Our Local Food System

Alexandrina Workshop Report
October 2021

This project is led by:

First Nations acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this region and acknowledge their connections to the land, waters and community. The Alexandrina Council region intersects the traditional lands of the following Aboriginal Nations and Clan:

- Ngarrindjeri (Nation)
  - Ramindjeri (Clan)
- Peramangk (Nation)
- Kaurna (Nation)

We pay our respect to their elders past, present and future.

Project background

In 2020, an emerging group called the Food Systems Network were successful in obtaining a grant from the Local Government Association of South Australia Research and Development Scheme for a project called Local government: Enabling resilient food systems in South Australia.

The project aims to engage local government, communities and stakeholders to build the resilience of local food systems in the face of climate change risks.

A consultancy team, Ethical Fields in association with Sustain and Collaborative Futures, were engaged to work with us on the project.

One of the key goals is to offer a guide for local governments to understand their role in enabling local food systems. The resources developed through this project will contribute to building the capacity of local government staff, elected members and communities to value local food systems, remove barriers and support climate-resilient initiatives.

Figure 1: Visioning exercise

To develop this guide, and to help each Council with future strategy, four participating Councils – Alexandrina Council, City of Onkaparinga, District Council of Mount Barker and City of Marion, held local workshops for people to join us to explore what a healthy and sustainable food system looks like. How can it drive climate change action? How can it support local jobs? How can it reduce food waste? And how can it connect us as a community?

What is a local food system?

A local food system is an integrated network of food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management within a particular geographical area. It incorporates everything that gets our food from paddock to plate and back again. A ***sustainable and resilient*** local food system will have positive environmental, economic, social and health outcomes for the local community and be able to withstand and respond to shocks, such as those caused by pandemics or climate change.

Figure 2 shows the components of a food system, highlighted in Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030.

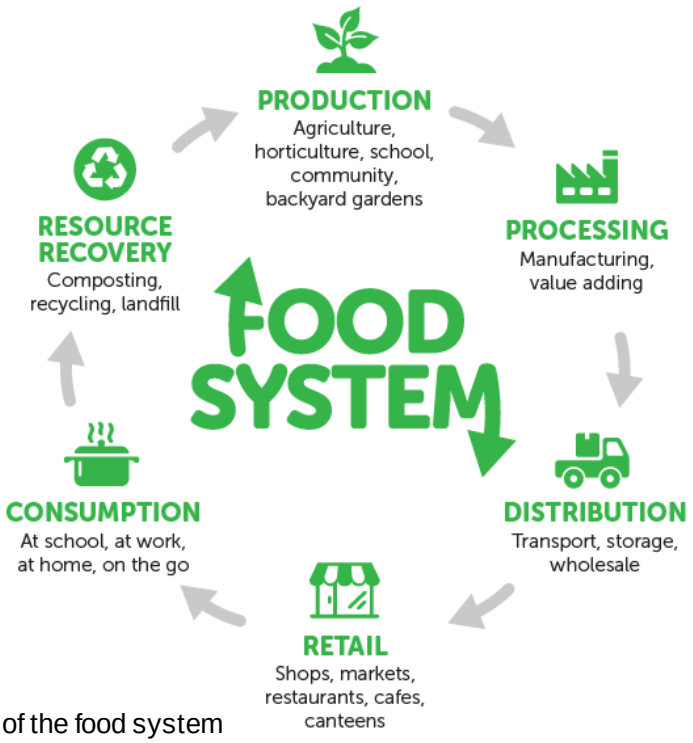


Figure 2: Components of the food system

Our local context and food system

The Alexandrina area is known for our friendly community, relaxed way of life and our abundant natural assets and strong heritage which drive our agriculture and tourism industries. Recently COVID-19 has accelerated patterns of change in our region, with more city-dwellers relocating to our communities and increasing use of technology changing the way our businesses operate and how our communities connect. Globally there has been significant changes with social and political disruption and conflict, trade disputes and escalation of the climate and environmental crises.

There are many issues and concerns within our community that remain unresolved and require more attention and effort, including:

- the changing climate and environmental pressures
- ongoing waste including the high percentage of food waste
- integration and consideration of nature in development and agriculture
- limited local employment options and the high proportion of young people that leave the area after graduating from high school and university
- limited access to public transport

- community inclusion and access to affordable, nutritious food for some in the community
- the rising cost of living.

Many of these issues impact on and are impacted by the food system. Further, climate shocks and stressors such as bushfires and COVID-19 have shown us the need to strengthen the resilience of our local food system and reduce dependence on more distant sources of food and ensuring access to affordable, nutritious food for all. These changes and challenges bring new opportunities into focus.

Jobs

Agribusiness is our largest industry which includes dairy, beef and sheep farming, broad acre cropping, fruit growing, fishing and viticulture. In 2015-16, the total value of agricultural production in the Alexandrina Council area was $155 million, with wine and table grapes ($61.8 million or 41%), livestock ($21 million or 14%) and vegetables ($19.4 million or 13%) the largest commodities (PIRSA 2021). As at 2016, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing was our fourth largest industry employer, employing 8.8% of our workforce (ABS n.d.). Retail (10.1%), and tourism (7%) were also significant employers within Alexandrina, with many of these businesses focussing on food (ABS, n.d.).

Food waste

The Fleurieu Regional Waste Authority provides food waste and organics recycling to most Alexandrina households, but participation/diversion remains low. Food and organic waste continues to make up a significant proportion of the general waste bin contents (44%) and therefore remains the largest opportunity to reduce waste landfill through diversion to the organics stream for recycling (FRWA 2021). When food is wasted, this means huge amounts of the resources used to produce and transport that food (e.g. water and fuel) are also wasted, and when organic matter goes to landfill it produces a range of greenhouse gases that heat our planet.

Climate change

Our changing climate presents a range of challenges for our food system. The Resilient Hills and Coast Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2016) reports that our region is expected to become 1.5°C warmer and 6% drier by 2070 which will make growing food more difficult. In terms of our food system's impact on climate change, local figures are hard to find that capture the contribution of the entire food system to greenhouse gas emissions, however a recent international study showed that about 35% of total global greenhouse gas emissions were from food system activities (Xu et al. 2021).

Community health and wellbeing

Health issues influenced by the health of our food system are experienced by many Alexandrina residents. Around 20% of our population live with circulatory disease and 5% with diabetes (PHIDU 2016) and around 70% adults and 30% children are overweight or obese (PHIDU 2020). Inadequate fruit (62%) and vegetable (89%) intake (SAMSS 2015) are important contributors to these issues, as well as lack of access to supermarkets, cafes and other food options which was identified among our top 8 infrastructure and service issues by the Alexandrina community (Alexandrina Council 2020).

In addition, almost 1 in 5 (18%) Australians went hungry during 2021. This figure has risen from 13% in 2020, back to pre-pandemic levels as government assistance payments in response to COVID-19 have been wound back. More than 1 in 3 (38%) Australians experiencing food security had not gone hungry before the pandemic (Foodbank 2021).

These reasons are why this conversation is so important and timely.

Workshop participation and content

Alexandrina held the third 'Our Local Food System' workshop on Tuesday 12 October, 2021 at Goolwa, following the first two workshops at Onkaparinga Council and District Council of Mount Barker. The workshop was attended by 35 people representing the breadth of food system stakeholders including farmers, landholders, distributors, suppliers, retailers, gardeners, eaters, waste and resource recovery, educators, community groups, researchers, planning and regulation and local government.

In setting the scene, local Ngarrindjeri woman Kyla McHughes, offered a Welcome to Country and detailed account of the Ngarrindjeri nation's reciprocal relationship with country and food highlighting how the people care for country and in return country cares for the people. This was followed by an overview of the changes to Alexandrina's food system after colonisation including the rise of key food industries such as dairy, meat, grain, fruit and vegetable production and fishing.

Figure 3: Welcome to Country with Kyla McHughes

The body of the workshop was structured around three activities:

- Visioning
- Back-casting
- Causal mapping.

The workshop and activities were designed to inform strategies and actions to support a ***healthy, sustainable and resilient food system for Alexandrina.***

Visioning: What could a healthy sustainable and resilient food system for Alexandrina look like?

The visioning activity invited participants to tell us their vision for a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system for Alexandrina.

Participants were taken on a guided meditation into the future to Alexandrina in 2040 and asked to imagine what their ideal food system would look like. Ideas were then shared through a speed-dating exercise and key themes were then grouped and voted on according to priority.

Figure 4: Creating our vision

The top 4 priority areas that emerged were:

1. Regenerative Farming/Growing

3. Localisation/Outlets

2. Planning and Design

4. Food Waste

Other themes highlighted were:

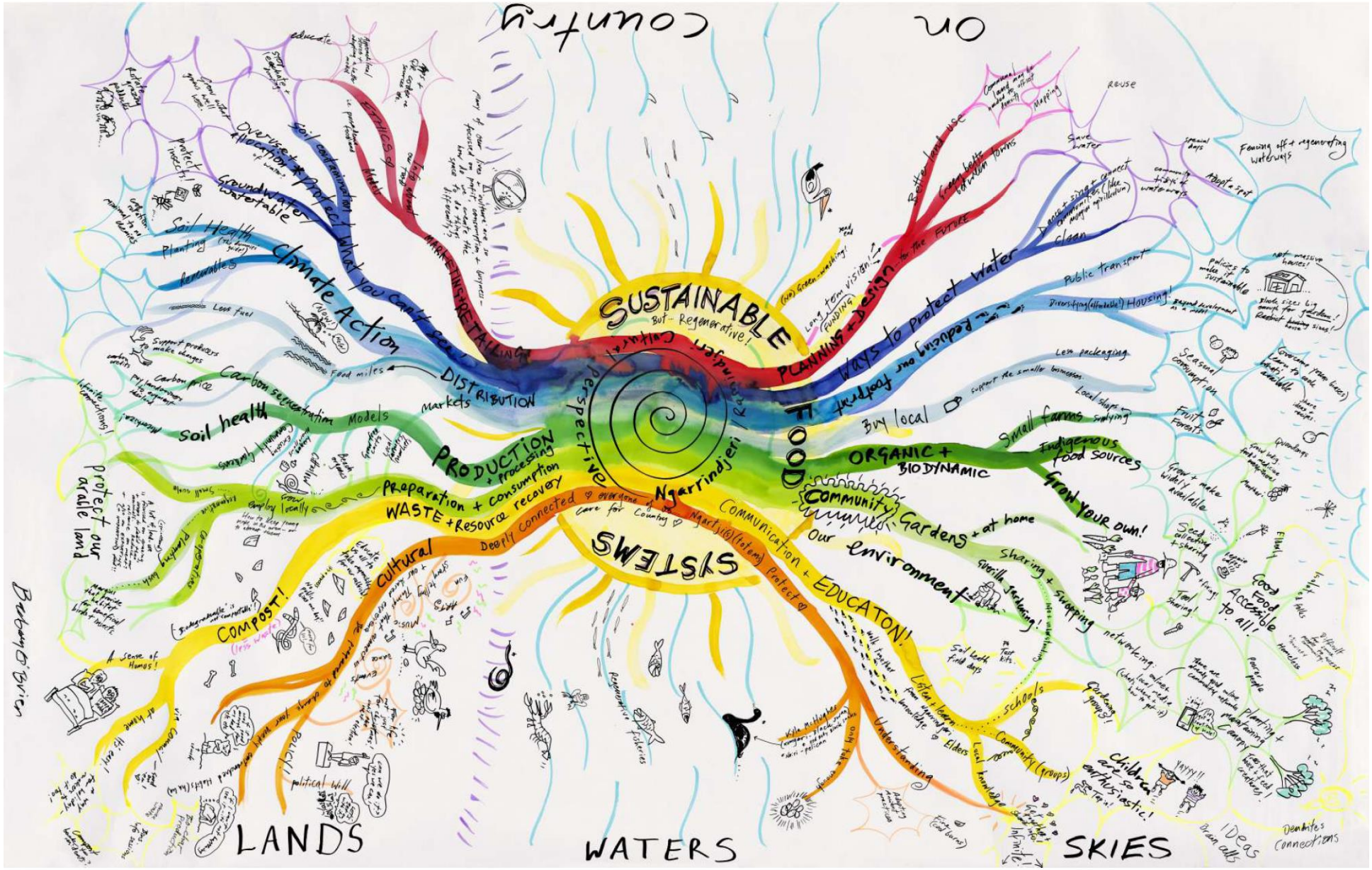
5. Education and Awareness
6. Water
7. Accessibility to food
8. Community food production
9. Supportive policies
10. Sharing/Trading food and skills
11. Indigenous food resources
12. Valuing farming
13. Culture.

Themes from this activity and the associated key points raised are listed in Appendix 1.

Figure 5: Barbary creating the Vision mind map/illustration

Local artist Barbary O'Brien created a real-time illustration of the vision generated by participants, shown in Figure 5 and below.

Visioning a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system for Alexandrina



Our Local Food System Workshop, Alexandrina Council, 12 October 2021

Mind Map/Illustration by Barbary O'Brien www.surfgardenstudio.com

Back casting: What actions could we take to move towards our vision?

Back casting is the process of working backwards from the future to reach your identified desirable outcome rather than forwards from the present. When working from the present, people are often blinded by their current difficulties and limitations. However, working backwards from the future produces a huge spectrum of options people had not previously thought about.

Priority themes from the visioning exercise were used as the topics for back casting:

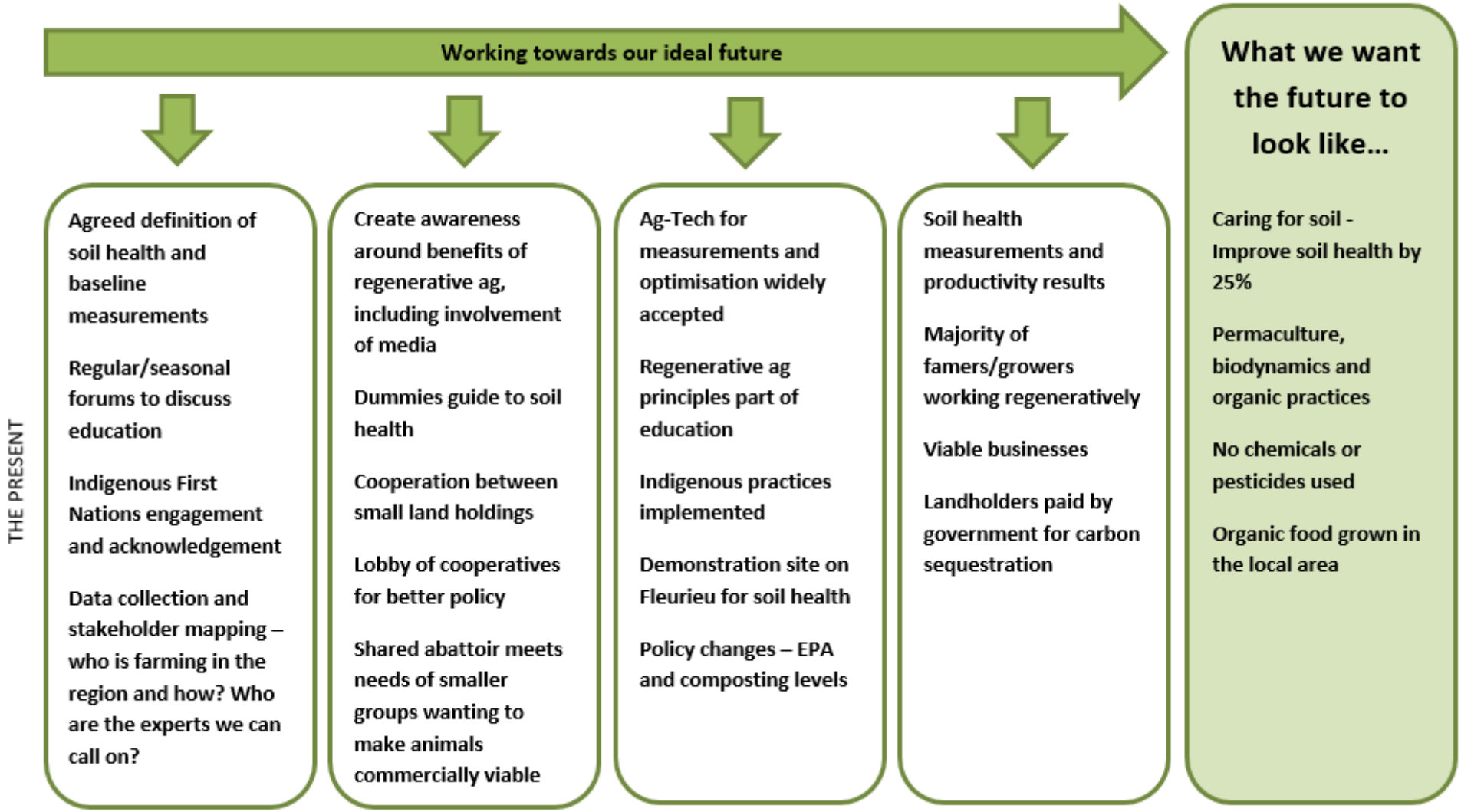
- Regenerative Farming/Growing
- Localisation/Outlets
- Planning and Design
- Food Waste

Results are shown in the diagrams on the following pages.

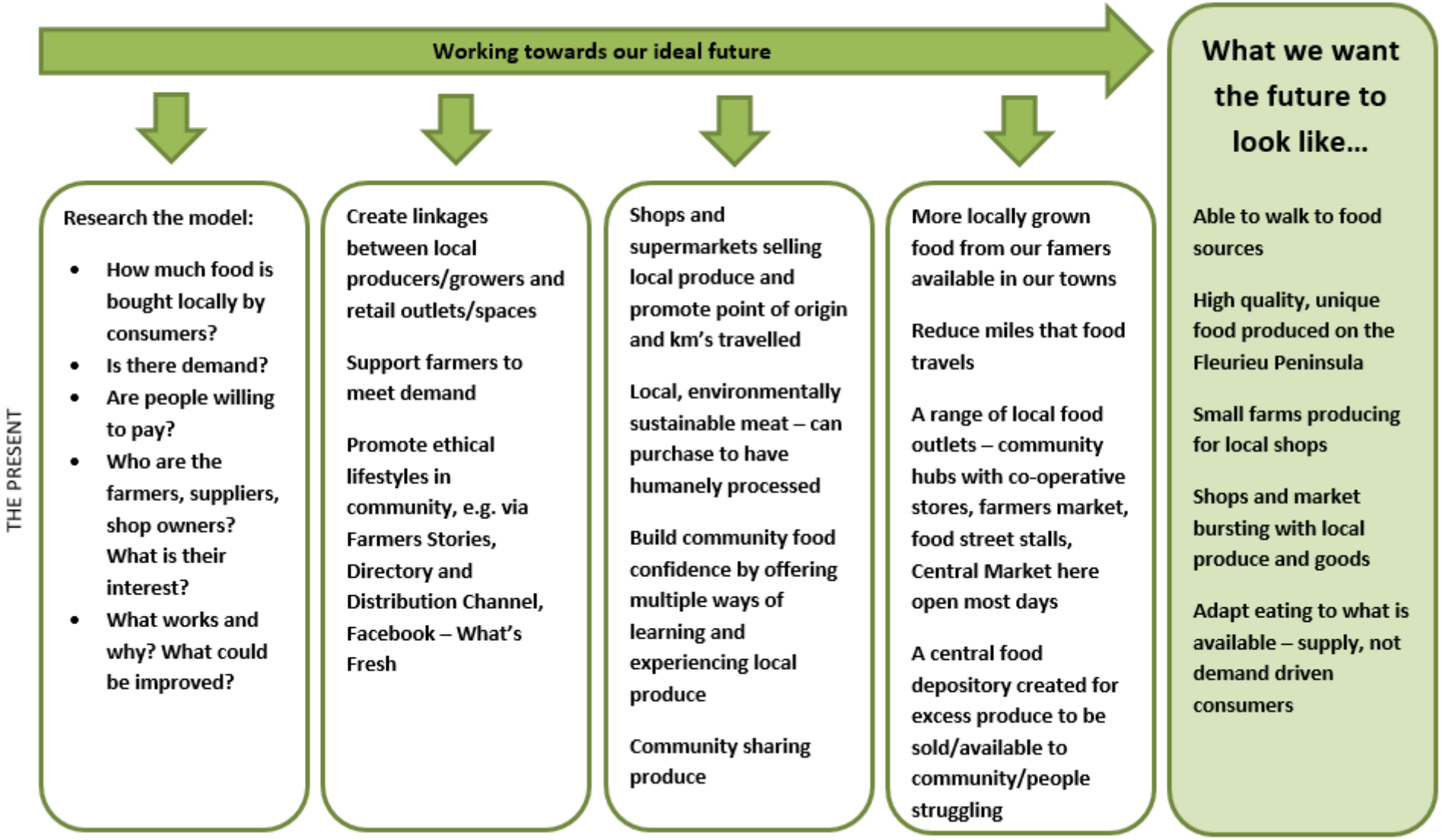
Figure 6: Back casting Regenerative Farming/Growing

Figure 7: Back casting Planning and Design

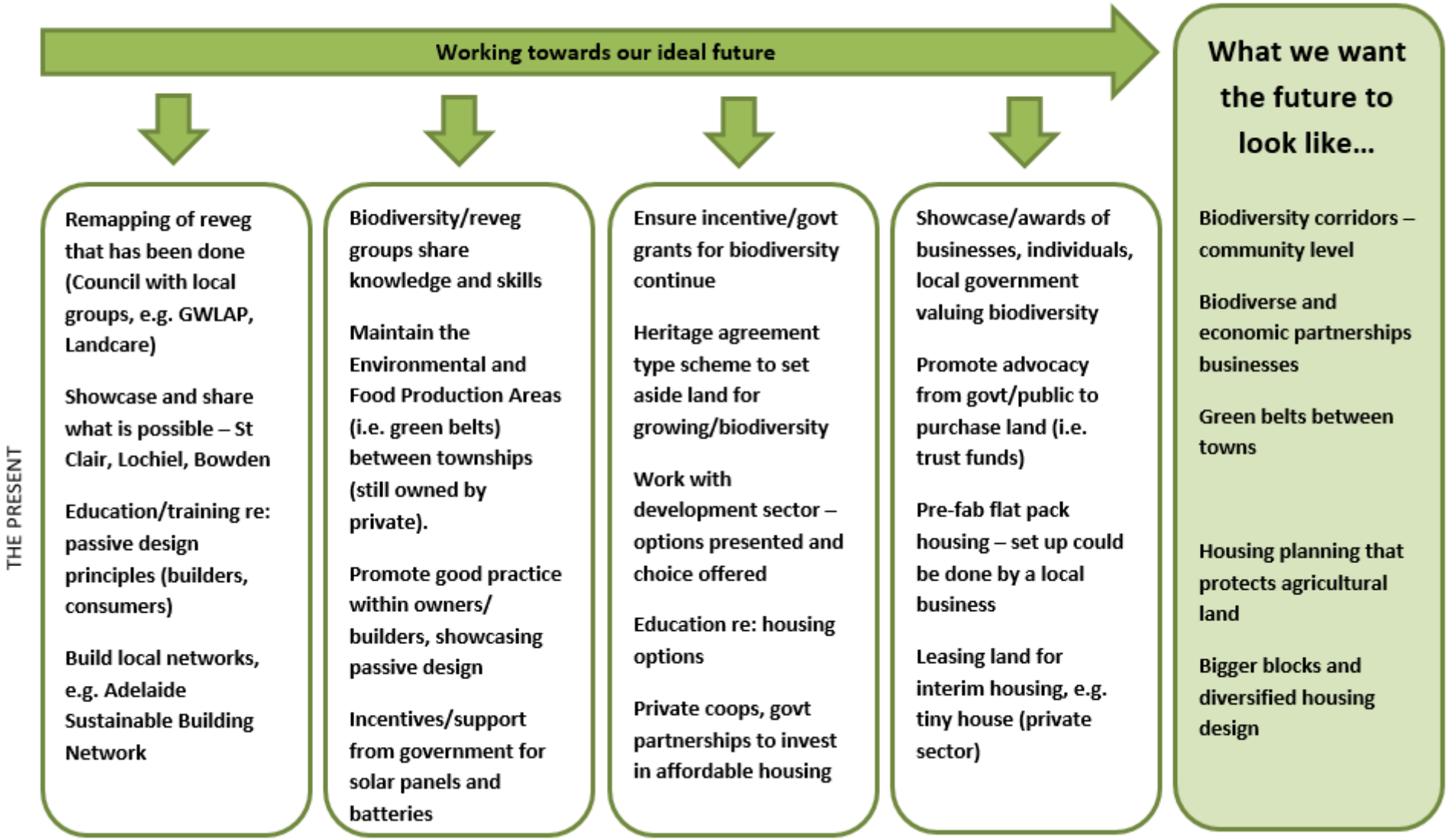
Regenerative Farming/Growing



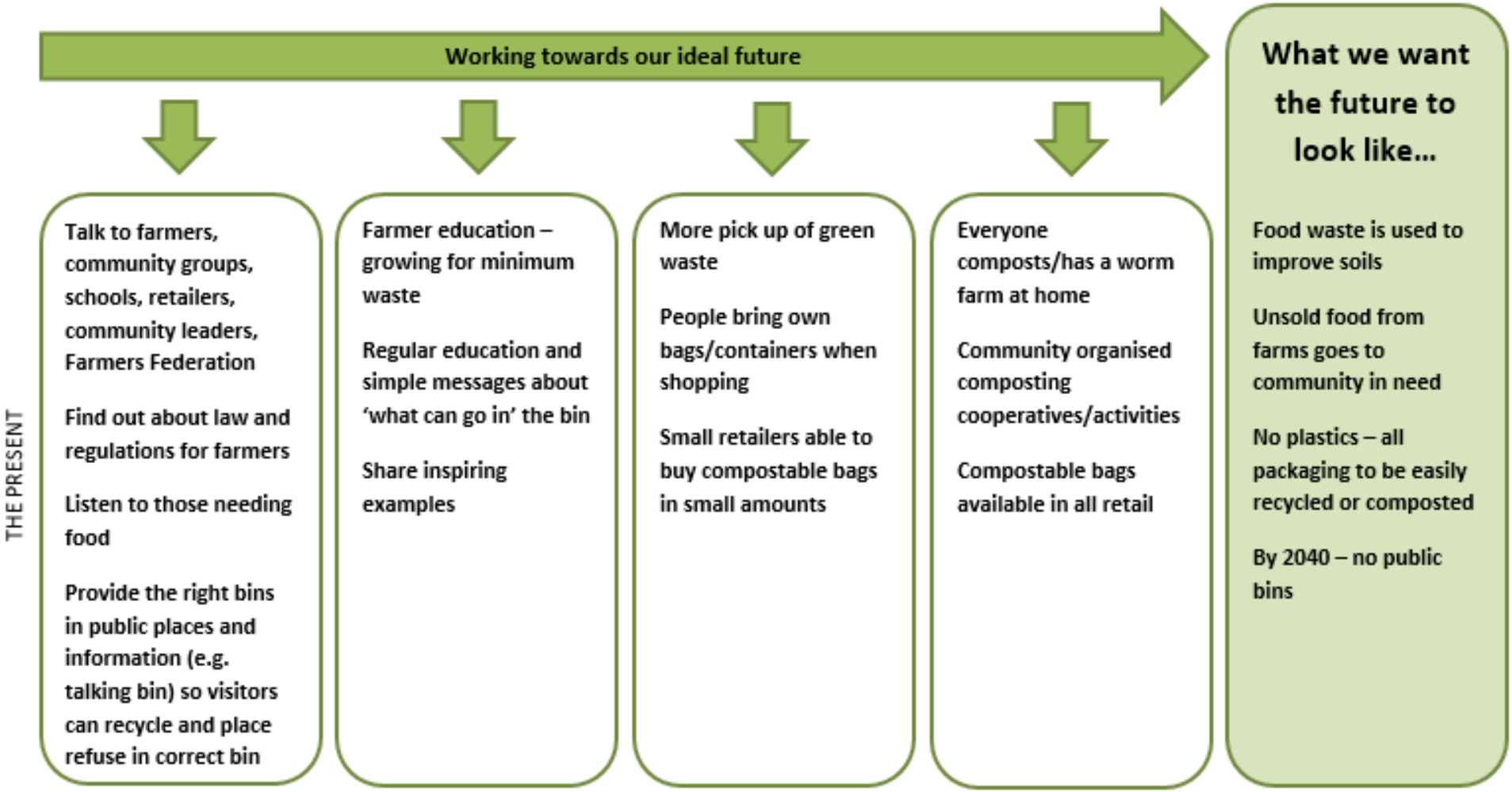
Localisation/Outlets



Planning and Design



Food Waste


Working towards our ideal future
THE PRESENT
Talk to farmers, community groups, schools, retailers, community leaders, Farmers Federation
Find out about law and regulations for farmers
Listen to those needing food
Provide the right bins in public places and information (e.g. talking bin) so visitors can recycle and place refuse in correct bin
Farmer education – growing for minimum waste
Regular education and simple messages about 'what can go in' the bin
Share inspiring examples
More pick up of green waste
People bring own bags/containers when shopping
Small retailers able to buy compostable bags in small amounts
Everyone composts/has a worm farm at home
Community organised composting cooperatives/activities
Compostable bags available in all retail
What we want the future to look like…
Food waste is used to improve soils
Unsold food from farms goes to community in need
No plastics – all packaging to be easily recycled or composted
By 2040 – no public bins

Causal mapping

Causal mapping is a way of looking deeply at a particular issue in our food system and consider all the different factors that influence that issue and how they interact with each other. Causal maps can help us identify which factors we can modify or act upon to get a desired outcome.

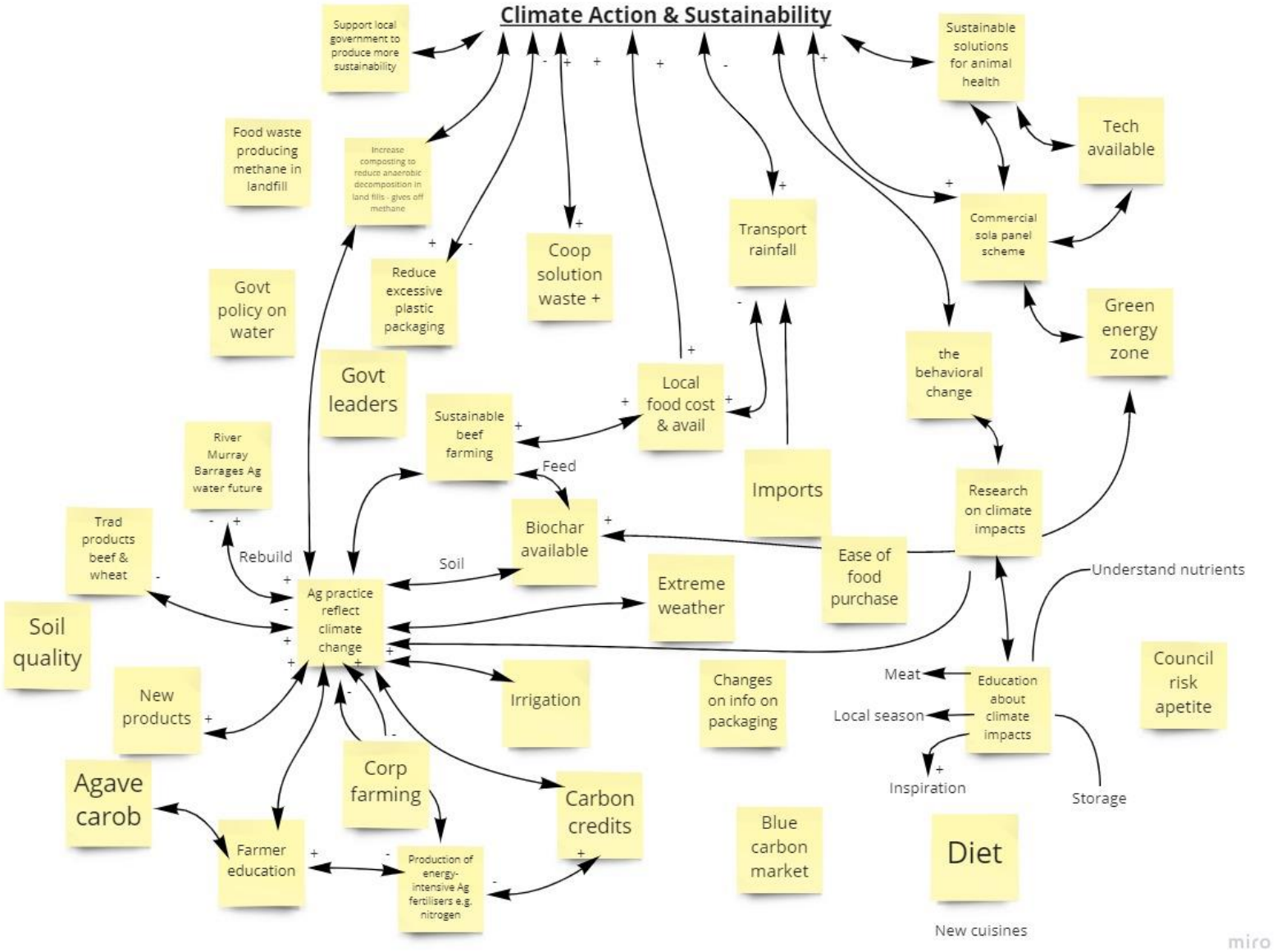
At the workshop, four groups each created a causal map examining one of four themes relating to Alexandrina's A2040 Community Plan:

- Climate Action and Sustainability
- Jobs in the Local Food System
- Circular Economy and Food Waste
- Community Health, Connection and Wellbeing.

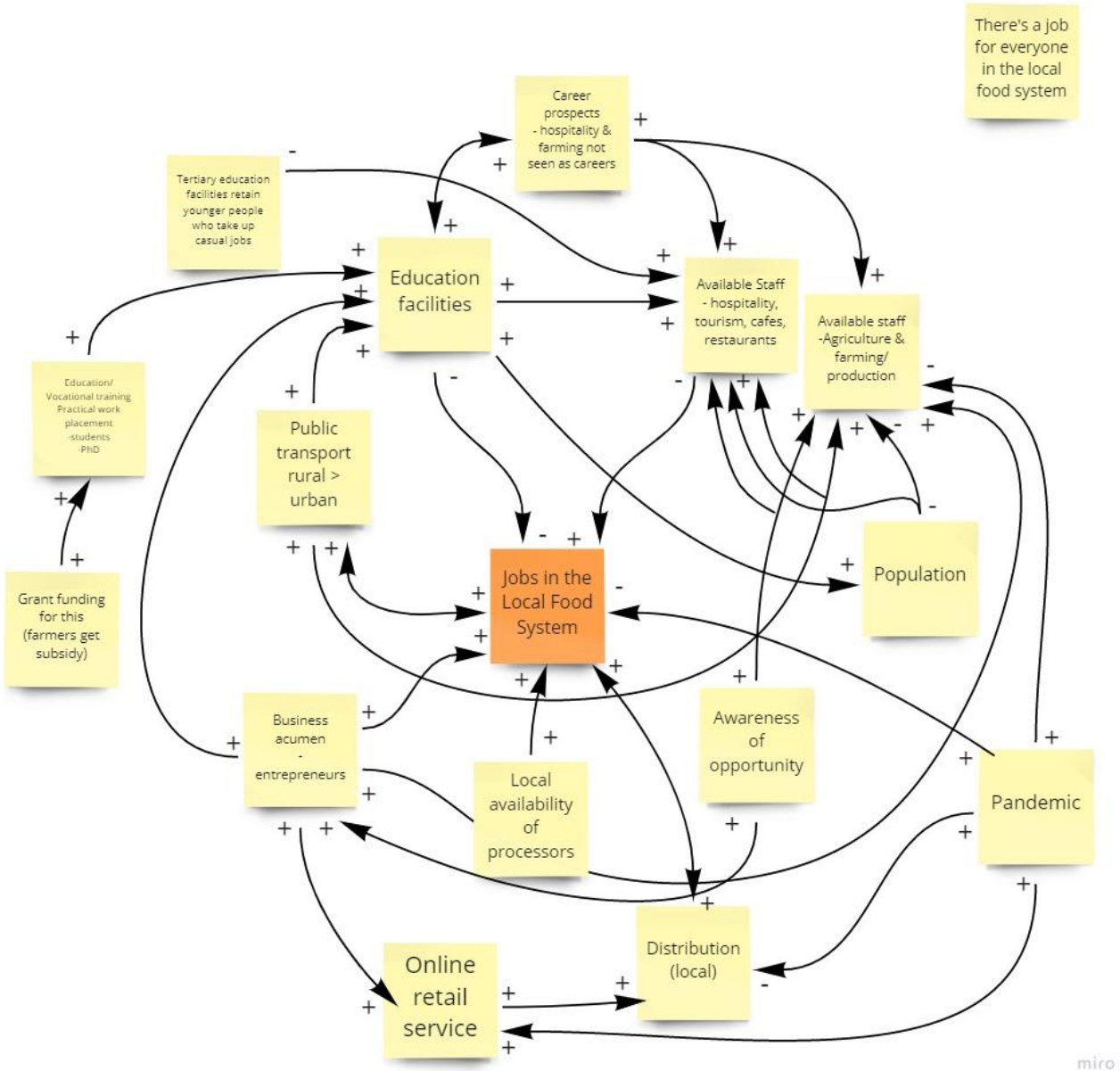
Plus and minus signs indicate how a change in one factor affects another (e.g. if agricultural practices increasingly reflect climate change, then we could expect that production of traditional commodities such as beef and wheat would decrease in our region).

The causal maps created are shown on the following pages.

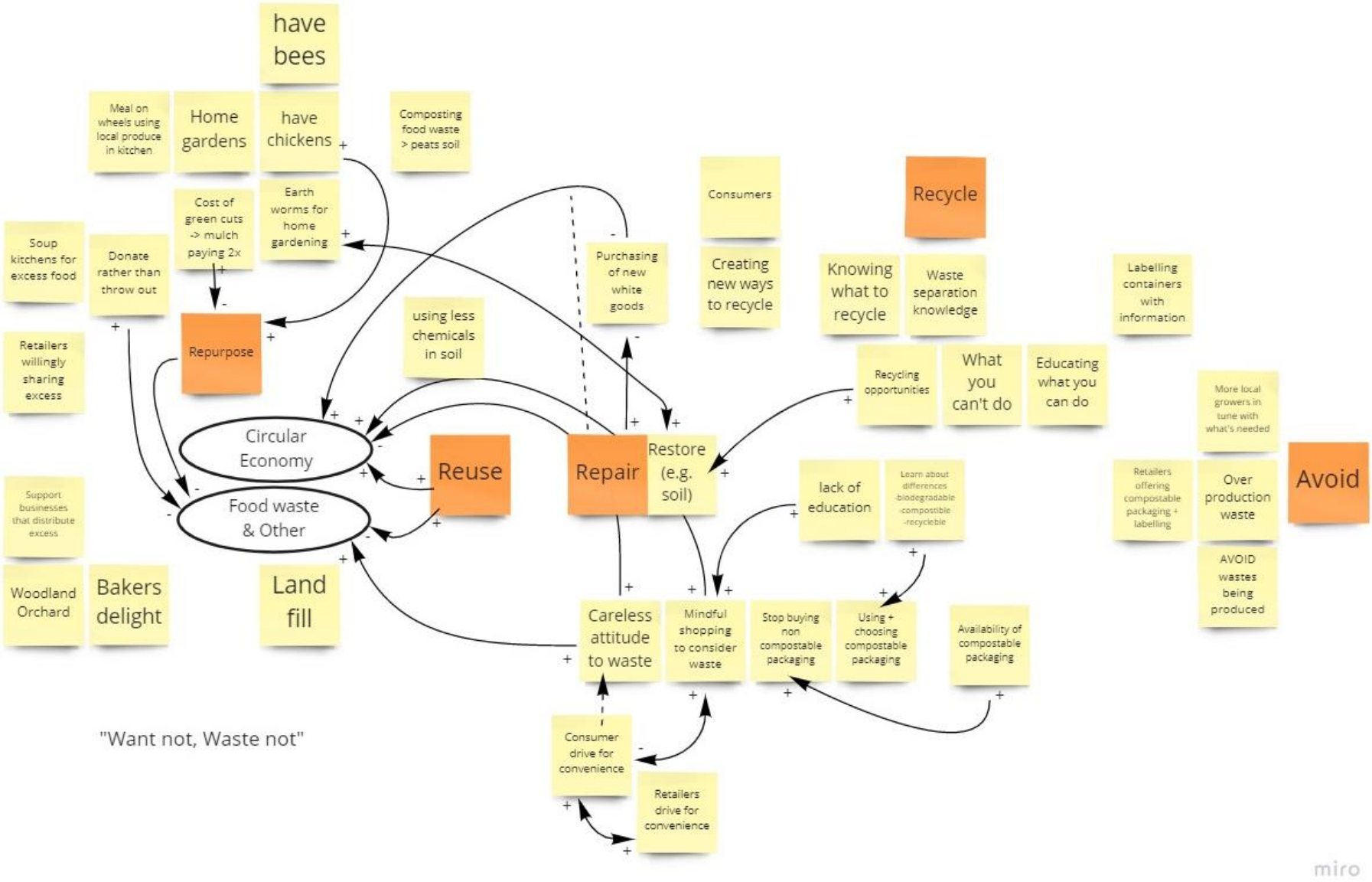
What factors currently impact on climate and environmental sustainability in the food system?



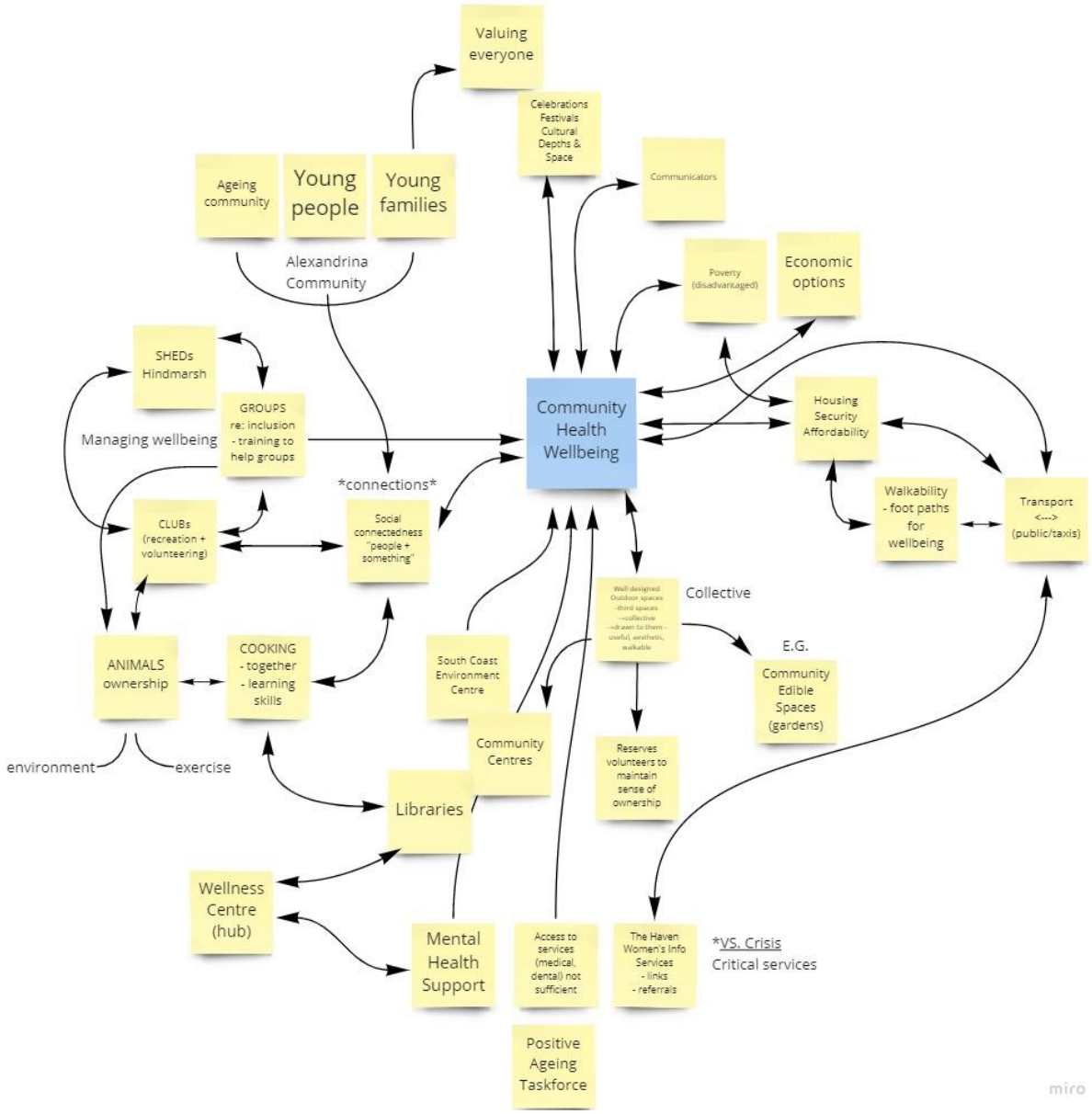
What factors currently impact on jobs in the local food system?



What factors currently impact on the circular economy and food waste in the food system?



What factors currently impact on community connection, health and wellbeing in the food system?



Summary of workshop outcomes

There was consensus among workshop participants that a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system for Alexandrina could be realised with attention and action on the vision themes, including regenerative farming, localisation, planning and design sensitive to food and the environment, reducing food waste, and more. While there is much to do to realise this vision, there are good things happening already with opportunities to build on these actions and reduce existing barriers.

Roles and Responsibilities

It was clear from the workshop that there is a role for everyone to play in building a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system in the Alexandrina region; from individuals as consumers, home gardeners, and community group members to special interest and advocacy groups, food sector businesses, education and research organisations and Council.

Council's role

There are a number of existing plans and actions of Council that already support the type of local food system that was envisaged through this workshop. These include:

Theme	Action	Plan
Regenerative Farming/Growing	Developing business leadership through the Alexandrina Sustainable Agriculture Round Table (ASART), with a focus on regenerative agricultural practices	Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027
Localisation/Outlets	Promotion of and practical support for local business including agribusiness and food businesses through Our Local Alexandrina and Business Alexandrina Procurement policy that gives preference to local suppliers and prioritises environmentally sustainable suppliers Community education and engagement to support and encourage sustainable lifestyles such as the Food Matters workshops held in 2021 Promoting community gardening Alexandrina Township Verge Gardening Guide	Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027 A2040 Community Plan 2020-2024 Environmental Action Plan
Planning and Design	Urban greening – One Million Trees project Encouraging the uptake of climate ready housing through the Where We Build, What We Build project Developing Village Innovation Plans with our townships through which community can shape the future of their town, including development.	A2040 Community Plan 2020-2024

Food Waste	Continue investment in the Fleurieu Regional Waste Authority (FRWA) to provide education and resources on food and organics recycling and services that support households and businesses to recycle their organics	A2040 Community Plan 2020-2024

At the conclusion of this project, a guide will be developed to support Local Government to understand their role in enabling local food systems.

Individual and Community role

Individuals can become a food citizen where they consciously make decisions about what they eat and where they get their food. Individuals can become active in food system activities such as sharing excess produce, joining community groups such as Cittaslow Goolwa or simply talking with family and friends about food.

Community groups and organisations can help to create resilient local food systems by undertaking food system activities such as food and waste education, prioritising purchasing from local food suppliers, operating community gardens or food swaps and other opportunities mentioned in our key vision themes.

There are already many projects and actions that are occurring throughout the region that align with the visions, themes and actions discussed at the workshop. A key next step is to begin to raise awareness of these projects through mapping and the collation of this information. This will be an opportunity to take stock, celebrate the existing work and further identify potential opportunities to strengthen the local food system.

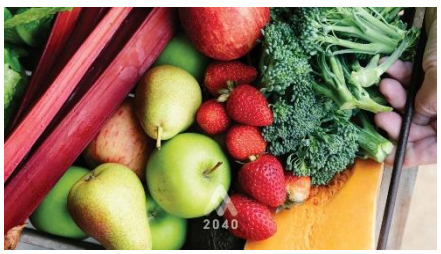
Summary and Next steps

The Our Local Food System workshop series was designed as a first step to better understand the local food system, to start the process of mapping our food systems and to begin to develop potential strategies, actions and communities of interest that can help realise the vision of a more sustainable, resilient and health-supporting food system.

The conversation therefore has really only just begun. Next steps include seeking feedback on the vision and actions from those who were less well represented at the workshop, including farmers, distributors and retailers and further map actions that are currently being undertaken by Council and our community to achieve our shared vision.

The project steering group will be working through potential further collaboration, new partnerships and learning through the end of 2021 and into 2022. Workshop participants will be notified of future developments and ways to participate and contribute further.

For queries or feedback, please contact Alexandrina Council's Community Wellbeing team on 8555 7000 or alex@alexandrina.sa.gov.au.



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Appendix 1 – Visioning activity – themes and key points

Vision theme	Key points:
Regenerative Farming/Growing (43 votes)	• Regenerative • Improve soil health. Caring for soil! Soil is key! • No chemicals or pesticides • Organic food production practices • Permaculture and biodynamic principles • Support biodynamic chemicals • Use invasive species as food soup • Blend of rural and urban food production • Local free range meats • Grown in local area
Localisation/Outlets (36 votes)	• Local food production is encouraged and supported • Small farms producing for local shops • Locally produced food is available through a range of outlets, e.g. supermarket, cooperative stores, farmers and food markets, street stalls • Reduce miles that food travels • Able to walk to food sources • High quality unique food produced on the Fleurieu Peninsula • People eat based on what's available locally and in season. Supply not demand. • Seasonal diets & consumption (local food, mileage, fresh) • Shops and stores label point of origin and kilometres travelled • Community sharing of produce • Transport is around speed as eating is localised
Planning and Design (34 votes)	• Green areas between towns • Larger housing blocks and developments that include open space • Edible streetscapes, including verge gardens, fruit trees and bush foods and garden plots in public spaces and use of rooftops and walls • Urban greening incorporating local species • Sitting spaces, under trees to meet, chat, eat - building community • Housing incorporates passive design, solar panels and batteries (subsidised by government) • Keep cars out of towns • Food that has high environmental cost in product is not locally produced
Food Waste (28 votes)	• Less food wasted • All organic waste is repurposed, e.g. composted or mulched either at home or by FRWA and available to residents and local business • Public bins available for organic and recycling which explain what goes in which bin, e.g. "a talking bin"

	• Food and organic waste receptacles for residents • Reduce food packaging and eliminate plastic packaging by replacing with compostable alternatives • No more rubbish in streets & beach & along the river
Education and Awareness (24 votes)	• Education on food production and agriculture process • How to: modelling, growing food and related non-food plants • Education about permaculture • Education about food miles and environmental costs, e.g. through signage about how many kms food has travelled in food stores • Use locals to share knowledge of food growing & using, e.g. vegies, herbs, bread, cheese • Education re: healthy food • Food is our health – the way food is grown is our health • Remembering lost practices of food and health • Shops/ Supermarkets show nutritional content of e.g. fruit & veg • Marketing - changed to promote healthy food • Boardwalk/ coastal path with app guides about culture, plants, etc. • Succession & mentoring multi-generational
Water (24 votes)	• High value use of waste water for food production • Seaweed farming • More river/seafood cultivation/ marketing/ consumption • Use more carp • Clean and waste water management including storm water • Rain water tanks + solar power • Introduce policy to bring river flow back to past health
Accessibility to food (21 votes)	• Quality food accessible to all • Free/ cheap food for homeless people • Aged care facilities more creative for their residents, food production outdoor areas • Community garden more central accessible
Community food production (20 votes)	• We all grow our vegies and fruit • More local food production and growing • Backyard food growing • All schools to develop own gardens. Get the children's input • Community gardens in every council area, in new housing developments • More public space to do community gardens connect • Community led gardens & street stalls to sell/produce • Community sharing food produced/ grown in their gardens • Promote and support community gardens

	• Worm farms in community verges
Supportive policies (20 votes)	• Policies around protecting agricultural land • Agri-Village • Edible City • Products are not allowed in the country if they can be produced here • Introduction of a food transport tax to encourage local foods • Tax credits for local, private food production • Subsidise household to develop backyard food systems • Government encourages and paying landowners for carbon sequestration • Community solar plans / discounts
Sharing/Trading food and skills (19 votes)	• More grow carts for people and an abundance of food that need to share to families that cannot grow their own food • Encourage bartering system • Local produce sharing and key to sustainability • Building outer community - welcome to come in and share • Sharing of food – cooking and eating together • Homelessness – food supply, input in community gardens • How to: modelling growing food and related food plants • Share knowledge (groups to use space), like bird, fish, plant groups • Tool library • Regular community meetings to discuss what we want to eat • Free meeting places for groups
Indigenous food resources (16 votes)	• More native food plants around town in parks and verges • Indigenous central food system
Valuing farming (16 votes)	• Farmers are Kings and Queens • Farmers considered highly-paid properly • Small scale farming, Biz model works • Commercial economical sustainability • Use co-operatives to pool food production, distribution and sales
Culture (3 votes)	• Regular celebrations of local produce, “Locavores”, “Providores” • Cockle Festival • Olive Festival • Carp Festival • The Arts - sharing, storytelling, music • Include linguistically and culturally diverse people • Be off the grid as a community