



The Grow Cook Share Project

About the Project

The Grow Cook Share Project is a community initiative, led by Bendigo Foodshare, Bendigo Regional Food Alliance, The Salvation Army Bendigo, Kangan TAFE, City of Greater Bendigo and Coliban Water, and funded by the Victorian Government's *Pick my Project* community grants for a 12 month period from March 2019.

The Grow Cook Share Project aims to address the significant local issue of food insecurity for the 10% of Greater Bendigo residents living below the poverty line, where regular access to healthy food is not a reality. One in eleven adults and one in five children in Bendigo do not have enough food to eat on a daily basis (ABS, 2017) and over 50% of adults do not meet the recommended daily intake for fruit and vegetables. In addition to this, poor quality foods high in energy fill stomachs for (sometimes) less cost. An over-reliance on these types of foods puts people at greater risk of chronic disease and obesity, and has a significant effect on physical and mental wellbeing (National Rural Health Alliance, 2016; Burns, 2004).

Bendigo Foodshare is making an impact in combatting this issue. Last year they redistributed over 650,000 kilograms of food that would have otherwise gone to waste to more than 87 emergency relief organisations, including 34 community organisations that cook and serve meals, and 58 schools and preschools. Bendigo Foodshare is providing food for 12,400 people in need every week, an unfortunate increase from 8,400 last year.

While access to fresh produce is part of the problem, many people lack the skills, knowledge, equipment and confidence required to prepare a healthy and tasty meal. People accessing food relief do not always have a choice about the types of fruits and vegetables available to them. We know from conversations with people accessing food relief that they sometimes receive foods they do not know what to do with. Being able to think on their feet and come up with a meal idea can be confronting, and people often revert back to the limited variety of foods they know, or consume expensive take-away food (Burns, 2004).

The Grow Cook Share Project aims to address these issues by contributing to the creation of a strong, sustainable and healthy food system within the Bendigo region, where everyone has access to healthy food on a regular basis. By access, we mean that individuals and families have:

- Physical access to fresh and affordable fruit and vegetables, and other food supplies required for a healthy diet. Where finances are an issue, this supply will be supported through organisations providing emergency food relief.
- An understanding of what nutritious food is and what constitutes a healthy diet, along with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prepare healthy food.
- The storage requirements for food (such as a fridge and cupboards) and access to a stove, oven and other basic cooking equipment.

The Grow Cook Share project will focus on three key areas:

- Establishing and supporting six Cooking Clubs in partnership with community based organisations and volunteer cooks in Bendigo and surrounds. These Cooking Clubs will run 4 classes with participants who currently access emergency food relief, and will teach practical skills in preparing nutritious meals using healthy vegetables and fruit.
- Finding ways to access more fresh produce from community, school and backyard gardens to distribute to the Cooking Clubs and to Bendigo Foodshare.
- Expanding the Salvation Army Gravel Hill Garden to increase its capacity to grow fresh produce to supply the Cooking Clubs and to the local community.





Grow Cook Share Achievements

The Grow Cook Share project has been embraced by the Bendigo Community and has achieved the following to date:

OVERALL:

- Grow Cook Share has an active social media presence, with regular stories being shared on Facebook and Instagram pages. The Grow Cook Share Bendigo Facebook page is particularly active, with nearly 500 followers.
- Local media has supported the project, with 3 WIN Central News stories, and 1 ABC radio story.

GROW COOK SHARE COOKING CLUBS:

- Six organisations have been engaged to run a cooking club: The Salvation Army Bendigo, Saltworks, Anglicare, Eaglehawk Community House, Heathcote Community House and Kangaroo Flat Community House.
- The Salvation Army Bendigo has successfully conducted and completed the first 'pilot' Grow Cook Share Cooking Club.
- A two day Training Workshop has recently been completed for participating organisations.
- A draft Grow Cook Share Cooking Club Manual has been developed and shared with participating organisations.

FOOD RECOVERY:

- Bendigo Foodshare has been working with local supermarkets to improve the quality and quantity of food recovered, with great success. Not only has the quality improved, the collapse of Heathcote Foodshare in late September led to Bendigo Foodshare rapidly expanding local pick ups from 40 to 96 collections seven days a week, increasing the amount of locally rescued food by over 30,000kg per month.
- The Grow a Row or Pick a Branch campaign has been launched to engage the Bendigo community's help in accessing fresh produce, by encouraging them to grow and donate some of their home grown produce to Bendigo Foodshare. To date, 322kg of homegrown produce has been donated to Bendigo Foodshare by backyard, community and school gardens. Other activities include:
 - Planting 160kg of seeding and sprouting potatoes in over 20 backyard, school and community gardens. Potatoes were donated by three local businesses, with the harvest to be shared with the grower and Bendigo Foodshare.
 - 50 tomato seedlings were donated by Mitre 10 Hume & Iser and shared with the 6 Grow Cook Share Cooking Clubs, and a number of community and school gardens. The tomatoes will be used by Cooking Clubs and excess will be shared with the community, including Bendigo Foodshare.
 - More than 10 schools are participating in the Grow a Row or Pick a Branch campaign, with educators valuing the opportunity to engage their students in the community service element of this campaign, extending and strengthening current school vegetable patch and cooking programs.
 - Partnerships with community groups (e.g. Bendigo Regional Fruit Fly Action Group and Kalianna School).
 - Local Grow a Row or Pick a Branch community initiatives, for example the Heathcote Community are establishing produce tables at various organisations to swap and share produce.

GRAVEL HILL COMMUNITY GARDEN, SALVATION ARMY:

- Construction of the new garden beds are nearly complete, extending the growing space within the garden by XXm². Completed garden beds have been planted with summer vegetables, with excess produce to be shared with Grow Cook Share Cooking Clubs.

