



STRATEGIC PLANNING DISCUSSION PAPER

July 2025

INTRODUCTION

Bendigo Foodshare is a not-for-profit charity that works to reduce food insecurity across central Victoria. Operations commenced in 2013 with the organisation growing exponentially since that time. Today it is governed by a nine-member volunteer Board, staffed by a mix of a small team of paid staff and many dedicated volunteers, operating from a purpose-built facility in Breen Street, Golden Square.

Bendigo Foodshare operates a seven-day service that sources rescued, donated and surplus food as well as purchasing food, distributing it via food partners including local charities, community groups and schools across central Victoria who in turn provide food relief to approximately 15,500 people each week. Bendigo Foodshare does not currently provide food relief directly to the community.

In 2019 a survey of almost 25,000 residents living in the Loddon Campaspe region (Active Living Census) found that one in 10 households (9.2%) in the region were food insecure – they did not have enough to eat. In some areas, this increased to one in 7 households. This was higher than the Victorian average of 6.2%. Since that time, the region, like other parts of Australia, has experienced significant cost of living increases leading to more people seeking food relief.

While the core objective of Bendigo Foodshare is to rescue food that would otherwise go to waste and distribute this food as food relief, Bendigo Foodshare is also committed to working with the community to increase food skills, including growing and cooking and skills, and to reduce the stigma and barriers to accessing help when it is needed.

In 2021 the Bendigo Foodshare Board developed the 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan:

Vision

Every person in central Victoria has secure access to healthy food.

Purpose

With passionate committed volunteers at our heart, we're working together with partners and community to connect people to healthy, affordable food by improving local supply and access, developing food skills and supporting a sustainable and healthy environment.

Values

Create **Connection** – we make meaningful connections with each other, the community and environment.

Act with **Integrity** – we say what we mean, and we do what we say.

Respect each other – we value and support people for their abilities, qualities and differences.

Show **Courage** – we face opportunities and challenges with passion, hope and innovation.

Principles

Strategic alignment

- all decisions and actions will support our strategic goals and objectives.

Triple bottom line sustainability

- we commit to focusing as much on social and environmental impacts as on financial impacts.

Community ownership

- community is engaged in the leadership and delivery of our services ensuring they respond to local needs.

Drive social justice

- we acknowledge diversity and discrimination within our community and aim to achieve equity and inclusion in all our decisions.

Collaborate for mutual benefits

- we will partner with others who share our goals for the benefit of our community.

Do no harm

- we will consider potential negative impacts of our actions and seek to eliminate, reduce or mitigate them.

Strategic Goals

We are living in an era of increasing community need. By embracing innovation, we plan to increase and improve:

Goal 1 – Access to healthy and sustainable food

Goal 2 – Organisational capability, capacity and culture

Goal 3 – Engagement with partners, stakeholders and community

The organisation signs off on annual business plan that includes actions that will take us closer to these goals. The Board then receives a quarterly update on implementation. Much has been achieved, and it is now time to revisit our strategy.

This paper provides a summary of our operations; its strengths and its challenges. At the end of the paper, there are a series of questions that we need to consider in the development of our new Strategic Plan 2026-2030. We would appreciate your thoughts and ideas to strengthen our approach.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS/ IMPACT

Since 2021 we have:

- Established new food supplier relationships and strengthened established ones
- Worked with over 90 food partners to distribute food relief across central Victoria
- Established a new purpose-built \$3.8M facility in Breen Street, Golden Square
- Developed a Masterplan for the Breen Street site
- Established Golden Gums Farm to grow produce
- Supported 5 young people to complete 'traineeships'
- Strengthened our work in the prevention of food insecurity
- Strengthened our governance and business systems
- Appointed our first Chief Executive Officer
- Attracted a highly engaged workforce that includes over 345 volunteers

In 2023 – 2024 we:

- Sourced 824,561kg food including 51,698kg shared with other regions
- Provided the equivalent of 1.64M meals
- Provided \$6.1M of food value
- Undertook 4,532 supermarket collections
- Donations of 18,562kg fresh fruit and vegetables
- 3,589 meals were made locally through our cooking programs
- Saved 1,566 tonnes of CO2 equivalent greenhouse gases
- Saved 116M litres of water
- Worked with 327 volunteers who provided 29,876 hours of labour valued at \$1.3M

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Delivering a food relief service is financially challenging. Operational funding from the State Government has recently been confirmed, but only until June 2027. This funding however only covers around one third of our operating costs. For the balance, we are dependent on funds from one off government and philanthropic grants and fundraising campaigns and initiatives. In 2025 Bendigo Foodshare adopted a Financial Strategy (2024-2028) which outlines the importance of and need for maximising and diversifying revenue. It also sets targets for different types of revenue and describes strategies to achieve these. The strategy also recognises that donated food and donated labour (from volunteers) is an important source of revenue even though no cash is transacted.

Attracting one off funding for capital projects such as our new building is easier than attracting funds for operations as people can see the outcome of their donation. As the organisation has grown, costs have risen. We now need to raise approximately \$1.5m each year to maintain operations.

The challenge of attracting funds for food relief agencies across the state led to the establishment of the Regional Food Security Alliance (RFSA). Chaired by the previous Bendigo Foodshare Board Chair with membership from Foodshares across regional Victoria (excluding Ballarat and Gippsland who are serviced by Foodbank Victoria). RFSA is working hard, lobbying State and Commonwealth

governments to secure funds for what we do. It also works across the state to redistribute excess food that individual agencies can't manage. In 2023–24 Bendigo Foodshare redistributed 51,698kg of food to other parts of regional Victoria.

Our volunteer team now coordinate both an Easter and Spring Book Fair. These successful events sell tens of thousands of books, raising more than \$100,000pa. The Board has been exploring other revenue raising enterprises aligned to our purpose.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

As highlighted already, Bendigo Foodshare has grown significantly over the last few years, now employing a Chief Executive Officer, a small staff team (9 FTE equiv.) and over 345 volunteers working from a purpose-built facility with supporting infrastructure. As this growth has evolved, the organisation has worked hard to strengthen its governance and corporate systems making sure it is professional in its practice and ensures all staff and volunteers are safe and supported.

Bendigo Foodshare is now located on nearly 5 acres of Crown Land in Breen Street, Golden Square. Over the last year we have been working on a Masterplan to develop the site into a Community Food Hub. Our goal is to make the site a place where community can come together, connect with others and immerse themselves in the joys of growing, sharing and appreciating local food.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

With recent cost of living rises and an increased incidence of fire and floods, the need for food relief has gained more profile. Aligned with the growing awareness of the importance of good food for health and wellbeing, there has been greater focus on food systems and their impact.

Bendigo Foodshare has been involved with local and regional partners on the development and implementation of local strategies including:

- The City of Greater Bendigo Food System's Strategy
- The Central Goldfields Food Systems Strategy
- Flourish – Regional Food System Framework, Loddon Campaspe region.

Across regional Victoria there is a growing demand for food relief and a declining supply. We are seeing a growing demographic of people seeking food relief beyond vulnerable populations. Traditional sources of food relief from Melbourne agencies have shrunk as demand for food relief grows. This has made it more and more challenging to source sufficient supplies to meet demand in central Victoria. We have worked with local food producers and manufacturers to build supplies using funds to purchase food when available as well as receiving food donations. The RFSA is forecasting a 6.5% decrease in food relief distribution.

The growing awareness of the importance of creating healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems has led to much research on what constitutes best practice. Bendigo Foodshare continues to explore what others are doing both locally, nationally and overseas to see how it can improve its approach.

PREVENTION

Many factors contribute to the increasing rates of food insecurity across the community. Some of these factors can be addressed through programs that build skills in growing food and preparing healthy, affordable meals.

Bendigo Foodshare has been the successful recipient of grants from VicHealth and other funders to deliver programs that aim to prevent food insecurity such as:

- Grow a Row, Pick a Branch
- Golden Gums Farm workshops
- Cooking for Change - Schools & Corporates
- Café for a Day
- Produce Markets

Demand for these successful programs is growing across the region. Unfortunately, resourcing constraints puts these programs at risk with growing competition for available funds to run these types of programs.

CURRENT PRIORITIES

In addition to business as usual and activities discussed above, the Board has been exploring and implementing the following initiatives:

Growing Regions infrastructure project

In 2024 Bendigo Foodshare was notified it had been successful in attracting \$665k from the Commonwealth Government to extend the capacity, capability and sustainability of the Breen St site. This includes a commercial kitchen, solar energy and site works. Funding has now flowed so implementation is underway with close to 100KW of solar panels installed to assist with power costs.

Enterprise Hub – governance & infrastructure

Following the success of the Book Fair, the Board has been exploring other potential enterprise models it can use to increase financial sustainability. These ideas need to be aligned with our values and principles. They also will need initial investment, so resources are not taken from delivering our core business.

Breen Street Site Governance

Bendigo Foodshare currently leases the Breen Street site from the City of Greater Bendigo who is the nominated Committee of Management (COM) as the site is Crown Land. The lease is for 9 years however we are exploring how we can extend the lease to 21 years and ultimately become COM ourselves. The City is supportive however there are complex issues to work through with State Government.

Land Use Activity Agreement (LUAA)

Bendigo Foodshare was one of the first organisations to develop a LUAA with the Dja Dja Wurrung who are the traditional owners of the Crown Land we lease. The agreement includes a range of obligations that we need to deliver. This includes development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Rules of Incorporation

As an Incorporated Association we are governed by our Rules of Incorporation in alignment with the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission. A review of our Rules is currently underway to ensure contemporary practice.

Strengths, Challenges & Opportunities

The following is a summary of some of the identified strengths, challenges and opportunities Bendigo Foodshare faces.

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Our people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteers > 345 – low turnover - Staff – 9 full time equivalent - Board – 9 members <p>Our culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values driven – respected / trusted - Problem solvers – outcomes focused - Growth mindset <p>Our capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relief & prevention of food insecurity - Story telling - Marketing - Grant applications & fundraising <p>Our community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing donations - >\$1.5M raised for new warehouse - Land use donated Golden Gums Farm <p>Our partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food distribution > 90 partner agencies - Regional Food Security Alliance - VicHealth <p>Our Governance / Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies – Board / Operations - Financial management - Occupational Health & Safety systems 	<p>Food supply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition with other food relief agencies to source food e.g. Foodbank, SecondBite - Declining food supply from Foodbank - Maintaining profile with local supermarkets – staff turnover - Manufacturers & Supermarkets cutting down on waste - Cost of food to purchase - Lack of clear service catchment / increasing demand <p>Financial Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of recurrent funding from State / Commonwealth Governments - Increasing competition for donations / grants - Grant makers always looking for big new ideas rather than funding existing initiatives. - Increased costs e.g. fuel, water, energy - Developing an Enterprise hub <p>Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand for programs across the region but no funding. - Lack of external funding commitment to prevention activities. <p>Our people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balancing expectations whilst preventing staff burnout 	<p>Food Relief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore new models e.g. Social Supermarkets/Farm Shop/Coop. - Develop new partnerships e.g. Manufacturers/Farmers/Loddon Mallee - Increase understanding of “lived experience” - “Brand our food” – speak to the ‘end user’ <p>Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilise partner agencies – train the trainer - Explore new models e.g. growing own food, co-farming <p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measure food miles - Review brand – CV catchment - Implementation of Breen St Masterplan - Wills & bequests - Financial Strategy implementation - Enterprise Hub – economic activities to improve financial sustainability - Use of Commercial Kitchen - AI <p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase profile of Bendigo Foodshare regionally - Bendigo Farmers Market partnership - Regional Local Government partnerships - Public transport advocacy to Breen St.

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Our Environmental Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Circular Economy - Composting - Solar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding to increasingly regular emergencies on top of business as usual. - Ensuring appropriate systems are in place for staff/volunteer safety as organisation grows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional Food Security Alliance – Advocacy agenda

In developing our new strategic plan, we are asking ourselves and our stakeholders:

1. What should we do more of and what should we do less of?
2. What should we be advocating to Local, State & Federal Governments for to help us address food insecurity in our region?
3. Are there other models of food relief that we should explore that might be more financially sustainable?
4. What other financially sustainable approaches should we consider to source food for food relief?
5. What other approaches can we take to raise funds to continue to support our operations?
6. What other initiatives should Bendigo Foodshare undertake to strengthen and resource our prevention work?
7. How will we know if our efforts to address regional food insecurity are successful?
8. What actions does the organisation need to take to strengthen its governance and corporate systems?
9. Who else should we be partnering with to help us achieve our vision?
10. What role should Bendigo Foodshare take in working towards a healthy, equitable and sustainable regional food system?