Increase of the working poor

Reflecting on the changing demographics of the area, one significant change noted was the rapid increase of the working poor in the area. Many service providers commented on the growth of the area, and consequently the rising costs of rent, which once deducted from a low wage, often doesn’t leave adequate money to cover the costs of living, including food. For example: “I’ve seen an increase in the working poor... and a lot more job instability, job loss, entrenchment, that sort of thing. So it used to be basically single mothers when I first started now it’s very diverse”.

“...we are now working with the working poor” - continued another: “people that are working but still can’t feed their families because they don’t know this week whether to pay their gas bill or whether to feed their families” – illustrating the reality of food insecurity. “...the casual work and then the amount of rent that they pay in this area don’t always equal one another” - commented another service provider: “and then if there is an unforeseen thing that happens like their car needs repairs... that just sort of tips them over the edge”...

On housing affordability: “Housing is also a real problem with people, trying to get affordable housing and a lot of times the rent is taking nearly all their money - over 50% of their income...”

On living week to week on Centrelink payments: “... if they are in private rental, they’d be paying two or three times as much in rental as they would if they were in Government Housing, and so it only takes one big bill to come in a fortnight, and they’ll struggle to make ends meet”.

Increase in Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Another big change noted in the City of Casey and Dandenong was the influx of new comers to Australia in the form of Asylum Seekers and Refugees. A strong concern among service providers was being able to meet the complex needs of this growing contingent in their community. Many service providers expressed concern around the financial hardship faced particularly by Asylum Seekers, as their visa status prohibits them from working, forcing them to survive completely on Centrelink payments. “They only get 80% of the dole which makes it really tricky if they are paying their rent, paying their bills or other things...food - it comes down to: ‘well I want to meet the obligations and do everything good’... so that when its up for review, they can become permanent residents ...they want to make sure they have paid their bills and food’s not the top priority” – commented one Service Provider.

“...you’ve got unemployed people in large groups in houses, they all speak the same language, they’re not allowed to work, are at a loose end and are struggling to make ends meet. There are social and potentially criminal results from that policy” – expressed another Service Provider, talking about the visa restriction on Asylum Seekers to work.

On the increase of Asylum Seekers in Casey and Dandenong: “Look really the only change that I have seen in my time (6 years in the role) has been an influx in asylum seekers” – was one comment. Continuing with: “So we’re seeing people in those sorts of situations that have much less support...have a much wider range of needs, and have real obstacles in helping themselves...we are giving them \$50 in food vouchers hardly seems to scratch the surface of their issues”.

Melise and Samet arrived in Australia as Asylum Seekers in 1998. On arrival to Australia they depended on the assistance of the Asylum Seekers Centre. 15 years on, they work as cleaners, have a daughter in high school, and own their own home. Samet is a trained Chef in Turkey and has built a small wood fired oven in the backyard, in which he cooks pide - a long flat bread with vegetables, meat or cheese as a topping. Melise makes fresh cheese, she would like to be able to make more cheeses with goats’ milk – but she hasn’t found a bulk supply yet. They have been able to provide a good life for their son here in Australia, but during the seven years waiting for their application to be processed, they were not allowed to study to get their skills recognised, so they can only work in unskilled jobs. Samet misses working in his field, and being respected for his mastery in the kitchen.

- **Challenges and opportunities: connecting residents to fresh fruit and vegetables**

Service Provider comments on food access within low SES groups exposed two main points:

1) restricted mobility posed a significant barrier to the access of healthy food; and that 2) the capacity of emergency food providers to keep up with demand for food was becoming difficult as supply of free or subsidised food was drying up.

Restricted Mobility of Low SES groups

According to the Service Providers a significant barrier faced by their clients in accessing healthy food for themselves was a lack of access to retail outlets to buy fresh food within their local vicinity. This lack of local food access, compounded with limited mobility posed a significant problem to low SES groups, as transport options to travel out of their local vicinity to access healthy food is often insufficient. In contrast, affluent people living in the area, can overcome this distance to healthy food by use of private cars, highlighting the impact restricted mobility poses to low SES groups and their access of healthy food options.

“A lot of people don’t own a car...” – commented one Service Provider. “There are buses” he continued: “but bus routes, they go on through Doveton, they don’t actually service Doveton itself...the main shopping centre for Doveton is in the southern part of Doveton, if you lived in the north part, getting home with a significant amount of groceries is going to be difficult, you are going to have at least two different busses with a walk up the hill on the way”.

Even if income rates were higher for residents in the area, public transport is still a major barrier to food access: “if a single mum cant get to the shops, to buy food for the weekend, its just as easy to transport the kids into Cornerstone and feed them up there, transport is an issue”.

Just one service provider thought public transport was sufficient in the area:

“There is very good public transport in our area... (Cranbourne)”. However, reflecting that most people accessing their service must have their own transport because it was not well serviced by public transport: “Well I suppose all the people that we see don’t have that as an issue, because they don’t need that to get to us, because we are a little bit outside the public transport field. So perhaps those ones we don’t see because they cant get to us”.

“Our clients are probably unlikely to travel out of Doveton to fulfil a voucher... if they are in the position which they are when they present to us,” – said one service provider.

Increasing demand and decreasing supply

The majority of service providers commented on the increasing demand for emergency food relief in the community and a decrease in free or subsidised supply of food available. When asked what challenges were present in supplying adequate food to their clients, 6 of the 8 service providers commented that increasing demand for food was difficult to keep up with. 6 of the 8 Service providers also commented that decreasing supply was making it difficult to provide adequate food through their service, and 5 of the 8 Service Providers listed the cost of purchasing food as a barrier, showing that those Service Providers with limited budgets were more heavily affected by the decrease in free or subsidised food in delivering their Service.

“If I had twice as much food I could handle the best part of twice as many people” - commented one service provider, showing a growing numbers of clients and his potential to distribute more food if it was available. Some service providers exposed that they were going to have to asses how they were going to continue providing their current services as their food stocks were nearly all gone: “we have

never been this low on food at all, and I think just the amount we are seeing per day, over 20...", "The veggies go quite quickly that's another thing" commented another Service Provider, continuing with: "we don't often get access to - fruit" – showing a lack of access to fruit and vegetables as an emergency food provider.

The Food Recovery Agency which also operates as an agent for Foodbank, Secondbite and Fairshare in Dandenong, explained that as food manufacturers get more efficient in their production, there is less food available for donation: "(the manufactures) are getting very good at what they do, they don't have mistakes in their production lines, they don't have end of product lines where they have loads of stuff that's labelled wrong to give away anymore".

- **Challenges and opportunities: connecting food relief to farmers**

Speaking with local Service Providers showed enthusiasm on their part to purchase or access fresh food from local farmers. The transport of food to Service Provider locations was seen as the biggest barrier in their current access of food, and therefore an important factor in thinking about buying direct from farmers. Storage and handling of the food was also a concern for some of the Service providers, and the system of distributing shopping vouchers to clients to buy their own fresh food was seen as an efficient means of saving time and cost, associated with the transport, handling and storage of produce for Service Providers. Engaging the community in capacity building and skill sharing around food knowledge and food distribution was seen as an opportunity by two of the Service Providers interviewed.

Purchasing from farmers

7 out of the 8 representatives interviewed said they would be interested in purchasing fresh fruit and vegetables from local farmers if it were possible with the 8th representative commenting that she already has access to enough produce thanks to the community, so she wouldn't need to.

In regards to budget available for fresh food the answers ranged from \$60 to \$500 a week. One Service Provider expressed that they had enough funding, and that cutting costs in regards to food purchase was not a concern, expressing a desire to purchase quality food in the delivery of their service. However, securing on-going funding was a concern for a number of service providers: "there is very few agencies that are happy to give you on-going funding for a week in week out program..."

"We'd have to have a range of produce", commented a service provider "it would have to be similar in quality to what people would get down at the grocery store" – he continued.

"I think that the clients would respond better to vegetables than fruits - ingredients to standard dishes that they can cook" – said another Service Provider. He then went on to comment on the cultural diversity of what 'standard dishes' means in the area, adding: "there are going to be clients looking for potatoes and beans and then we will have people looking for bok choy".

Transport

All 8 Service Providers interviewed listed transport of food, as a barrier to providing their existing food services. "If I could get a bigger vehicle I could get more food" – said one service provider. "If I had access to more food that was delivered directly to me, it would take a fair bit of pressure off" – he continued. "When we don't have enough volunteers with cars, we cannot get the food that is offered

to us” – commented another service provider, adding: “you know we have had offers of great food but we can’t get it because we don’t have the volunteers to get it transport wise”.

Storage

Storage was a concern for 4 out of 8 of the Service Providers: “it would be a good idea – but it’s not just the transport issue it’s also the storage issue, and the turn over, we would need to know that the clients would actually take enough of the fresh produce, that we wouldn’t end up having it spoil”. The same service provider reflected on how great it would be to have clients “less reliant on pre-packaged stuff” but was realistic about how buying direct from farmers would work, considering his relatively low level of 15-20 clients coming in a week. Referring to the functionality of buying from farmers collectively: “if it wasn’t just us doing it in Doveton, but also the Salvos...and the farmer only has to do one trip and drop a little bit off in three places, they are the things that make it work a little better”.

“It would be nice to have something like a market day at the centre, so that you know people could come in and just access fresh food” - commented one service provider. Adding: the issue is getting rid of it, what the demand is at a given time.”

Shopping vouchers

Many Service Providers use a lot of their budget and grant money to buy and distribute food vouchers as a way to distribute high volumes of food without having to provide the transport, handling, and storage of the food. Many Service Providers also give out hampers and serve weekly, fortnightly or monthly cooked meals made with ingredients that are free or made available very cheaply through Foodbank and other Food Recovery Agencies. However a large chunk of funding in three cases was distributed to clients in the form of shopping vouchers to Coles and independent supermarkets. The Service Providers seemed open to finding new ways of using their funding to improve access to fresh fruit and vegetables, as the voucher system seemed a bit of a compromise even to them, because there is no guarantee that clients will be purchasing fresh food with the voucher. Once inside the supermarket the voucher could be used to purchase processed foods, defeating the objective in distributing the voucher in the first place as a way of giving clients access to fresh food.

“We have talked about doing less dollars in the vouchers,” said one Service Provider, who then went on to explain that they would like to purchase more low cost food from Avocare to distribute in food hampers instead of vouchers: “but we would run into issues with just the transport manual handling”. “I give them vouchers because that’s a very quick way of getting rid of a relatively large sum of money and it doesn’t take up much space” - said another Service Provider.

One service provider stressed that they had funding available for providing clients with food, and issuing vouchers was the easiest method of distributing it: “I’m not in that sense short of money, I’ve got money that I can use, which I use it to give people vouchers”.

“The reason for giving them vouchers is so that they can buy fresh food”- commented one Service Provider. A big concern in giving out fresh food was the risk of the food going bad before it was distributed to the clients: “the mushrooms are already starting to look a bit on the shady side, and by the time you’ve got it on Tuesday and given it out on Thursday...” the same client then commented that if the produce was fresher and was guaranteed to have a better shelf life, that he could take on more produce to distribute to clients.

On being asked if his would be interested in buying food from local farmers, one Service Provider exposed his thinking on the matter: we would fund that sort of program by cutting back a little bit on the vouchers... we do \$19-20 000 a year in vouchers and a \$1000 a year at Foodbank but if we could, lets say potentially, maybe I could see us doing \$100-150 a week in fresh products, just thinking that's about \$10 a client, yes I think that is something that we could do.

The benefits of the voucher system outlined by the Service Providers were that it eliminates transport, handling and storage of produce by the Service Provider allowing distribution of healthy food, saving staff valuable time and costs. This system already in use could be easily adapted by Casey Food Hubs to work with Service Providers in increasing fresh food access to low SES groups.

Social capital

Through talking with Service Providers it is clear that there is potential to engage the skills and capacity of residents in the City of Casey that are not working, offering them an opportunity to connect with their local community and teach and learn skills and knowledge around food.

An Emergency Food Provider who services Asylum Seekers and Refugees spoke about the eagerness of Asylum Seekers to help out and volunteer their time, while they are on their temporary visa and cannot work: "I've got several Asylum Seekers who are allowed to do voluntary work and are encouraged to, they have to negotiate through their case worker... I'm rostering them now because we've got a number of people wanting to come and help, not only because they want to help but also because it gives them something to do physically, and also they've got the skill of the language..."

The Food Recovery Agency, who is also passionate about providing capacity building and training for the unemployed, spoke about the potential of harnessing some of the knowledge around traditional food culture in her training programs: "we are only dipping our foot into this cultural food, so we are quite interested to learn from these CALD communities, what recipes we can adapt for the community from their cooking".

4 Recommendations

4.1 Mobile Market - lack of resident mobility was found as a significant barrier in resident access to healthy food in the City of Casey (City of Casey 2010), as was backed up by all eight of the Service Providers. I believe a Mobile Market would offer a viable way of connecting low SES groups with fresh local produce.

4.2 Order and delivery service – as transport of food was a concern for all eight Service Providers I believe there would be potential for a fruit and vegetable order and delivery service. Initially it could be limited to Service Providers involved in the Mobile Market, therefore increasing cost viability, if the orders where small.

4.3 Harnessing social capital - to harness the skill and capacity of the unemployed and new arrivals moving into the City of Casey for, through skill development through social enterprise, and community building initiatives.

4.1 Mobile Market

A travelling market – on the back of a bus or van (see Figure 2. for example) overcomes the barrier of client mobility within the City of Casey. The idea of a mobile market held, directly for clients to access, seemed interesting to some of the Service Providers, and in fact one Service Provider in Doveton commented on how good it was when the local Myuna Community market was running. The Myuna Market was a council initiative to increase fresh food access in the Eumemmerring and Doveton area, which has now been suspended. While the concept of providing affordable fresh fruit and vegetables is the same as the one I'm proposing, two fundamental differences in the running of the market remain.

The Myuna market sourced most of its produce from the Melbourne market, and received some local donated produce. A Casey Food Hub initiative differs from this model in that most of the produce would be local – coming from the Bunyip Food Belt, Gippsland or surrounds. Secondly, the market would be mobile, allowing the produce to be easily transported to service multiple locations, requiring only one employee that could double as a driver and fruit seller. The efficiency of having just one paid operator and not having to organise the set up and pack up of the market makes a mobile market considerably more viable economically.

The Myuna model, even though it no longer operates, serves to illustrate to Service Providers how they could participate in an idea such as a mobile market. For example, vouchers could be for sale to Emergency Food Providers to give to their clients, just as the system used by the Myuna model. The service providers are already in contact with their clients so could be responsible for communicating the times of when the travelling market would arrive at their location. It seems that with just a bit of planning, and coordination the travelling market could arrive at key times at the centre when people are already there, for example before or after a free meal. It would also operate on the use of a voucher system, a system they are already comfortable with and one that does not require them to be responsible for the handling or storage of perishable food, which was a concern.

4.2 Order and delivery service

All eight Service Providers consulted considered transport a barrier to providing their Emergency Food Service, as most of them rely on volunteers and have limited vehicle and manpower capacity to transport food. I believe that if a local Casey Food Hub could offer an efficient, easy-to-use ordering system and a weekly delivery service, a market could be found within Service Providers for local fresh fruit and vegetables. Even though client access to healthy food – fruit and vegetables was considered important, it seemed that service providers avoided taking much fruit and vegetables from Food Recovery Agencies, as they were concerned about its limited shelf life. One Service Provider told me that if the produce was guaranteed to last longer, then he could increase the number of vegetables purchased for client hampers. Due to the local sourcing of produce from Gippsland, the Bunyip food belt and surrounds, the produce for sale will certainly be fresher having travelled a smaller distance than the non-local produce, having been transported untold distances before reaching the City of Casey.

Furthermore, if a mobile client market was operating in conjunction with the delivery service, the volume of produce sold to Service Providers for their cooked meals and hampers would not be so critical to the viability of the vegetable run, as delivery to the Service Provider could be made at the same time as the client Mobile Market.

Figure 2. Image showing the Mobile Market Concept



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4.3 Harnessing Social capital

I believe there is potential to use a Casey Food Hub project to harness the capacity of the unemployed, in the handling, transport and sale of local food. Furthermore opportunity lies in Casey Food Hub 'spin off' social enterprises that could train people in food handling and cooking while operating as a business, selling healthy prepared meals. An example of this type of community capacity building can be seen in a model used by the Food Recovery Agent we spoke to. She runs a multitude of different training projects built around the distribution of free and cheap food to charities, including cooked meals. This model should be learned from or incorporated into a Casey Food Hub project.

I think there would be a significant level of enthusiasm and skill lying in the communities of immigrants settling in the area that could be harnessed in a Casey Food Hub 'spin off' Project. In many cases these new comers to Australia are transporting with them rich food traditions that could be tapped, to inspire a deeper connection to food and more conscious food consumption within the wider community. The food tours organised by the Benevolent Society and World Food Dandenong,

that showcase Afghani and Indian food, is an example of how the sharing of food cultures can ignite passion around food. While visa restrictions restrict Asylum Seekers from participating in work even at a volunteer capacity, agreements have been made between caseworkers and charities, therefore there is the potential to get around this obstacle.

5 Conclusion

In gauging interest levels in potential participation in a Food Hub, all eight Service Providers indicated that they would like to continue contact with VEIL throughout the development of Casey Food Hubs projects, indicating a level of interest in either participating or keeping an eye on the development of a Food Hub in their region.

Some Emergency Food Providers are allocating considerable amounts of their food relief budget on supermarket vouchers, out of efficiency and in the hope that clients will buy fresh food. In working with Emergency Food Providers in improving fruit and vegetable access, there seems to be potential in using a voucher system.

The limited mobility of residents along with the limited capacity for the transport and storage of food by Service Providers are underlining concerns for the distribution of fresh food to low SES residents. A Food Hub or related services could help to overcome these barriers by: 1) providing a mobile market accessible directly by clients, saving Service Providers the task of the transporting, handling and storing the food; 2) providing a produce delivery service directly to Service Provider kitchens, facilitating access to quality, fresh produce.

Many opportunities exist for community engagement and capacity building with Casey Food Hub 'Spin off' projects. Existing models already in action around community training, and food handling and distribution should be supported and learned from, as they offer a remarkable asset to the local community.

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