

Impacts of Localized Food Systems Greenbelts Case Study Melbourne and Victoria - Australia

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Project Objectives

- Document the scale, importance, role and benefits of local food production and its social, environmental and economic outcomes.
- Focus on Greenbelt Areas - urban, peri-urban or interface areas, regional city and small scale agriculture by using three different spatial scales of 'local':
 - Metropolitan Scale: Melbourne metropolitan area
 - Melbourne to Ballarat Regional Transport Corridor: Series of urban and regional local government areas
 - Regional Service Centre

What is Local Food?

- No universally accepted and adopted definition of a local food system or local food.
- Generally used definitions of local food and local food systems that embrace four broad concepts.
 - 1. That the food is grown in the general locality in which it is consumed.
 - 2. That the distances that the food is transported are minimized.
 - 3. That if food is processed it is done so in the general locality in which it is grown and consumed.
 - 4. That food that is grown locally can be purchased locally.

What is a Local Food System?

- Literature: Return to sense of place, equitable food access, a strengthening of local economies and opportunities for embedding environmental best practice – all often features of Greenbelts
- Variety of terms: alternative food initiatives (or networks), community food security, post-productivism, and shortened food chains.

(Feagan 2007)

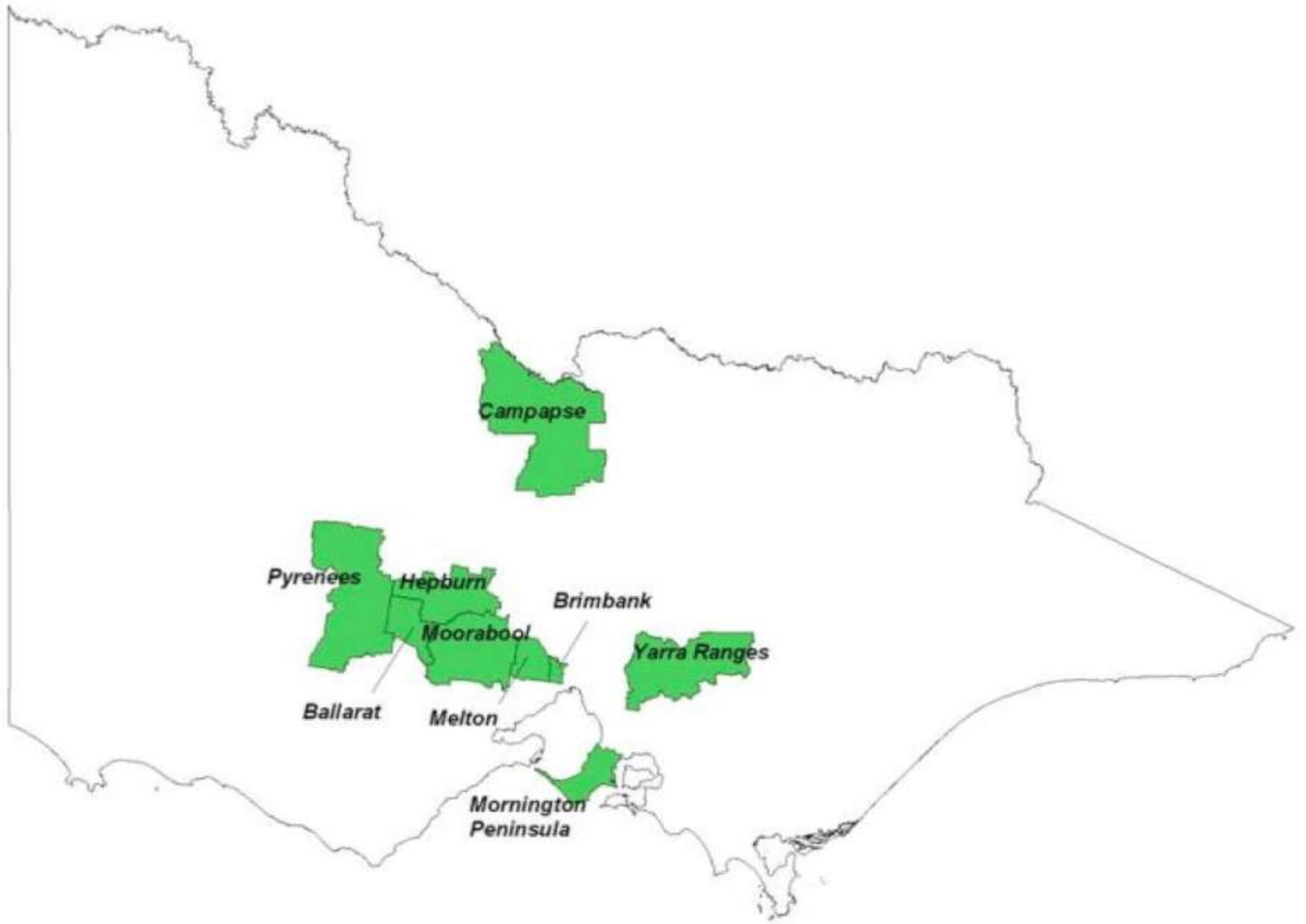
What is a Local Food System?

A local food system generally exemplifies:

- Focus on small scale production
- Greater connection with the land
- Shortening of 'food miles'
- Socially embedded economies based on place.
- The generation of money in the local economy
- Meeting the consumer appeal for fresh, safe and better tasting food.
- Consumer desire for improved environmental practices.
(Seyfang 2008)

Methodology

- Case study approach - broad series of 'local' geographical areas generally identified with Greenbelts providing:
 - Comparative data and analysis - agricultural land use, economic structure and impact
 - Qualitative information – from a wide range of stakeholder interests and communities.
 - Purposeful sampling method



The impacts of a localised food supply
Evidence?

What is the

Data Collection Methods

Fieldwork research:

Structured in-depth interviews – 146

- Growers/Producers – 104
 - Retailers – 11
 - Community Groups – 11
 - Service Providers – 20
 - Focus Groups – 9
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- Detailed profiles of the economic activity, agricultural land use and the local food economy in 9 selected case study areas

Fieldwork Research

- Research was conducted in 13 local government areas
- Interviews conducted at markets (predominantly farmers' markets), retail outlets eg farm gate sales, and various individual, local government and community group locations

Definition and Awareness of Local Food Systems

- Parameters of distance between production and consumption eg 100 kms
- Physical and political boundaries eg state, regional or municipal identifiers
- Social connotations eg community - community gardens, backyard growing
- Local food in association with an identified location eg Greenbelt areas

Definition and Awareness of Local Food Supplies

- *To me, “local” is Victoria –Grower/Producer*
- *Local is regional produce first then produce from a wider distance and what is available seasonally. I first look to local, state then interstate – need for compromise with other products – Grower/Producer*
- *Local is seasonal. During winter “local” becomes produce from within the State area to make up supply quota – Retailer*
- *Local moves around the country in reality and expands to areas of economy. Distance or boundaries are not used to define local – Grower/Producer*
- *Grown locally. Marketed locally – Identified as Local - Community Group*

Economic Impact of a LFS

- **The concept of economic impact of local food is diverse**
- The local market place connects producers and consumers, and becomes a nursery for new businesses eg marketing and word of mouth
- Identity of place is important
- Farmers' Markets advantages eg empowerment but not always reliable income
- Farmers' Markets flow on effect in building identity and tourism
- Employment generation – generally low and fluid – seasonal
- Valuable role of LFS: nurtures entrepreneurship, innovation and connection between people in the local community

Environmental Impact of a LFS

- Preservation and conservation of land for food supply activity and other agricultural uses against urban encroachment
- Practices eg soil farming, organic production, heirloom crop and rare breed preservation
- Using land for compatible traditional crops over mass produced varieties
- Transport and emission reduction
- Consumer trust for local produce and the appreciation of the educational exchange between producer and consumer

Social Impact of a LFS

- An important outlet for interaction and networking
- Opportunity for consumers to forge a tangible link and relationship with their produce source
- Source of fundraising for community groups
- LFS can fill essential gaps eg access to nutritional sources
- Assist skill transfer and development, foster community connections across all demographics
- Partnerships with government

Barriers to LFS

- Lack of understanding and education of the value of LFS by the wider community and government...
- ... countered by a lack of knowledge about who the producers are and what is available in communities;
- Cost of local food and a perception that it is “boutique”/ a luxury
- Lack of resources for local growers e.g. marketing training and subsidies;
- Incompatible regulatory systems for small growers and subsequent bureaucracy and paperwork
- Prohibitive start-up costs;
- Water restrictions

Addressing Barriers to LFS

- Distribution reform in favor of the local level e.g. community food co-ops, community supported agriculture; government support of local food and cost absorption to make local food more affordable for consumers;
- Incorporation of local food supplies into municipal health and well-being plans;
- Greater links between producers and consumers e.g. local produce directories;
- Greater consideration of food supply in local government decision-making and coordination of local food supply across local government departments;
- Increased water allocations and opportunities for local producers to develop their business such as providing start-up support; and
- Marketing training and events for small producers to showcase produce.

Exploration of Changing Industry and Social Profiles

- Patterns over the past 30 years suggest significant changes in the use, value and perceptions of Rural and Greenbelt areas
- Decrease in large farm numbers and increase in scale, reliance on non-farm income, declining farmer numbers and ageing profile of farmers, but increase part-time farming and an increase of non-farming land uses
- Traditional, transitional, amenity and multifunctional landscapes
- Process of restructure and change has not been uniform geographically or between industry and commodity types
- Complexity of the process of change is revealed in the 9 profile study areas selected for this research

Exploration of Changing Industry and Social Profiles

- Counter-urbanization - is a strong feature of population change in
- Decline in agricultural employment (and a concurrent ageing of the farmer population)
- Agricultural Profiles: processes of land use change - dual processes of fewer, larger farms, proliferation of small and sub-commercial farms in those areas in Greenbelts and closer to large urban centers and 'amenity' landscapes in hills and along the coast
- Farm business numbers – declining or stable in the 'solid' agricultural areas

Yarra Valley Case Study

- Victorian government in the late 1960s realized that the natural resources and agricultural productivity of the Upper Yarra region were more valuable to the state than the economic benefits from intensive land development
- Introduction of strong regulatory measures which continue to underpin the benefits of a highly productive agricultural region linked to environmental, recreational and tourism services, primary industry, and a wide range of business activities
- Highlights how deliberate policy and action taken some thirty to forty years ago, together with ongoing processes to protect and support allow the potential and benefits of LFS to be fully realized

Summary

1. Local food and local food systems are an increasingly important concept, needs to be clearly defined and importance recognized – Importance of profiling in Greenbelts
2. Strong evidence from the fieldwork research and the interviews conducted that there are social and community benefits from local food production – which are yet to be fully quantified
3. Information collected by standard processes associated with agricultural and business data is limited in its capacity to document local food production and the operation of local food systems
4. Economic and environmental benefits from protecting/supporting local food production often only revealed over a longer timeframe than governments/communities are used to working with