



Fostering resilience and sustainability through better coordination, support, and decentralization of the Melbourne city region food system



Over the last five years, the Melbourne city region food system (CRFS) has been impacted by multiple shocks and stresses, including events related to the weather and climate; the global COVID-19 pandemic; economic, political and civic events such as the war in Ukraine. The compounding impacts of multiple simultaneously occurring events have revealed the fragility of the food system and how vulnerable the CRFS is to disruption. In response, CRFS stakeholders have activated pre-existing policies and initiatives and created new and innovative solutions to complex problems. Characteristics of the Melbourne CRFS have enabled and limited the effectiveness of these policies and initiatives to mobilize various resilience capacities. While the response of CRFS stakeholders has undoubtedly lessened the impact of temporary food availability issues, ongoing problems around food affordability and food accessibility persist, and the CRFS remains vulnerable to a range of anticipated future shocks and stresses. Based on the shortcomings of the CRFS response, three policies and initiatives were identified that can transform the Melbourne CRFS so that it becomes more resilient and sustainable.¹

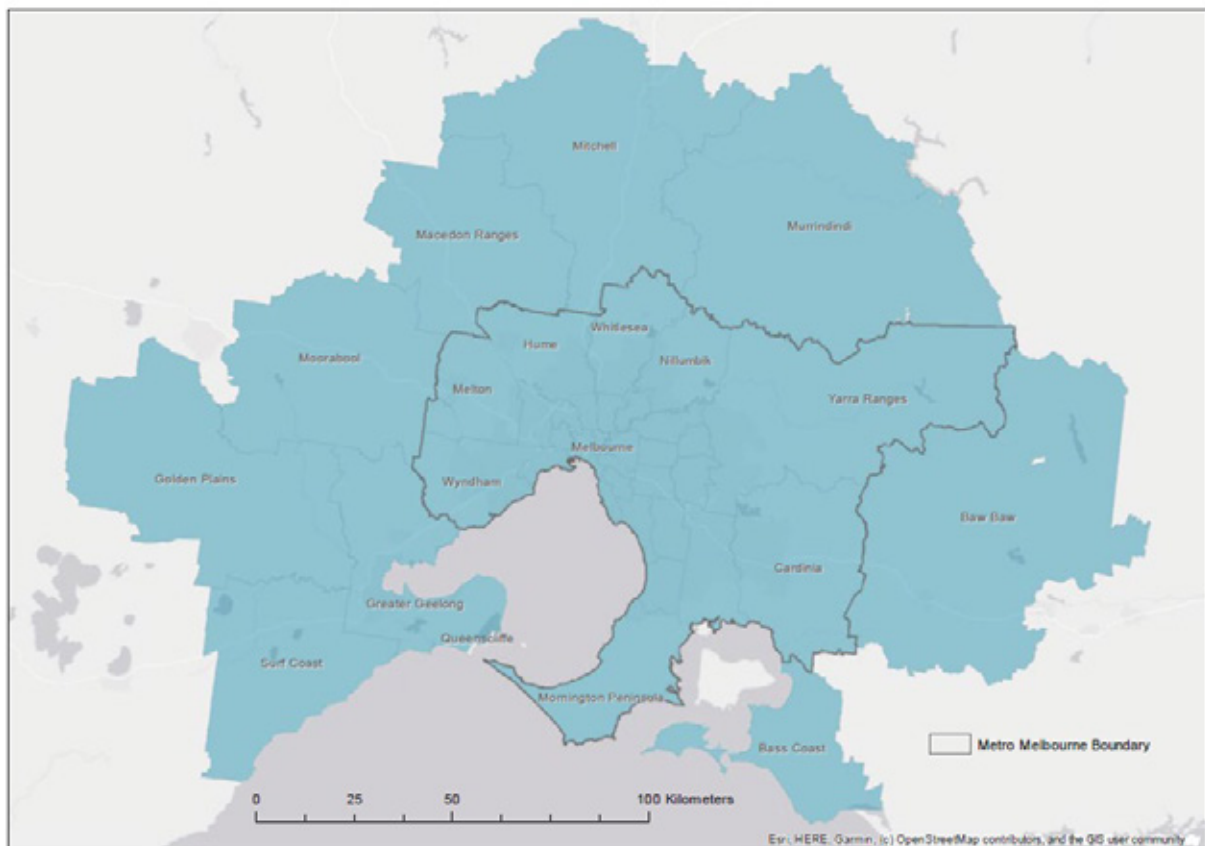
A closer look at the strengths and weaknesses of the Melbourne city region food system

Greater Melbourne is characterized by a temperate climate with warm to hot summers, mild springs and autumns, and cool winters. The population is expected to grow from 5.1 million to 7 million by 2050.² Residents in the CRFS access food from a range of small grocers, permanent markets, regular accredited and non-accredited farmers' markets, various alternative food networks and a highly concentrated supermarket sector. Four major retailers account for 80 percent of the grocery market.³

The CRFS consists of an inner food bowl containing 31 local government areas (LGAs) that make up the metropolitan area of Greater Melbourne and an outer food bowl comprised of nine LGAs,⁴ (Figure 1). Many LGAs have community food systems, food security, and urban food strategies in place (Figure 4). There are eleven LGAs in Victoria with a dedicated food systems policy.⁵

In 2015, Melbourne's food bowl had the capacity to meet around 41 percent of the city's food needs.⁶ Most

Figure 1 Melbourne's city region



Source: Murphy, M., Carey, R. & Alexandra, L. 2022 The resilience of Melbourne's food system to climate and pandemic shocks. University of Melbourne. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124370>

fresh produce is grown in the state. During winter, a large proportion of Melbourne’s fruit and vegetables are sourced from the northern states.⁷ The primary commodities produced in Victoria by gross value in 2019-2020 were dairy, beef, sheep meat, grains, fruit and nuts, wool and vegetables.⁸ It is difficult to estimate where the CRFS sources its food because of a lack of publicly available data about the movements of domestic food freight.⁹

Recent survey data from the City of Melbourne reported an increase in residents experiencing food insecurity from 25.8 percent in 2019 to 32.9 percent in 2020.¹⁰ In 2014, around 4 percent of Victorian adults experienced one criterion of food insecurity.¹¹ Groups already experiencing disadvantage are at greater risk of food insecurity, particularly First Nations Australians, single-parent households, the elderly, unemployed people, and other low-income groups.^{10:12}

No single body or department is responsible for governing the CRFS. Despite efforts to improve CRFS governance, such as the Melbourne Food Alliance, coordination and fragmentation of food system governance remain significant challenges. The private sector provides central leadership to ensure the supply chain works effectively and food supplies are managed in response to shocks and stresses.⁴ Charities and civil society organizations (CSOs) lead emergency food and water distribution,¹³ relying largely on volunteer work and donations from private enterprises.

Compounding impacts of multiple, simultaneous shocks stress the fragility of the Melbourne food system.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in Melbourne becoming the world’s most locked-down city in 2020-2021, significant challenges were created by physical distancing requirements and lockdowns. Figure 6 demonstrates how the diverse and far-reaching impacts of the pandemic were felt across the entire CRFS. The impacts also varied in their magnitude. Some impacts were temporary, such as food shortages and the availability of supermarket products. Others had transformative impacts, completely upending the CRFS and causing long-term changes, such as sharp increases in online retail and changes in food handling, manufacturing and distribution.

Unprecedented bushfires in southeastern Australia in 2019-2020 and major flooding events in New South Wales and Queensland in 2022 devastated the vast areas directly affected. The direct effects on the Melbourne CRFS were limited, with immediate but temporary disruptions to the CRFS food supply and increased food prices. While a high degree of uncertainty remains, more frequent and severe climate-related events are anticipated, though there has not been adequate preparation. In contrast, the disruptions caused by the pandemic were described as taking CRFS actors by surprise and were generally discussed among CRFS stakeholders. Urban sprawl continues to pressure farmers and food production in peri-urban areas.

Figure 2 Timeline of significant shocks and stresses that have impacted the Melbourne city region food system

Periods	2001	2009	2011	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Climate and weather-related events (e.g. floods, droughts, bushfires)									
Urban sprawl	Ongoing								
Ecosystem-related events (e.g. plant and animal pest and disease pressures)									
Economic events (e.g. food price shocks, inflation, market disruptions, financial speculation of commodities)									
Public health and biological events (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, isolation requirements)									
Political and civic events (e.g. war in Ukraine)									
Industrial events (e.g. train derailments)									

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Figure 3 Types of events and shocks and their impacts on the city region food system

	Climate and weather-related events (e.g. floods, droughts, bushfires)	Public health and biological events (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, isolation requirements)	Economic events (e.g. food price shocks, inflation, market disruptions, financial speculation of commodities)	Political and civic events (e.g. war in Ukraine)	Ecosystem-related events (e.g. pressures from plant and animal pest and diseases)
Increase food waste and loss across the city region food system (CRFS)					
Direct damage to crops					
Reduced activity across the supply chain because of labour shortages					
Increase in “cost-price squeeze” on farmers					
Labour shortages					
Fewer transport and distribution activities due to movement restriction measures					
Difficulties for farmers in accessing markets					
Reduced capacity to import and export					
Disrupted the availability of critical materials (e.g. pallets, food packaging materials)					
The increased cost of inputs such as fertilizers, diesel, and energy					
Temporary closure of processing plants					
Closure of businesses and enterprises, reduced employee working hours					
Loss of income, furlough, and income stress					
Changes in the business model to react to the new context.					
Empty shelves and temporary food shortages at the retail level					
Increase in food prices (fresh produce including meat, vegetables, fruits, etc.)					
Difficulties in physically accessing food retailing					
Increase in food insecurity					
Changed shopping habits (e.g. panic buying and hoarding)					
Difficulties in redistributing or donating food (due to lack of volunteers or human resources) to vulnerable households					
Increase the share of vulnerable people present in the city region					
Reduced donations to food relief services					
Burnout of food sector workers					
Increased rural-urban migration					

Source: Authors’ own elaboration

stresses have resulted in compounding the impacts on the CRFS (Figure 2). The connections between multiple shocks, stresses and their compounding impacts are illustrated in the causality chart (Figure 6). For example, COVID-19 significantly impacted employment and income with underemployment reaching 13.8 percent in Australia.¹⁴ Additionally, many of the carry-over effects of the pandemic, associated with the cost of living and affordability of food, were further exacerbated following the war in Ukraine. Even so, CRFS stakeholders noted the difficulty in attributing impacts to one cause, given the complex outcomes resulting from compounding events.

The compounding impacts on the Melbourne CRFS have highlighted the fragility of the food system and vulnerability to shocks and stresses, which are expected to increase in frequency and severity in the future. The CRFS can anticipate future climate-related events, pandemics and fluctuations in the price of food and resources as a result of geopolitical and civic events. Figure 2 suggests a trend to a “new normal” where multiple events that simultaneously impact the CRFS become more regular.

How the Melbourne city region food system responded to multiple, simultaneous shocks and stresses

A range of collective initiatives and public and private policies across different scales were activated and emerged in response to compounding shocks and stresses on the Melbourne CRFS (Figure 4). Figure 3 depicts how various events caused and compounded other impacts in the CRFS. Figure 6 demonstrates how initiatives and policies were implemented to prevent, mitigate and address multiple impacts. However, the magnitude of these impacts, particularly from the pandemic, suggests a lack of sufficient resilience mechanisms to prepare for the long-term stress caused by disruptive events such as the pandemic or simultaneously occurring multiple shocks. Key policies and initiatives identified are outlined in Figure 4. A range of initiatives led by the Victoria State Government, local governments and CSOs played a critical role in addressing these impacts (Figure 4).

The collective response of city region food system actors: civil society organizations, state and local governments

State Government: reacted with various social protection schemes to help communities absorb the shocks

The Victoria State Government activated existing

and implemented new policies to respond to sharp increases in food insecurity because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 4). The key initiatives identified were the state emergency management plan (SEMP), the establishment of a Food Relief Taskforce to strengthen and enhance food relief activity in Victoria,¹⁵ a new social protection scheme, “Working for Victoria”¹⁶ and a broad range of funding and grant opportunities **to support community responses to provide food relief** in response to rising food insecurity and disruptions caused by COVID-19.¹⁷ “Working for Victoria” combined with increased welfare support from federal social protection schemes JobKeeper¹⁸ and JobSeeker¹⁹ significantly reduced the impacts of employment and income loss caused by the pandemic.¹⁹ Support from these schemes gradually decreased as Melbourne re-opened after lockdowns and isolation requirements were withdrawn.

Civil society: towards transformative initiatives

The CSOs were crucial in addressing food insecurity in response to and during shocks and stresses. For instance, Moving Feast, an alliance of over 20 different organizations and enterprises, emerged from the pandemic crisis as a transformative response to provide healthy and culturally appropriate food relief to low-income households by delivering produce boxes, emergency meals and backyard gardening kits. Many place-based initiatives, neighbourhood, grassroots, and mutual aid networks grew and gained importance and transformative power as they worked to meet their community’s needs and provide viable and appropriate alternatives to food relief (Figure 4). Food relief and distribution agencies adapted and created new responses where traditional forms of food relief were no longer possible, mainly because of the pandemic (Figure 4). The Victorian Farmer’s Market Association (VFMA) accreditation programme and Open Food Network became transformative during the pandemic (Figure 4).

Local government: food strategy and coordination

Local governments played a significant role in improving the resilience of their LGAs and meeting the needs of their community in response to various shocks. Key initiatives identified include the implementation of local and community food system strategies and the designation of dedicated food system officers in LGAs (Figure). These initiatives helped address multiple aspects of social well-being, improve the diets of LGA residents by enabling local food production and consumption, and contributed to local economic development. Furthermore, local governments adapted existing initiative programmes, including community meals, community grants and food relief programmes,

implemented new programmes and collaborated with new stakeholders.

Coordination among CRFS stakeholders remains a critical issue that limits the effectiveness of the CRFS response to shocks and stresses. The Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group was established in April 2021 as a multistakeholder platform to improve coordination among a diverse network of stakeholders across Melbourne's CRFS (Figure 4). The working group was described as operating much like a food policy council and filling some of the roles of metro-level coordination during the pandemic, particularly in the absence of the Melbourne Food Alliance during that time.

"The Melbourne Food Alliance has been inactive since 2020 and during the pandemic, perhaps because the City of Melbourne council and many other local governments contracted their focus to their own local government area and core functions". – Researcher, Interview 1

From anticipating and absorbing shocks to the onset of adapting and transforming food systems

Collectively, the response of various CRFS stakeholders softened the impacts of compounding shocks and stresses. Some initiatives have mobilized anticipative and absorptive resilience capacities through downstream responses by enhancing the ability to meet the growing needs and number of people experiencing food insecurity. For example, the SEMP, networks of food relief distribution agencies and the development of the food relief task force have enhanced the preparedness of the CRFS by establishing and improving plans and networks that distribute and allocate food and water in response to shocks and stresses. Other initiatives, such as the Melbourne Food Alliance and VicHealth Working Group, have mobilized transformative and adaptive resilience capacities by improving coordination among CRFS stakeholders and reducing "siloe" responses to food insecurity by facilitating a multistakeholder and integrated approach. Initiatives such as LGA food system strategies and dedicated food system officers, VFMA's accreditation system, Moving Feast, Open Food Network (OFN) and many place-based initiatives have also mobilized transformative and adaptive resilience capacities by developing local food economies, diversifying livelihoods, and creating new and alternative systems that could operate independently of the dominant food system model.

Potential for further transformative change

Many characteristics of the Melbourne CRFS were recognized as enabling and limiting the response to

shocks and stresses. For example, connectedness and coordination among CRFS stakeholders, particularly among civil society members, whereby the strong pre-existing formal and informal networks allowed for rapid and coordinated action in response to shocks and stresses. This characteristic enabled new multistakeholder platforms for local food system actors to connect and coordinate.

Moreover leadership by public sector organizations, which assumed coordinating roles for multistakeholder initiatives, such as the VicHealth Working Group and Melbourne Food Alliance, was critical and unique.

While sectors of the CRFS demonstrated connectedness and some individual stakeholders exhibited the capacity to adapt innovatively to changing circumstances, coordination issues among stakeholders still limit the adaptability of the CRFS.

The openness and ability of Melbourne's CRFS to source food from a complex network of local, regional, national, and global supply chains contribute to the overall resilience of the CRFS by provision of a sufficient amount.²⁴

The flexibility of the CRFS allowed businesses to diversify value chains and adjust their operations according to changing circumstances. For example, organizations like Open Food Network supported producers to shift to online sales and overcome physical distancing restrictions.

The CRFS is characterized by a diverse range of food system stakeholders. Responsibility for the food system was described as divided between government and market players, with power imbalances favouring large retailers and industrial food organizations. More powerful and privileged stakeholders still dominate the CRFS. There is still a lack of minority voices and diverse representation in the CRFS.

Despite having a diverse range of CRFS stakeholders and complex food sourcing options, Melbourne was still described as reliant on a food system model characterized by highly concentrated, centralized, long and "just in time" supply chains. The pandemic highlighted how fragile and vulnerable the primary food system model is to disruption and the implications on CRFS residents.

Characteristics of Melbourne's CRFS have enabled a variety of public, private and collective initiatives to emerge and grow, which have demonstrated the transformative change in the CRFS. Additionally, the pandemic was described as hitting a "reset button" and creating an opportunity to foster collaboration and try to achieve things differently.

The cracks revealed in the Melbourne city region food system

Even so, many of the impacts of compounding shocks and stresses remain, and initiatives implemented by CRFS stakeholders appear insufficient to ensure residents can access affordable, healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food throughout various shocks and stresses. Many residents are still suffering the consequences of rising food prices and the increased cost of living. The responsibility and accountability for food accessibility remain unclear.

Governance of the Melbourne CRFS remains fragmented across different levels and departments of government operating in silos, which was recognized as a significant obstacle to setting up governance from a food system perspective and establishing broad-based resilience. Additionally, the governance of the Melbourne food system has largely been left to private enterprises, described as pursuing their agenda in a market that typically favours stakeholders with the most significant buying power. It was emphasized that CSOs struggled to find capacity for the regular administration work needed for funding applications. Furthermore, repeatedly competing for smaller project-based grants rather than securing long-term funding for local food system infrastructure was seen as limiting their response. Temporary increases in government welfare services in response to the pandemic saw demand for food relief services decrease; however, the gradual reduction in welfare support after lockdowns caused these benefits to reverse.

Both industry and civil society participants described the environment following the onset of the pandemic as reactive to the symptoms of the problem. Civil society members criticized the Victorian Government's emergency food relief response for its inherent vulnerabilities, associated with a reliance on a volunteer workforce and food donations from a large enterprise and it was therefore unable to support the increase in people experiencing food insecurity. Consequently many pre-existing issues that contributed to the vulnerability of the CRFS remain unchanged, such as reliance on long and complex supply chains; inadequate social welfare payments; fragmentation of food system governance; an inadequate emergency food relief model and insufficient support for CSOs.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the policies and initiatives implemented were insufficient to deal with widespread, unexpected and long-term stress. Multiple events caused disruptions across the food system. For example, while multiple shocks significantly impacted food production, food accessibility and affordability have become the greatest challenges for CRFS stakeholders and residents. While significant efforts have been made to improve the resilience of Melbourne, and many initiatives have fostered localized or sector-specific resilience, the CRFS is still lacking broad-based resilience and remains vulnerable to future shocks. Without implementing policies and initiatives that address the gaps in the CRFS and lessons learned from previous events, the CRFS is likely to experience the same, if not worse, outcomes from future events.

Figure 4 Identified pre-existing and newly emerged initiatives and policies implemented by CRFS stakeholders in response to multiple shocks and stresses

Victorian Government State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) 2013

The Emergency Management Commission (EMC) prepared the SEMP and was approved by the State Crisis and Resilience Council (SCRC) in accordance with the Emergency Management Act 2013.²⁰ The Australian Red Cross is the **lead relief agency** for distributing food and water under the Victorian Government SEMP.²¹ The EMC is supported by Food Bank Victoria, the Salvation Army and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.²¹ Charities and civil society organizations lead the emergency food relief response using a largely volunteer-run workforce.⁴ *“The plan [SEMP] had fortuitously been reviewed following the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 and instigated during the black summer bushfires (2019-2020), and many of the mechanisms were already operational before COVID-19”. – Food Relief Agency Representative, Interview 2*

State Food Relief Taskforce April 2021

The Taskforce was convened by the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and the Department of Fairness, Families and Housing in April 2021 in response to the **sharp increase in levels of food insecurity** in Victoria.²² The Taskforce was established to provide strategic advice to the government to strengthen and **enhance food relief activity** in Victoria to ensure food supply and distribution are targeted to areas most in need. It comprises senior representatives from food relief organizations, local, state, and federal government, community peak bodies and industry.²³

Working for Victoria 2020

A temporary social protection scheme, **“Working for Victoria”**, was launched in 2020 as part of the Victorian Government’s AUD 1.7 billion Economic Survival Package. The initiative worked with local governments and employers to **employ Victorian jobseekers**, including people who lost their job due to COVID-19, in roles that support the community and contribute to Victoria’s ability to respond to the pandemic.²⁴ The “Working for Victoria” initiative provided employers **access to a labour pool** using an online service through a partnership with Sidelicker, **recruitment services** and financial assistance to **create new roles** that helped Victoria respond to the pandemic. It was praised for allowing some social enterprises to remain open and scale up but received criticisms for placing significant administrative pressure on smaller businesses.

Place-based Initiatives

Groups of place-based initiatives, neighbourhood, grassroots, LGA-based, and mutual aid networks emerged, grew, and gained importance through the pandemic. These groups came together to understand the needs at the local level and gather support from people in the area to try to provide food to people in appropriate ways. Key examples include Alphington Food Hub, Whittlesea Food Collective and Fawkner Food Bowls.

Designated LGA officers 2014-Present

Multiple LGAs had designated positions such as **food system officers, urban agriculture facilitators or agribusiness and food industry facilitation officers**, or allocated food system projects to the portfolio of an existing staff member.²⁵ Most positions were relatively new, with some jobs being created in 2014 and 2015 and several other councils creating positions in recent years. The responsibilities of officers were often incorporated within the community health and well-being and economic development departments. These officers look broadly at the different shocks, stresses, and contributors to a food system. Officers also support the implementation of relevant food system policies, act as conduits, and provide support to help diversify food businesses and build resilience. These positions supported councils and local government in breaking down departmental “silos” by improving cross-organizational communication.²⁹

LGA Food System Strategies 2012-Present

Many LGAs have **community food systems, food security, and urban food strategies**. These strategies identify issues facing municipalities and provide strategic direction to align previous and future work of local government to work across the food system. Furthermore, they include actions **to create healthy, equitable and sustainable local food systems, particularly concerning** food safety regulation, promoting sustainable local food production, reducing food waste, providing safe drinking water and community education on food system issues.⁵ In 2012, the City of Melbourne council implemented the first local food policy in Australia for the City of Melbourne LGA to provide a guiding framework for coordinated action and decision-making to improve the food system.³⁰

Melbourne Food Alliance 2019

The Melbourne City Council established the **Melbourne Food Alliance** in 2019 as a metropolitan-wide governance mechanism to work across councils and private organizations to encourage collaborative planning and action across food system stakeholders. The alliance comprises 12 community leaders from various sectors, including food production, supply and distribution, diet and nutrition, food access, waste, research and academia and local government.

Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group
2021

In response to rising food insecurity caused by COVID-19, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), a statutory authority in Victoria, established the **Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group** in April 2021. The working group comprises stakeholders from various sectors, including food relief, state and local government, research and academia, community health, food movements, social enterprise, multicultural organizations and other food organizations and networks.

“The group was formed to understand and coordinate on-ground collective efforts, to improve the access and availability to healthy food for all Victorians”. – **Local Government Representative, Interview 13**

Food Systems Consensus Statement
May 2022

A key output produced by the **Food Security and Food Systems Working Group** was a **Food Systems Consensus Statement**,³¹ which was released in May 2022. The statement identifies ten leverage points and creates an action and policy agenda for the Victorian Government to take action to address the critical vulnerabilities and shortcomings of the Victorian Food system. The statement provides a framework with clear advocacy that, if implemented, would accelerate the transition toward a food system that is healthy, regenerative, equitable, sustainable, and resilient.

“It is a significant advance of a whole-of-system manifesto-type statement/advocacy agenda to seek a more integrated and coherent approach to food system policymaking in Victoria”. – **Civil Society Organization Representative, Interview 8**

VFMA Accreditation System
2010

The Victorian Farmer’s Market Association (VFMA) was founded in 2004 and driven by lobbying from the Victorian farmer’s market sector. Launched in 2010, the **VFMA accreditation system** underpins the association by ensuring that all farmers are represented and that farmers are selling direct. The pandemic **transformed the membership** and accreditation system into a powerful tool that allowed VFMA, as a member association, to lobby on behalf of all members, markets, and customers directly to Agriculture Victoria and the Department of Health Services (DHS) to **overturn the ban on farmer’s markets** during a state of emergency, allowing farmers to continue selling produce.

Moving Feast
2021

In 2021, **Moving Feast**, a collective of over 20 different organizations and enterprises, **emerged from the pandemic crisis** as a transformative response to provide food relief that was healthy and culturally appropriate. It was described as an innovative drive to separate hunger and food waste by connecting local producers with local food relief agencies. This has evolved into a collective of members looking at how to **transition the food system** at a local and regional level.

Open Food Network
2012 - Present

Open Food Network (OFN) project was founded in 2012 by two individuals as an open-source platform enabling new, ethical supply chains. Open Food Network facilitated farmers and producers to go online and continue selling their products when farmers’ markets were closed. Open Food Network **became important during the pandemic** by making it easy and efficient for food producers to sell products online and wholesalers to manage buying groups and supply through networks of food hubs and shops.

New Food Relief Distribution Agency Responses
2020-Present

Food relief and distribution agencies **adapted and created new responses** when traditional forms of food relief were not possible, mainly caused by the pandemic. An international student food market and voucher programme were delivered by the City of Melbourne; the Victorian State Government and Foodbank Victoria, successfully providing an opportunity for international students who could not work or access financial support during the pandemic to access food. Food relief agencies developed **procurement plans** to reduce reliance on donations from major retailers after experiencing low levels of food availability because of changing purchasing habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contactless operations, such as **drive-through food assistance programmes** and **hamper delivery services**, were implemented to comply with COVID-19 health restrictions.

Job Keeper and Job Seeker
2020-2021

In 2020, the Australian Federal Government announced new social security measures: a new maximum rate of the JobSeeker Payment to around 76 percent of the minimum wage of a full-time worker,³² and a new JobKeeper payment to help keep Australians in jobs by supporting businesses affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19.18 A Coronavirus supplement was included in the JobSeeker payment and initially targeted those looking for work or who had lost their job or income because of the pandemic.

The path forward to a more resilient and sustainable city region food system

The impacts of multiple compounding events on the Melbourne CRFS highlighted how several systems – particularly climate, poverty and food – interconnect and that siloed responses to complex and system-wide problems are insufficient. This experience has exposed the vulnerability of the CRFS as the compounding impacts of multiple shocks and stresses still restrict food accessibility for many. An extensive list of transformative collective initiatives and policy recommendations was discussed. Three of the most needed and actionable were selected to address pending issues and, more broadly, strengthen CRFS resilience and sustainability. Figure 5 unravels how these actions could be moved forward. Each action must embed the self-determination and food sovereignty of First Nations Peoples.

A gulf has been revealed regarding who is responsible and accountable for food access and has demonstrated the government's lack of governance frameworks to address food access. This lesson has intensified calls to implement a formal metropolitan food system governance mechanism that brings all actors responsible for governing the CRFS together to create a coordinated and integrated approach to improve CRFS resilience and sustainability. This mechanism would address the fragmentation of governance across the CRFS, reduce the "siloing" of government departments, reduce power imbalances, and enable governance from the viewpoint of the food

system. Furthermore, this could advance policy reform and regulation to ensure the voices of smallholders, local food system actors and diverse communities, particularly First Nations peoples are represented, empowered, and meaningfully included in decision-making.

The role of CSOs in alleviating food security and responding to the pandemic has proved invaluable. However, their capacity to provide support is inhibited by irregular and short-term funding and a lack of infrastructure to enable collaboration between enterprises. Calls were made for deeper, ongoing, and base investment to fund shared and decentralized food system infrastructure, such as food hubs and processing and distribution facilities. Ultimately, investment in local food system infrastructure will help foster local, regional, and alternative food systems, improve the capacity and leadership potential of already active civil society networks, and contribute to the diversification and decentralization of the CRFS.

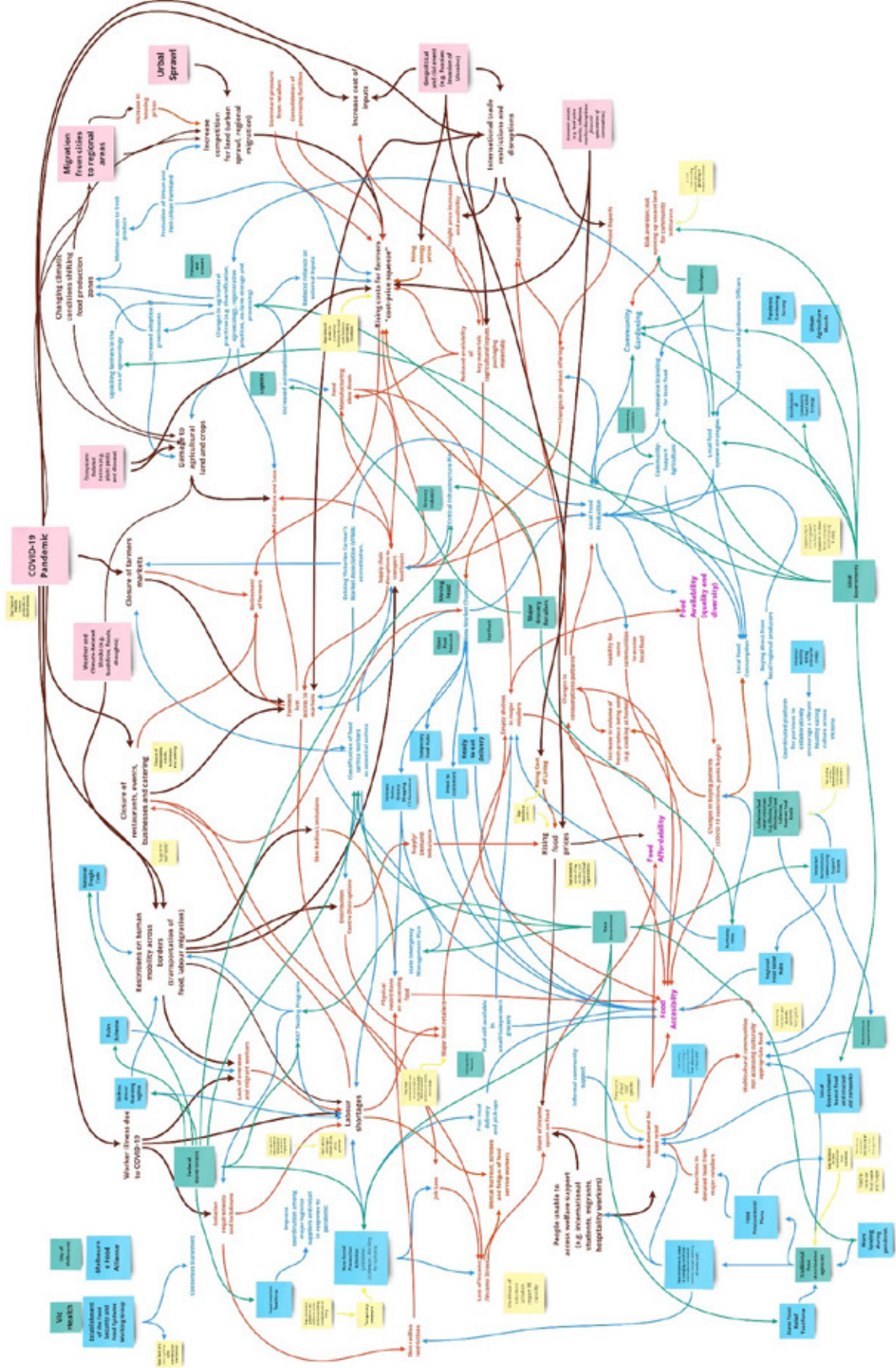
The expansion of support for established emergency food relief networks has undoubtedly softened the impact on many households in the CRFS. Temporary increases in Federal Government social protection schemes resulted in food banks reporting a decline in demand because people could temporarily afford to purchase food. Given that future shocks are anticipated to impact the CRFS, and the rising cost of living remains a major prohibitive factor for people, increasing governmental welfare services was recognized as a solution that is much closer to the heart of the food access problem.

Figure 5 Three priority transformative policies and initiatives selected in the second focus group session. Participants voted on their top three initiatives or policies to transform the Melbourne city region food system. The table includes what needs to be done, how it can be done and the steps to follow to implement these initiatives.

Transformative Policy/Initiative	What needs to be done	How can it be done/who is responsible	Next steps
<p>Development of a metro-wide coordination and governance mechanism such as a food policy council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring CRFS stakeholders responsible for governing different sectors and nodes together to create a more coordinated and integrated approach to improving CRFS resilience and sustainability. Reduce fragmentation of CRFS governance and “silos” of response to system-wide problems. Ensure the voices of diverse and minority communities are represented empowered, and meaningfully included in decision-making. Invest in broad-based resilience and allow coordinated efforts to advance other transformative policies and initiatives such as legislating the right to food, decentralizing food systems, monitoring food system performance or developing public sector food procurement and retail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the rich network of CSOs with a history of lobbying for improved food system governance. Ensure the continued commitment of funding and resources to enable collaboration between stakeholders. Ensure that the policy council is cross-sectoral and prioritizes the voices of First Nations peoples, agricultural communities, smallholders, and diverse communities in decision-making processes. Ensure it is community-led and bring government into the discussion. The VicHealth Food Systems and Food Security Working Group was recognized as having significant progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the long history and strong networks of food system stakeholders in Melbourne advocating for forming a food policy council with a coordinated, community-led advocacy campaign. Leverage existing multistakeholder initiatives such as the VicHealth working group and Melbourne Food Alliance. Use the Consensus Statement produced by the VicHealth Working group as a “springboard” to strengthen advocacy calls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate CRFS stakeholders to collectively lobby the state government. Use the Food Policy Council to take this forward as a major brief. Use previous work such as the Consensus Statement and People’s Food Plan, 33 to propose specific reforms and strengthen advocacy calls. Follow VicHealth’s recent Future Healthy Food Hubs initiative, which invested AUD 4 million across seven local organizations to develop food hubs in regional and urban fringe communities.³⁴
<p>Strengthen local food system infrastructure through funding, policy reform and regulation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide base funding and foundational investments for food enterprises to set up and support long-term systems change rather than single-year projects. Implement a policy that enables locally controlled and owned production, processing and distribution across food and agricultural systems. Provide funding for shared, decentralized physical infrastructure such as food hubs and processing and distribution facilities that encourages and enables the collaboration and long-term thinking required for systems-level change. For example, food hubs can foster collaboration, cooperation, and coordination among CRFS stakeholders, reduce overhead costs for food enterprises through savings on rent and resource sharing, and help small and medium-sized producers connect to CRFS residents. Provide funding for infrastructure that benefits all the businesses in that region instead of allowing a single business to step up in capacity or capability in a particular space, such as renewable energy infrastructure in large manufacturing regions. Overcome government hesitance to invest in physical infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate that shared physical infrastructure for developing local food economies is necessary and that infrastructure can lead to improved collaboration and, more importantly, shared benefit. State Departments should seek to provide grants that benefit multiple actors in one region or sector rather than allowing one business or enterprise to improve capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local governments can call for a significant increase in levels of welfare benefits. For example, in their recent Community Food Relief Strategy (2021-2025), the City of Melbourne have included a call for an increase in levels of welfare benefits to be above the poverty line and increase ongoing support for social housing.³⁵
<p>Improvement of welfare assistance payment and increases in the minimum wage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for the implementation of a universal basic income. Increase in welfare services and increase in the minimum wage with fewer requirements and an autonomous and self-determination-led framework behind it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated lobbying from multiple CRFS stakeholders at Federal Government via State Government. Local governments can include advocacy statements in their food system and food relief strategies. For example, the City of Melbourne Food Relief Strategy.³⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local governments can call for a significant increase in levels of welfare benefits. For example, in their recent Community Food Relief Strategy (2021-2025), the City of Melbourne have included a call for an increase in levels of welfare benefits to be above the poverty line and increase ongoing support for social housing.³⁵

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Figure 6 Relationships between multiple shocks and stresses, the resulting impacts, subsequent policies, initiatives and various city region food system stakeholders. Components are colour coded, where pink demonstrates shocks and stresses; burgundy shows primary impacts of shocks and stresses; blue demonstrates initiatives and policies implemented; green indicates city region food system actors and stakeholders; and yellow reveals gaps and impacts not addressed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Endnotes

- 1 The content of this brief reflects the perception of 15 actors across Melbourne's CRFS (collected through 15 interviews and two focus groups between June and August 2022).
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