

29 September 2025

Dear Hon Julie Collins MP ,

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the National Food Security Strategy Discussion Paper. At this critical juncture, Australia faces interconnected food system challenges that threaten community health, environmental sustainability, supply chain resilience, and economic prosperity. Rising food insecurity, vulnerable supply chains, and mounting environmental impacts demand transformative policy responses.

While we commend the Australian Government's commitment to developing this strategy, we emphasise that success requires learning from past efforts. Previous public health and climate-related strategies have struggled to achieve meaningful impact due to inadequate implementation frameworks, failure to address power imbalances that favour corporate concentration over community needs, and limited authentic community participation in policy development.

About Regen Melbourne

[Regen Melbourne \(RM\)](#) serves as a catalyst for collaboration to create a safe, just and regenerative Greater Melbourne. Born from the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Summer bushfires, we unite an alliance of over 200 organisations committed to systems-level transformation and funded by government, philanthropy and impact investors. Our portfolio spans three ambitious [Earthshots](#) and a range of place-based, community-informed projects while our [Systems Lab](#) –which includes a distinctive partnership with six Melbourne universities – explores the enabling conditions for change. Our mission is clear: to position Melbourne within the safe and just operating space where human needs are met within ecological limits.

Our Food System Work

Our work is rooted in strong connections with the organisations and communities that nourish Melbourne. We channel a shared vision of the diverse actors across the food system, from growers and retailers to community food enterprises and youth advocates, who are united in building a thriving, regenerative, and equitable food system for our city. To uncover the systemic barriers that stand in the way of this transformation, we undertook an extensive sensemaking process, mapping the realities of Melbourne's current food system and identifying clear pathways for meaningful change. The insights from this phase of work can be found in [The Foodie City We Need to Become: Greater Melbourne's Systemic Opportunity](#) report.

Key Systemic Issues Identified

Our sensemaking process identified four critical systemic barriers to food system transformation that we urge the Feeding Australia strategy to address:

1. **Entrenched Inequities** – Historical injustices continue to shape and constrain our food system, perpetuating disadvantage across communities. A narrow focus on economic

growth over collective wellbeing has locked the system into patterns that deepen inequality.

2. **Climate Vulnerability**– Rapid environmental change is exposing our food supply to unprecedented risks, pushing system resilience beyond its limits. Insufficient planning and adaptation measures leave us dangerously unprepared.
3. **Ecological Degradation** – Predominant production methods are eroding ecosystems, diminishing biodiversity and disrupting the natural balance essential for long-term food security.
4. **Institutional Fragmentation** – Disconnected governance structures, regulatory frameworks, and investment practices reinforce siloed approaches, blocking the coordinated action needed for genuine transformation.

Our Vision: Nourished Neighbourhoods

As we identified the systemic barriers to a thriving, healthy food system, we also uncovered clear pathways to guide the transition ahead. These pathways are detailed below in our recommendations for the Feeding Australia strategy. All proposed actions align with our Earthshot for Melbourne – [Nourished Neighbourhoods](#) – a vision of communities where everyone has access to healthy, affordable, regenerative food and where local food systems generate shared economic prosperity.

Intentionally aspirational, this vision underscores the scale of transformation required. We urge the Australian Government to adopt a similarly ambitious approach in shaping this strategy, using inclusive, aspirational language that resonates across diverse communities and reflects the food system’s many dimensions, from economy and nutrition to health, environmental sustainability, community connection, and belonging.

Our recommendations below are grounded in the insights and aspirations shared through our sensemaking process and reflect the lived experiences of the many partners and communities we work alongside across Melbourne to create a food system that nourishes both people and planet.

Place-Based Approaches and Equity need to be core principles of the design of the strategy

We strongly recommend embedding "place-based and localised approaches" as a core principle, recognising that Australia's diverse geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts require tailored solutions rather than uniform policies. Building on Treasurer Jim Chalmers’ [interest](#) in place-based work, we need to recognise that remote Indigenous communities, urban food deserts, and regional agricultural areas each present unique challenges requiring contextually appropriate responses.

Community-led initiatives like Box Divvy and Community Grocer [demonstrate](#) this approach's effectiveness, successfully reducing food insecurity while supporting local economies and growers. Foodprint Melbourne's recent [research](#) further highlights the importance of local food systems in building climate resilience.

The strategy must establish mechanisms for authentic community consultation and regional adaptation, empowering local stakeholders—including community leaders, Traditional Owners, and residents with lived experience—to contribute substantially to both development and

implementation. The Federal government should draw from proven place-based initiatives such as [City Deals](#), [PLACE](#), and [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) to inform these participatory frameworks.

Equity must be embedded throughout the strategy as a core principle, grounded in the fundamental recognition that access to nourishment is a human right. Low-income households, geographically isolated communities, and refugee and migrant populations face disproportionate barriers to nutritious food access due to systematic structural issues rather than individual circumstances.

The strategy should prioritise First Nations food sovereignty and approaches that address the gendered nature of food system impacts, and ensure culturally responsive actions are integrated across all components. This requires addressing root causes of inequality rather than merely treating symptoms.

Productivity should be reconceptualised within a wellbeing frame

We recommend reconceptualising the "productivity, innovation and economic growth" priority area within a broader wellbeing framework. As addressed by The Australia Institute's [submission](#) to the Productivity Commission, there are multiple issues with taking a narrow productivity angle. CSIRO's national food systems [stocktake](#) demonstrates how narrow economic focus has marginalised sustainability, equity, and health considerations, potentially harming communities if equitable food access is not prioritised alongside productivity measures.

The strategy should integrate wellbeing economics principles and adopt metrics from established Federal policies that embed productivity within broader wellbeing outcomes, including the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), [Measuring What Matters](#), and the [National Cities Performance Framework](#). This approach ensures economic growth serves community and ecological wellbeing rather than operating at its expense.

Nutrition security should be prioritised over food insecurity

The strategy should elevate nutrition and health as key priority areas, moving beyond traditional food security to embrace nutritional security. While food security ensures sufficient calories, nutritional security ensures access to foods that promote health and wellbeing.

Current productivity emphasis has created a system that excels at producing ultra processed foods while struggling to make nourishing food accessible. The strategy should prioritise ensuring all Australians have reliable access to culturally appropriate, nutritious foods supporting both human health and environmental sustainability.

The over-reliance on food relief exemplifies this challenge. As identified in the Centre for Policy Development's Avoidable Costs [report](#), food relief represents failure demand, often providing highly processed foods lacking nutritional value.

We recommend the strategy incorporates lessons from existing place-based programs that prioritise nutrition security, ecological wellbeing and local economic prosperity. These include but are not limited to:

- [The Community Grocer](#) operates markets within public housing communities, simultaneously improving residents' access to nutritious food while providing meaningful economic support to local producers.
- [VicHealth](#) has demonstrated sustained commitment through their previous [Future Healthy food hub](#) investment and current support for [local food partnerships](#), recognising food access as a key health determinant.
- [Whittlesea Food Collective](#) operates an innovative wholesale model that enables institutions to source regenerative food directly from local producers, creating new market pathways for sustainable agriculture.
- [The Good Food for All program](#), delivered by [Open Food Network](#), implements a targeted voucher system that connects low-income communities with nourishing food while supporting local community food enterprises.

Strengthen Climate and Ecological Health Focus

Climate change and sustainability should be elevated to a priority area with expanded scope addressing interconnected environmental threats. Food systems face multiple challenges including biodiversity loss, land degradation, freshwater depletion, nutrient cycle disruption, and chemical pollution, requiring comprehensive responses aligned with planetary boundaries [framework](#).

In light of the recent [report](#) of Australia's dire future as outlined in the first National Climate Risk Assessment, the strategy should mandate climate risk assessments for food system policies, invest substantially in localised sustainable food initiatives, and fully implement domestic sustainability standards including the Australian Agricultural Sustainability [Framework](#). This approach recognises that environmental health is fundamental to long-term food security.

Invest in Local Food System Resilience

We welcome the inclusion of resilience in this strategy and urge the adoption of a holistic, systemic approach, one that challenges the overreliance on export-market productivity as the primary measure of value in our food system. Strengthening localised food networks is essential to building true resilience. By moving beyond a supermarket-dominated model, local systems create multiple pathways for food to reach cities, reducing vulnerability to supply-chain disruptions.

A powerful opportunity lies in leveraging institutional food procurement to stimulate demand for local, regenerative production and bolstering the resilience of supply. Schools, hospitals, aged-care facilities, and government agencies hold significant purchasing power that, when strategically directed, can create viable markets for sustainable producers while improving nutrition and lowering the environmental footprint of our food supply. Regen Melbourne is contributing to a national [investigation](#) into how Australia can unlock these procurement opportunities and establish supportive policy frameworks. Focusing on preparedness and localised solutions- across security, sustainability, democracy, defence, risk management, and infrastructure- will help secure a more resilient food future, echoing the principles of Professor Tim Lang's food resilience [framework](#).

Address Local Implications of Competition Policy

A place-based approach to competition policy must address the economic dynamics reshaping neighbourhoods. Corporate consolidation, particularly through supermarket chains and fast food outlets, is creating local monopolies that extract wealth from communities while limiting consumer choice.

This “economic leakage” erodes the viability of small businesses and diminishes the diversity that once defined vibrant neighbourhood economies. While national competition frameworks remain essential— and we would welcome the implementation of the ACCC supermarket inquiry’s [recommendations](#) when that occurs— effective intervention also requires a neighbourhood-level lens. Market concentration plays out locally, where residents feel its immediate effects on affordability, choice, and economic opportunity.

The strategy should therefore embed urban-planning tools and food-system governance mechanisms that account for the spatial and economic impacts of consolidation, opening pathways for diverse food enterprises to take root and flourish within communities.

Ensure Whole-of-Government and Sector Coordination

Effective implementation of the Feeding Australia strategy requires robust governance structures that bring together all relevant government departments. CSIRO research reveals that food policy is currently fragmented across 11 federal portfolios, creating significant coordination challenges that undermine both policy effectiveness and coherence. To address this fragmentation, the strategy must establish formal governance and implementation structures with mandatory representation from key departments including Health and Aged Care, Social Services, Treasury, Finance, and Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. It must also ensure policy coherence across government strategies within the Department Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, including the recently launched [Agriculture and Land Sector Plan](#). This integrated approach will ensure coordinated action across health, social services, environmental, and economic portfolios. Additionally, governance structures need to support sector-wide collaboration and coordination. We recommend establishing the National Food Council and related implementation groups using collaborative governance models that prioritise collective action. The Federal government should draw lessons from successful cross-governmental initiatives such as [City Deals](#), the [National Biosecurity Committee](#), and the [Murray-Darling Basin Community Committee](#). By analysing both the successes and barriers encountered by these existing collaborative frameworks, the government can develop more effective structures for the coordinated design and implementation of the Feeding Australia strategy.

Establish Inclusive and Community-Focused Governance

We recommend establishing participatory governance structures that guarantee balanced representation across the full spectrum of food system stakeholders. Industry-dominated councils risk overlooking essential perspectives on health, equity, and sustainability—perspectives critical to achieving genuine food security and addressing systemic challenges.

Community participation should be embedded throughout the strategy’s development, not

confined to a single consultation period, creating an ongoing platform for meaningful community engagement and dialogue on key food system issues.

An instructive model is [The Food Conversation](#) initiated by the UK's [Food, Farming and Countryside Commission](#). This process brought together a diverse cross-section of community members who deepened their understanding of the food system's complexities while articulating their vision for the future of food. The UK government then built on this work by forming a [Citizens' Advisory Council](#) to help shape its national food strategy. Australia should adopt a similar approach—compensating participants and ensuring representation from a diverse range of lived experiences— while establishing this Council as a cross-portfolio body reporting directly to Cabinet, rather than solely to the Minister for Agriculture.

Final Remarks

The National Food Security Strategy offers a transformative pathway toward food systems that serve all Australians while regenerating the ecosystems upon which our future depends. The recommendations above—embedding place-based equity, reconceptualising productivity through wellbeing frameworks, and establishing inclusive governance—can catalyse the systemic change required for resilient, nourishing food systems. Regen Melbourne stands ready to contribute our networks and expertise to this vital endeavour, ensuring Australia's food future reflects our highest aspirations for social justice, ecological health, and shared prosperity.

With gratitude,



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