Transforming the Public Plate

Good Food Purchasing Australia

A Menu of Options for Public Food Procurement That Nourishes People, Place and Planet

Contents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and sea across this great southern land and pay respects to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that we live and work on, and benefit from, the lands of hundreds of Indigenous nations. We also wish to acknowledge the thousands of years of traditional practices and culture of Indigenous people and offer our solidarity and support to facilitate regenerative futures together. Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team extends its gratitude to Macdoch Foundation, for initiating and funding this groundbreaking project. To the many associates we work with all over the country in this unrecognised and often invisible work – we deeply appreciate the depth of your commitment to this endeavour.

Glossary of Terms

Anchor Institutions – Large, stable organisations (hospitals, universities, schools, aged care facilities) with significant purchasing power that can influence local food systems through their procurement practices.

Connection Infrastructure – Systems, networks, and intermediaries that facilitate relationships and transactions between food producers, processors, distributors, and institutional buyers.

Food Security – A state where all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs. Includes six dimensions: availability, access, stability, utilisation, sustainability, and agency.

Food Systems – The entire range of actors and interlinked activities involved in production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products, and the broader environments in which they operate.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty – Indigenous peoples' right to define, control, and protect their own food systems, including traditional foods, farming practices, and food-related knowledge.

Leverage Points – Strategic places in a system where a small intervention can produce significant, lasting changes with disproportionate impact.

Local Procurement – Sourcing food from nearby or regional producers, typically defined by geographic proximity (such as bioregions) or state/territory boundaries.

Planetary Health Diet – Eating pattern developed by the EAT-Lancet Commission emphasising plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, nuts) with minimal animal-source foods to support both human health and environmental sustainability.

Public Food Procurement – Government spending (direct or indirect) on food for publicly-funded institutions and programs including hospitals, schools, aged care, prisons, childcare, and defense.

Sustainable Agriculture – Farming practices that restore and enhance ecosystem health, prioritising soil health, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration while producing food.

Social Procurement – Purchasing practices that deliver economic, social and environmental benefits beyond the goods and services being procured, such as supporting Indigenous businesses, SMEs, and local employment.

Sustainable Food Procurement – Procurement approaches considering what food is purchased (healthy, local), where it comes from (including diverse producers), and how it is produced (climate and biodiversity protective production systems).

Sustainable Healthy Diets – Eating patterns promoting health and wellbeing with low environmental impact that are accessible, affordable, safe, equitable, and culturally acceptable.

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About this Report

This report is designed as both a practical evidence base and a call to action for those shaping Australia's food system. It is for policy makers across all levels of government, sustainable food system allies, investors, food system actors, and partners from the paddock to the food service kitchen and community. It provides insights, data, and stories that demonstrate what's possible when procurement, policy, and partnerships align toward a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable food future.

We invite readers to use this report as a springboard for collaboration and investment: to start conversations with potential partners, inform new strategies and funding programs, and strengthen existing implementation approaches. It offers:

- A baseline for action,
- A snapshot of opportunities, challenges, and our modest progress,
- Examples and mechanisms for success from an international scan, and
- Highlights of where and how targeted investment and effort can deliver real system-wide change.

Our goal is to inspire and equip decision-makers to embed sustainable food procurement within their everyday work, their strategies, their policies, their goals/targets and their budgets. In Australia the momentum, goodwill, and interest already exist. We are ready. What's needed now is investment in coordinated, courageous action.

The vision is clear and optimistic: we have the people and momentum to act now. This report offers a practical foundation for collaboration – helping policymakers, funders, and food system actors turn goodwill into coordinated, lasting change.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC FOOD PROCUREMENT?

Public food procurement – the money the government spends directly or indirectly on food for institutions and programs – has substantial potential to drive positive changes across our regional and state food systems. By using a values-based approach and giving more strategic consideration to the impacts of public spending, food procurement can influence food systems resilience and sustainability. Public procurement can create public good by considering:

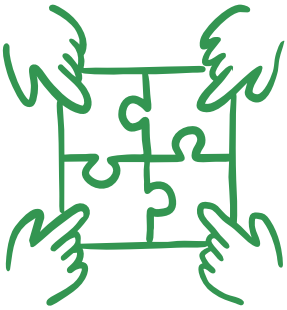
- What food is purchased and consumed (e.g. healthy and local),
- Where it is coming from (e.g. including all scales of producers, Indigenous businesses and women's enterprises), and
- How it is produced (e.g. production systems that offer environmental protections).[1]

The 2025 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)[2] report emphasises the urgent need to transform food systems in order to address persistent hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation, and inequitable access to healthy foods. Current systems are failing to deliver on multiple fronts: they contribute to climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable resource use, while leaving large populations food insecure. Public food procurement represents a significant and untapped opportunity to shift towards more sustainable practices.

Team reflections

This report represents the first collaboration of a national team of food systems experts across multiple organisations exploring public food procurement. The team brings together high-level skills, networks, and insights from across Australia's food system, united around a shared goal: to demonstrate that a sustainable approach to public food procurement is not only doable but essential.

Through this rapid 10-week project, the team uncovered evidence of success from inspiring global examples and the emerging and/or untapped opportunities in Australia. We were struck by how far other countries have advanced comparatively, through embedding and investing in sustainability, health, and local economic goals using coherent policy and procurement practices. We now understand how much potential exists for these approaches to be adapted and contextualised in Australia.



The process

This project, and this report that emerged from it, was a truly collaborative effort. Each team member took responsibility for researching and drafting a specific section, drawing on their expertise and helping join the dots by tapping into their networks from across Australia's food system. We met weekly during the research phase to share insights, test ideas, and troubleshoot challenges, creating a dynamic space for learning and collective sensemaking.

Along the way, we invited additional contributors to share their expertise and showcase their existing work. We also met and interviewed practitioners and policymakers from different sectors. We have captured these diverse voices to build momentum, and ensure the recommendations are grounded, actionable, and nationally relevant. This process establishes the report as authoritative, credible and practical.

Executive Summary

Purpose and Ambition

Public food procurement stands as one of the most powerful, yet chronically under-utilised, policy levers available to Australian governments. Every day, publicly funded institutions – hospitals, residential aged care facilities, long day care, prisons, schools, defence facilities and community food programs – purchase and serve food to millions of Australians. These are not simply transactions. Collectively, these purchasing decisions shape production systems, supply chains, diets, livelihoods and environmental outcomes. They determine who thrives within our food system and who is left behind.

Transforming the Public Plate is an Australian first. It provides the most comprehensive national picture to date of public food procurement – mapping its scale, structure, constraints and transformative potential. Drawing on expenditure analysis, policy research, procurement practice, community perspectives, international evidence and scenario modelling, this report demonstrates that sustainable public food procurement is both feasible and achievable within existing government systems. What it requires is coordinated action and sustained investment to bridge the gap between intent and impact.

Why This Work Matters

This report is guided by an integrated vision of what sustainable public food procurement can achieve. It is not an end in itself, but a powerful mechanism to deliver tangible public value:

- Improving health and nutrition through greater access to fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food in public settings
- Strengthening food security across all six dimensions – availability, access, stability, utilisation, sustainability and agency – while building resilience against future food-related shocks
- Reducing environmental and climate impacts across the food system, including emissions and biodiversity loss
- Supporting resilient regional and local economies, from farmers and processors to social enterprises and small businesses
- Advancing equity and inclusion, including First Nations food sovereignty, meaningful community participation and fair livelihoods throughout the supply chain
- Delivering long-term value for public expenditure by recognising and avoiding the hidden health, environmental and economic costs that burden future generations

These goals align closely with emerging national priorities, including *Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Strategy*, national nutrition and preventive health agendas, climate commitments and regional development objectives.

The Case for Urgent Action

Australia's current food system delivers abundance for some, but extracts a steep and largely invisible price from health, equity, the environment and the economy. The evidence is stark:

- The food system contributes approximately one-third of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions
- An estimated $274 billion per year in hidden health, environmental and economic costs
- 1.3 million households experiencing food insecurity
- Fewer than 10% of Australian adults and children consuming adequate vegetables
- 32% of vegetable growers actively considering leaving the industry

Public food procurement alone will not resolve these crises. Yet as a strategic leverage point, even modest changes in procurement criteria and practice can trigger disproportionately large, system-wide transformations over time.

What This Report Delivers

The report makes four foundational contributions to understanding and action:

Mapping the national food procurement landscape – revealing who buys food, under what arrangements, and at what value, establishing a baseline for transparency, accountability and reform.

Identifying constraints and opportunities – examining the procurement rules, contract structures, renewal cycles and policy settings that shape current practice, while exposing barriers to First Nations and regional participation and pathways for meaningful change.

Modelling scenarios for transformation – testing outcomes across a spectrum from incremental improvement to transformative approaches aligned with health, sustainability and economic development goals.

Charting clear pathways to action – translating evidence into practical, implementable steps that governments, institutions and funders can take immediately.

The National Food Procurement Landscape

For the first time, this project has quantified the national value of publicly funded food procurement across major institutional settings. Australian governments spend, directly or indirectly, $2.14 billion per year on food procurement:

- **Residential aged care: $1.07 billion**
- **Public hospitals: $345 million**
- **Long day care: $332 million**
- **Correctional facilities: $158 million**
- **Defence: $78 million**
- **Meals on Wheels: $65 million**
- **Residential care (mental health and homelessness): $58 million**
- **TAFE hospitality training: $15 million**
- **School meals: $4 million**
- **Antarctic bases: $3 million**

This represents something rare and valuable: stable, predictable demand. It is a powerful market signal capable of enabling farmers, processors and suppliers to invest confidently in healthier, more sustainable and more resilient food systems.

Understanding the Barriers and Possibilities

The obstacles to sustainable public food procurement are structural rather than technical:

- Fragmented responsibilities scattered across portfolios and levels of government
- Procurement systems designed narrowly for compliance and short-term cost efficiency
- Limited visibility into total food expenditure and its broader impacts
- Chronic under-investment in the infrastructure that connects producers, processors and institutions and market domination by extractive large multinationals
- Short funding and policy cycles that actively discourage long-term transformation

Yet beneath these structural constraints lies encouraging signals. There is demonstrated, strong public support from diverse communities, stakeholders and decision makers. This issue resonates because it offers a rare opportunity to address multiple crises – health, environment, economy, equity – through coordinated action.

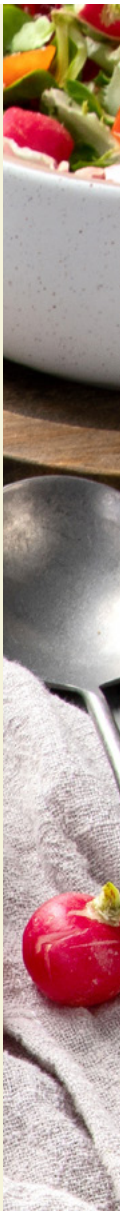
Envisioning Transformation: What the Modelling Shows

Transformation also requires a shift in collective imagination. Australia has developed a cultural acceptance of institutional food as inherently poor quality, failing to recognise the role these settings could play in building a more nourishing food system. Many countries have successfully challenged this assumption, demonstrating that change is both possible and worthwhile. Australia needs a similar mindset shift.

The lack of political ambition in this space means Australia is falling significantly behind. While other high-income countries – and many low- and middle-income nations – have strategically deployed public food procurement for up to two decades, Australia has barely begun. Scenario modelling from international learnings reveals the substantial potential of sustainable public food procurement in Australia to:

- Increase consumption of vegetables, fruits and minimally processed whole foods across institutional settings
- Amplify economic multiplier effects for farming communities, regional economies and local food systems
- Enable farmers to transition toward regenerative practices with reduced risk, lowering the environmental footprint of our food system
- Elevate food quality and restore dignity to institutional dining
- Reduce long-term costs to institutions and the broader system by avoiding future health and environmental harms

Critically, these outcomes emerge not from isolated pilot projects, but through policy alignment, clear targets, coordination infrastructure and sustained investment. Australia possesses the institutional capability to adapt and implement these approaches across our federal, state and local government systems.



Goals and Principles to Guide the Path Forward

Throughout its analysis and recommendations, this report applies a consistent framework for sustainable public food procurement in Australia.

Drawing on international experience, the goals should be pursued collectively, without hierarchy:

- Ensure access to nutritious food for all Australians in institutional settings
- Improve biodiversity and reduce climate impacts across the food system
- Prioritise local procurement and regional economic development to build resilient communities

These goals must be pursued through approaches grounded in core values:

- Place and context specific – recognising that solutions must respond to local conditions, cultures and capacities
- Supportive of First Nations food sovereignty – centring Indigenous knowledge, rights and self-determination
- Prioritising community agency – ensuring those most affected have genuine voice and power in shaping food systems
- Embedding equity and justice – addressing historical and structural inequities throughout the supply chain

Together, these principles provide a practical and ethical framework for embedding sustainability into everyday procurement decisions, transforming how governments use their purchasing power to nourish people, strengthen communities and protect the living systems on which we all depend.

Pathways to Action

Through deep engagement with sustainable food procurement practice - studying international precedents while designing for Australia's unique context, diverse regions and complex governance landscape this report identifies five mutually reinforcing pathways to make transformation a reality.

1. Leadership

Sustainable public food procurement requires visible, sustained leadership across governments, institutions and regions, working collaboratively. International best practice approach includes establishing a non profit and independent coordinating entity with authority, resources and mandate to drive alignment, share knowledge and accelerate progress.

2. Coordination and Capacity Building

Building the infrastructure that connects knowledge, people and supply chains. This includes establishing value-chain coordination mechanisms that link farmers to processors to institutions. It requires communities of practice across institutional settings, building collective understanding and shared learning. It demands investment in food systems literacy across procurement actors and the development of compelling narratives that capture public imagination and political will.

3. Governance and Partnerships

Effective governance must span sectors, government departments and all levels of government – federal, state and local. It requires formal structures for cross-portfolio collaboration and clear accountabilities. Critically, it must embed Indigenous leadership and support First Nations food sovereignty.

4. Measurable Action Coupled with Monitoring

This pathway requires co-designed targets, criteria and guidelines developed with institutions, producers and communities. This includes supportive regulation, transparent monitoring systems and applied research partnerships that track progress, identify what works and build the evidence base for continued improvement and investment.

5. Investment and Time

Sustained investment matched to short, medium and long-term goals requires three complementary capital sources working in concert. Governments deliver through policy, regulation and strategic grants that de-risk transitions. Philanthropic funding plays a catalytic role unlocking coordination, testing innovation and achieving scale. Impact investment bridges the gap by financing the physical infrastructure - on-farm and/or regional food hubs, processing facilities, cold storage and distribution networks - that sustainable procurement depends upon, providing patient capital that accepts modest returns in exchange for measurable social and environmental outcomes.

Pursued together, these five pathways create the conditions for sustainable public food procurement to move Australia from lagging behind to leading – delivering profound benefits for the health and livelihoods of our communities and the living systems that sustain us all.

Good Food Purchasing Australia

About Good Food Purchasing Australia (GFPA)

Good Food Purchasing Australia (GFPA) is a newly formed, action-oriented initiative that connects policy, research and practice to transform how Australian governments source and purchase food. GFPA was established as a direct response to the findings of this report, commissioned by the Macdoch Foundation and produced by a national team of food systems researchers and practitioners. GFPA will bring together experts across health, agriculture, environment, procurement and community wellbeing to advocate for a smarter, fairer and more sustainable food system. It works closely with communities, enterprises, farmers and institutional actors who are driving better food procurement in regions and cities across Australia.
For more information visit

www.goodfoodpurchasingaustralia.com.au

Executive Summary

Background–For the first time, we have mapped public food procurement in Australia–across hospitals, aged care, schools, corrections, long day care, defence and other major public institutions. Each year these institutions purchase enormous volumes of food—shaping production patterns, supply chains, nutrition, our health, environmental outcomes, and regional economies. Beyond the data we have captured diverse voices and perspectives to build momentum, and ensure the recommendations are grounded, actionable, and nationally relevant. This process establishes the report as authoritative, credible and practical.

What did we do?

Mapped the National Landscape
Identify who buys what, it's $ value, and under what arrangements.

Revealed Constraints & Opportunities
Policy gaps in Australia and international solutions; contract practices and timelines; equity considerations, and First Nations perspectives.

Developed evidence-based change scenarios
Model impacts from "Business as Usual+" through to transformative procurement adopting targets on sustainability, health and nutrition, and economic outcomes.

Set a Pathway for Action
Provide practical and proven high-impact steps for governments, policymakers, and investors to act now.

What is the size of the opportunity?

$2.13B

Our best estimate is that annually Australian governments spend $2,137,315,595 per year on the procurement of food

Residential Aged Care	$1,074,788,792
Hospitals	$344,919,324
Prisons	$157,608,112
Defence	$77,842,758
Long day care	$331,820,152
Others	$150, 336, 457

The Food System Sustainability Challenges

Our food system contributes **1/3 of our emissions**

There are significant hidden costs in our food system

ENVIRONMENT **$225 billion**

HEALTH **$49 billion**

1.3 million households are food insecure

<10% of Australian adults and children eat enough vegetables

2.8% Our food system circularity rate is only 2.8%

~1/3 of vegetable growers are considering leaving their farms

There is currently insufficient investment in connection infrastructure and supportive policy to drive action

Our scenarios and policy solutions show that sustainable food procurement can:

- Decrease food systems emissions
- Increase food freshness and decrease waste
- Increase the multiplier effect in regional economies
- Reduce institutional costs
- Increase vegetable and plant consumption
- Increase local sourcing
- Allow farmers to derisk the transition to more regenerative production methods

The Menu for success

Leadership

- Across the food system and governments
- In institutions
- In our regions, towns and cities
- Establish a new coordinating entity

Investment and time

- Set short, medium and long term goals
- There is no quick fix but over time the impacts accumulate and are transforming

Coordination & capability building through *connection infrastructure* to deliver

- Value chain coordination and support connecting producers/processors to buyers and kitchens in institutions
- Communities of practice for learning and sharing
- Food systems literacy including public campaigns

Governance & partnerships

- Cross-sectoral, across government, and including food system actors and civil society–at the level of action–regional, state and Commonwealth
- Include First Nations representatives and food sovereignty acknowledgment
- Expand food systems literacy knowledge

Measurable action coupled with monitoring

- Codesign and embed–targets, criteria, guidelines
- Regular monitoring of policy, practice and food systems impacts
- Include academics as partners in applied research

Section 1

Introduction

Overview

- Public food procurement is a proven leverage point for much-needed food system change.
- The call to action is in response to the substantial hidden and known costs – as well as long-term risks – posed by the current food system to health and equity, food security, the environment and climate, and our economy.

1.0 Introduction

1.0.1 Why This Project Matters

For the first time in Australia, we have mapped the value, and opportunity, of public food procurement across hospitals, aged care, schools, prisons, childcare, and other major public institutions. These institutions purchase enormous volumes of food each year – over $2.13 billion worth of public purchasing which shapes production and processing patterns, supply chains, nutrition, environmental impacts and outcomes, and regional economies.

Beyond action in institutional policy and programs, this baseline report can also be used to inform the development of *Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Strategy,* a National Nutrition Policy, and forthcoming large public events such as Brisbane 2032 Olympics.

1.0.2 Project Objectives

Map the Australian procurement landscape: Identify the arrangements and value of publicly funded (directly or indirectly) food procurement across a range of institutions, large and small.

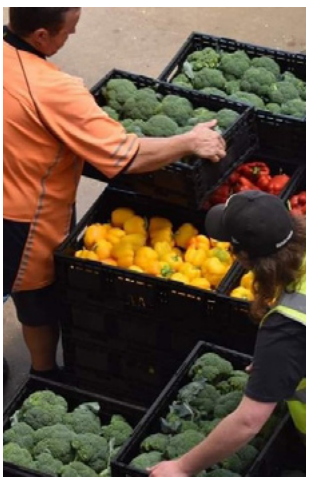
Reveal constraints & opportunities: Expose policy gaps and identify possible solutions based on international experience, contract practices, equity considerations, and Indigenous perspectives.

Develop scenarios for what is possible: Design scenarios from business as usual through to transformative procurement targets on food system sustainability, nutrition, and equity.

Set Pathways for Action: Provide practical, high-impact steps for governments, policymakers, and investors to act now.

1.1 Why food procurement and why now?

> *"Governments have few sources of leverage over increasingly globalized food systems – but public procurement is one of them. When sourcing food for schools, hospitals and public administrations, Governments have a rare opportunity to support more nutritious diets and more sustainable food systems in one fell swoop."*
>
> Olivier De Schutter – United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2014



Transformation is needed to shift towards food systems that are inclusive, resilient, equitable, and environmentally sustainable, ensuring everyone has access to affordable and nutritious food while supporting livelihoods and planetary health.[3]

Public food procurement is a powerful lever for change. International examples from Brazil, the UK, Europe, and the US have shown that by aligning public procurement with health, environmental, and social objectives, governments can:

- Create stable markets for all scales and sustainable producers,
- Incentivise shifts to healthier, diversified diets,
- Reduce the environmental footprint of food production and supply chains,
- Foster local and regional food economies, thereby strengthening resilience,
- Promote equity by prioritising marginalised producers and communities,
- Strengthen interdependencies between food, health, and education systems, e.g. through school and hospital food programmes, and

- Act as a leverage point: small shifts in criteria, such as sourcing standards or menu design, can create disproportionately large impacts across supply chains and communities.[4]

Sustainable healthy diets are patterns of eating that promote all dimensions of individuals' health and wellbeing; create low environmental pressure and impact; are readily accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and are culturally acceptable.[5]

Leverage points are strategic places in a system where a small shift can produce significant, lasting changes. Taking action at a leverage point focuses on minimal intervention for disproportionate impact.[6]

1.2 Public support for a more sustainable approach

The Australian community strongly supports governments using public procurement to create public good. Independent polling conducted in 2023 (high level results captured in Figure 1 below) demonstrates consistently high support for governments to adopt more sustainable approaches to public food procurement.[7]

Figure 1 – High level polling results

Sustainable public food procurement goes beyond "buying better." It is a policy instrument that improves access to nutritious food, stabilises regional supply chains, and builds producer capacity, thereby enhancing equity, sustainability, availability, access, agency, and stability – the core dimensions of food security. Procurement is not just a supply-chain function, it is a systems-level policy tool for public good,[8] that in the food sector simultaneously delivers on sustainable healthy diets and socio-economic goals, making it a key entry point for holistic food systems transformation.

1.3 What is the food system and how does it work in Australia?

Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.[9]

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

The current food system isn't the result of coincidences or isolated events. Instead, it represents a scaffolding of global and local decisions, often rooted in pursuits of power, domination, and profit. This stands in stark contrast to the pre-colonial food system practised by the traditional owners of this land, which emphasised farming in tune with nature and a philosophy of take only what you need.

65K+

65,000+ years experience managing complex, sustainable, nutritious and equitable food systems.

Indigenous food systems are embedded in ancestral land, water and sky ecosystems that provide food and nutrition for all things on Country.

Diverse and locally specific food systems that reflect the unique social, geographic, environmental and cultural contexts of Indigenous Australia.[10]

1.3.1 The hidden and known costs of the Australian food system

Alarmingly, a 2025 CSIRO report estimates significant hidden costs of $ 274 billion from the Australian food system (see Diagram 1). Australia has the highest hidden costs per person in the world. [11]

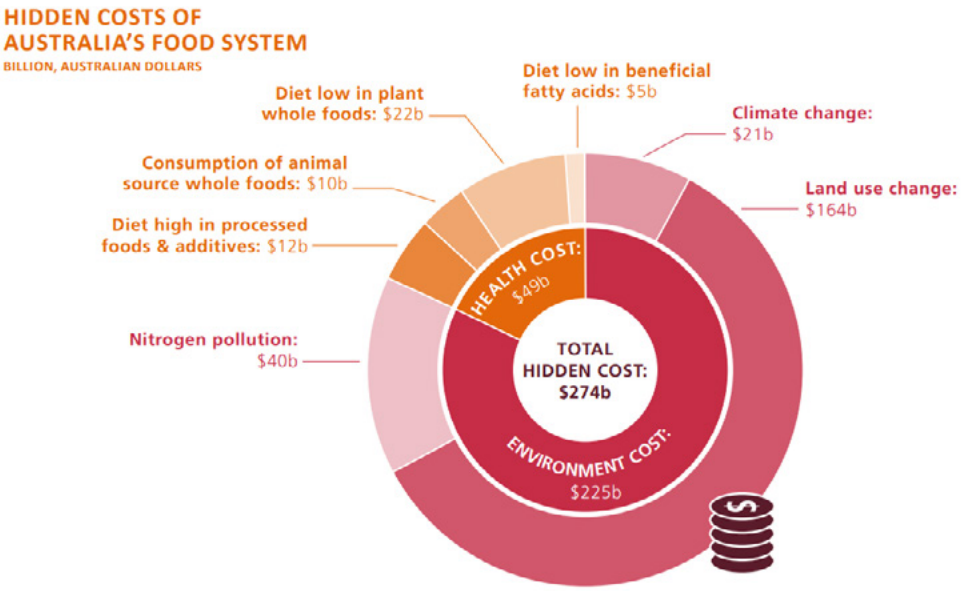


Figure 2 – Environmental and health hidden costs of Australia's food system in 2020, by cost category and subcategory (billion dollars)[12]

1.3.2 Australian food systems challenges

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

30–40%

An estimated 30–40% of Australia's emissions come from the food system.[13]

6.8 tonnes CO_2

Total food systems emissions per person is 6.8 tonnes of CO_2 per year[14]

7.6M tonnes

Each year in Australia, around 7.6 million tonnes of food is wasted across the food supply chain.[15]

Habitat loss, climate change, and invasive species continue to drive up the number of species threatened with extinction. Ongoing habitat destruction from agriculture and aquaculture affects 32% of newly listed species.[16]

FOR HEALTH AND EQUITY

Less than 10%

Less than 10% of Australians eat sufficient fruit and vegetables.[17]

1 IN 8

In 2023, 1 in 8 households experienced food insecurity due to a lack of money for food at some time in the previous 12 months.[18]

12 years

Loss of Indigenous food sovereignty in Australia is linked to significant health impacts and contributes to a 12-year life expectancy gap for Indigenous people.[19]

40%

40% of the calories in Australian diets comes from ultra processed foods (containing high amounts of sugar, saturated fat and salt in addition to excess calories).[20]

FOR THE ECONOMY

32%

32% of Australian vegetable growers are considering leaving the industry.[21]

22%

22% of food losses (waste) occurs on farms and 16% in manufacturing (compared to 3% in institutions), impacting livelihoods.[22]

Only around 2.8% of biological materials, including those in the food system, are currently reused in the circular economy, representing a missed economic opportunity and a loss of important nutrients from the food system.[23]

1.4 Procurement and Food Security

Sustainable procurement operationalises food security policy – turning government expenditure into a long-term investment in equitable access to nutritious, resilient, and sustainable food for all Australians. It is a high-impact mechanism for strengthening national and regional food security by aligning public purchasing with nutrition, equity, and environmental objectives.

According to the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), food security is defined as a state where all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary preferences and needs for an active and healthy life. This definition includes six dimensions: availability, access, stability, utilization, sustainability, and agency.[24]

1.4.1 What is food security?

Public institutions – such as schools, hospitals, aged-care facilities, and prisons – represent significant and stable sources of food demand. When procurement frameworks embed sustainability, nutrition, and local-sourcing criteria, they enhance the availability and access of healthy foods, stimulate regional agricultural economies, and improve the stability and resilience of supply chains. Evidence from the World Health Organisation shows that such policies directly improve diet quality and reduce health inequities, particularly for vulnerable groups.[25] Similarly, FAO research finds that sustainable public food procurement acts as a market lever, fostering diversified, localised production systems that support livelihoods and importantly build resilience against shocks.[26]

In Australia, integrating sustainability and nutrition into public procurement supports the forthcoming *Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Strategy.*[27] CSIRO's *Reshaping Australian Food Systems Roadmap* further highlights that procurement reform is among the most powerful levers for system-wide change, driving innovation, supporting health sustainable diets, and reinforcing community food security through relocalised supply partnerships.[28]

Many Australians experiencing food insecurity access food via publicly funded meals, including healthcare facilities, Meals on Wheels, aged care, and residential care. Public food procurement can be an important lever to improve nutritious food access in these settings.

1.4.2 Are we food secure in Australia?

Current data shows that 1 in 8 Australian households are not food secure.[29] Despite this, Australia is regularly described as being food secure because we have an exportable surplus of bulk agricultural commodities. Over 70% of Australia's agricultural production is exported. The remaining 30% feeds a population of 27 million, so Australia is estimated to be able to feed another 63 million people, or around 100 million people in total.[30] However, CSIRO describes this commonly repeated metric as a misleading indicator of food security, because it conflates agricultural commodities with food.[31] By assuming we could exist on a diet based on our dominant exports of grains and beef, dietary requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables (or the potential of alternative sources of proteins such as dairy products, pulses, and eggs) are downplayed.

The Victorian Food Supply Scenarios Modelling, published by the University of Melbourne, shows a shortfall in fruit and vegetable production[32] and forthcoming research from CSIRO shows that domestic production – particularly for vegetables, nuts and seeds – is inadequate to the population's food and nutrition needs. As such, there is a mismatch between what we produce in Australia and the healthy and sustainable food we need to eat – including in public institutions. Given that food procurement represents a predictable and reliable market, it could be an effective lever for working with the agricultural sector to increase production and fill these supply gaps.

Thank you

We are grateful to the following individuals and organisations for the contributions they have made to the development of this body of work. Your willingness to work with us and provide advice and/or data over a short, 10 week timeframe is truly appreciated.

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Aaron Pearce	Corrections Queensland
Aimee Esselmont	Government Procurement, Victorian Government
Alex Hooke	Social Traders
Andreas Seibold	Infrastructure and health Support Services, ACT Government
Annet Hoek	Freelance Senior Researcher & Consultant
Ash Garlett Penfold	Gather Foods
Bec Spink	Wirrigirri Primary School
Bettina Bergmann	Procurement Manager, City of Copenhagen
Dr Carolina Venegas Hargous	Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition
Catherine Coogan-West	Foodbank Queensland
Danielle Proud	Department of Education, South Australia
Deanne McMullen	Health and Wellbeing Queensland
Elisabeth Lette	EML Advisory
Dr Erica Reeve	Postdoctoral Researcher, Deakin University
Frank Dinneen	Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business
Gavin Hanscomb	Corporate Services Division, System Procurement, Queensland Health
Georgia Savage	General Manager, The Community Grocer

Dr Jennifer Browne	Faculty of Health/School of Health and Social Development/ Institute for Health Transformation, Deakin University
Jessica Howell	Graduate Researcher, Faculty of Health/School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University
Jessica Johns	Healthshare Victoria
Jodi Clarke	Sustainable Table
Joel McKay	Procurement Capability Branch, Department of Finance, Australian Government
Dr Jorja Collins	Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food, Monash University
Joshua Gilbert	Indigenous Consultant, Agriculturist & Innovator
Julie Bonnici	Meals on Wheels, South Australia
Julie-Anne McWhinnie	Department of Health, Victoria
Justine Coates	Plus One Serve–AUSVEG
Kathrin Hetz	Food Systems Consultant, WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health
Kate Thornber	Wellbeing and Inclusion Policy and Service Design, Education Directorate, ACT Government
Leanne Elliston	National Nutrition Foundation, ACT
Liz Dixon	Regional Development Australia, NSW
Liz Sanders	The Food Embassy
Margaret Rozman	National Nutrition Foundation
Assoc. Prof. Marta Andhov	University of Auckland
Michelle Lausen	Plus One Serve–AUSVEG
Dr Maureen Murphy	Community and Public Health Division,Department of Health Victoria
Patsy Purtill	Corrections Queensland
Raffaele Persichetti	Ultra Juice Australia
Rema Ghosn	Corporate and Infrastructure Division, Department for Health and Wellbeing
Ronella Gomez	The Community Grocer
Dr Ros Sambell	Edith Cowan University, Western Australia
Sharon Laurence	VicHealth
Simon Jackson	Compass Group
Dr Stefanie Carino	Climate and Health Alliance
Stefan Kauffman	Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University
Thomas Pollock	GovReady Queensland
Veronika Pasalic	Wellbeing and Inclusion Policy and Service Design, Education Directorate ACT Government
Vincent Sully	Government Procurement, Victorian Government
Yannick Laurent	Foodbuy, Compass Group

Section 2

Public Food Procurement Expenditure Mapping

Overview

- This project has undertaken an Australian-first mapping of the annual amount spent by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments on public food procurement.
- **Our best estimate based on our mapping of the annual total value of public food procurement is over $2.12 Billion.**
- Tables for each setting by state and territory are included.
- The methodology, data sources for our calculations for the best estimates are in Appendix A.

2.0 Introduction

To our knowledge, this is the first time since 2007[33] that a comprehensive mapping of public food procurement has been undertaken. Although commercial market-based assessments exist, we did not have access to these. The 2007 report – produced for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – was limited to exploring food distribution channels for supplying the institutional market along with other sectors, including retail. It did not contain an estimate for the market value of procurement as we have created here.

The 2007 report characterised food supply to public institutions as heavily consolidated, with wholesale and distribution activities led by a few major participants. This consolidation remains today, with several wholesalers – such as BidFood and PFD – holding the majority of grocery and dry goods contracts. Contracts for fresh produce (fruit, vegetables, meat), bread and baked goods, and dairy foods have a wider variety of suppliers. Of note, since the 2007 report there has been an increase in the number of people accessing food via institutions, particularly in aged care and hospitals. This means that the market opportunity has expanded alongside the leverage potential for food system change.

Because we are the first to do this mapping and had no baseline to work from, we developed a simplified method using an evidence-based approach and logic model for determining the annual spend on food procurement by institutions funded (directly or indirectly) by the Commonwealth and State or Territory governments across Australia. We have outlined our methodology in Appendix A. In developing this approach, we consulted with experts to check our thinking and confirm that our process was sound. This has resulted in our best estimate for public food procurement across Australia.

2.1 The best estimate of annual expenditure on public food procurement

The diagram below captures the institutions we included in our mapping. Some food procurement is directly funded by governments and a separate budget item (e.g. hospitals and correctional facilities). In other settings it is covered by general program costs (e.g. residential aged care) or partially subsidised through government contribution or payments to support delivery of programs (e.g. long day care and Meals on Wheels).

The international policy context (see Section 4) shows that in every section we mapped, governments have the ability to introduce or strengthen policies, criteria and targets to influence sustainable food procurement.

Table 1 – Annual public food procurement spend by setting

NATIONAL SPEND		STATE SPEND	
Residential aged care	$1,074,788,792	Public Hospitals	$331,820,152
Long day care	$331,820,152	Correctional facilities (prisons and youth detention)	$157,608,112
Defence	$ 77,842,758	TAFE	$15,227,641
Meals on Wheels	$65,045,809	School meals	$4,233,199
Residential care (mental health and homelessness services)	$57,936,309	Venues/Events management (found in South Australia only)	$4,400,000
Antarctic bases (Managed by the Australian Antarctic Division)	$3,493,498		
ESTIMATED TOTAL SPEND	**$2,137,315,595**		

NB: we have not included Commonwealth or State government emergency food relief (EFR) because the resourcing allocated to EFR is largely for operational funding and the sector relies heavily on food donations rather than procurement. Emerging social wholesaling models for supporting community sector procurement are described in Section 6.

2.2 Tables for institutional settings and jurisdiction

In this section we provide data tables by institution type and government jurisdiction (National or State/Territory). Please refer to Appendix A for the methodology.

2.2.1 Residential Aged Care

Table 2 – Residential aged care (National, State and Territory estimates)

	Annual spend on food & ingredients	No. of residents	No. of meals	No. of institutions	No. of institutions in regional locations
NSW	$346,246,903	63,903	68,248,404	832	298
Victoria	$280,062,124	51,688	55,202,784	744	285
QLD	$215,947,144	39,855	42,565,140	461	177
WA	$98,721,790	18,220	19,458,960	249	48
SA	$92,940,443	17,153	18,319,404	231	75
Tas	$24,620,846	4,544	4,852,992	67	67
ACT	$13,388,669	2,471	2,639,028	27	0
NT	$ 2,860,873	528	563,904	9	9
National total	**$1,074,788,792**	**198362**	**211,850,616**	**2620**	**959**

Please see Section 3 for a comprehensive overview of the aged care sector and the new quality standards for nutrition and monitoring/ reporting introduced on 1 November 2025.

2.2.2 Defence

Table 3 – Defence (National estimate) (excludes private contractor procurement)

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	Source of funding	Catering model
National total	$77,842,758	Commonwealth funded through Department of Defence	In-house by Australian Army Catering Corps or Maritime Logistics Chefs employed by the Navy, with ingredients (and pre-made ration packs) procured by the Department of Defence via open tender. There are additional sites managed by contract by food service providers (see case study on Compass in Section 3)

2.2.3 Meals on Wheels in Australia

Table 4 – Meals on Wheels (National, State and Territory estimates)

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	No. of meals
NSW	$20,250,000	4,500,000
Victoria	$15,750,000	3,500,000
QLD	$12,150,000	2,700,000
WA	$6,525,000	1,450,000
SA	$8,049,732	1,100,000
Tas	$1,494,765	332,170
ACT	$421,312	93,625
NT	$405,000	90,000
National total	**$65,045,809**	**13,765,795**

2.2.4 Long Day Care

Table 5 – Long Day Care (National, State and Territory estimates)

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	No. of meals
NSW	$107,095,842	127,922,328
Victoria	$86,092,440	101,262,269
QLD	$81,231,051	97,027,718
WA	$36,669,690	31,694,803
SA	$18,433,129	22,017,744
Tas	$4,591,676	5,484,600
ACT	$6,769,110	8,085,470
NT	$3,076,396	3,674,650
National total	**$331,820,152**	**396,347,846**

2.2.5 Residential care

Table 6 – Residential Care (National, State and Territory estimates) (Residential mental health care and emergency/crisis accommodation)

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	No. of meals	No. of institutions
NSW	$10,049,347	1,239,742	353
Victoria	$13,978,387	2,489,245	681
QLD	$27,078,884	3,651,560	304
SA	$695,919	258,659	213
WA	$3,207,360	879,307	72
Tas	$3,018,554	415,381	75
ACT	$2,043,611	158,532	47
NT	$1,145,306	289,138	83
National total	**$57,936,309**	**9,655,931**	**1,828**

2.2.6 Hospitals

Table 7 Public Hospitals (National, state and territory estimates)

	Public hospitals $ spend on food & ingredients	Patient days
Victoria	$86,480,739	5,920,309
NSW	$107,000,000	7,325,019
QLD	$72,436,042	4,738,136
SA	$26,118,186	1,788,002
WA	$22,391,017	2,102,443
Tas	$14,000,000	561,734
ACT	$7,051,340	467,400
NT	$9,442,000	410,571
National total	**$344,919,324**	**23,313,614**

Hospitals are a key setting for state government food procurement. See Section 3 Practices and Constraints for a detailed overview of this setting.

2.2.7 Correctional facilities

The food available in prisons has a significant influence on the quality of life for incarcerated people.[34] Poor nutrition can impact on concentration and learning and may result in episodes of violent or aggressive behaviour;[35] a poor diet can also contribute to poor mental and physical health[36] compared with the general population.

A small number of prisons in NSW and WA include food-growing initiatives, either as a small-scale project within the prison or in the form of a prison farm. These initiatives

enhance fresh, nutritious food supply, reduce costs, provide meaningful activity and skill development for people in custody, and contribute to environmental sustainability and waste reduction.[37]

Programs within the NSW Corrective Services estate reported savings on grocery bills of around $4 million annually through internal food production,[38] while WA prison farms donate excess produce to food relief charities.[39] From a rehabilitation and wellbeing perspective, growing and harvesting food has been linked with improved self-efficacy, mental health, reduced aggression, recidivism, and increased engagement in pro-social, skill-building work, benefits documented in the broader literature on prison-garden programs.[40]

Moreover, food-growing aligns with the "food systems and choices" focus area of the 2023 NSW Healthy Prisons Framework for Action, which emphasises creating healthy food systems in custodial settings.

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	No. of inmate meals	No. of facilities
NSW	$35,594,856	13,796,453	42
Victoria	$35,150,487	3,632,006	14 public, 3 private
QLD	$52,170,000*	11,471,330	49
WA	$12,635,774	6,612,048	17 public, 1 private
SA	$8,455,655	2,490,358	8 public, 2 private
Tas	Included in hospital table	799,022	7
ACT	$2,407,206	465,485	2
NT	$11,194,000	2,916,204	7
National total	**$157,952,324**	**42,182,795**	**146 public, 5 private**

Table 8- Correctional facilities (National, State and Territory estimates) (Prisons and youth detention facilities)

*The figure for Queensland is comparatively higher than other states. The data was provided directly by the Department of Corrective Services, who advised that it also includes corrections officer meals which part of their EBA.

2.2.8 School Meals

Around the world, schools have emerged as a key setting for sustainable food procurement to ensure child welfare and nutrition. In some countries (e.g. Finland and Sweden), meals are provided for all children free of charge; in others there are schemes for payment, although families on a low income may not pay a fee (e.g. the UK). Tasmania was the first state in Australia to introduce government-funded school lunches in 2023. The lunches are now provided in 45 schools, increasing to 60 in 2026. The Tasmanian Government has mandated that, starting in July 2025, the social enterprise Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, which manages school meals and food procurement, must source up to 75% of its fresh produce from within Tasmania.[41]

Table 9 – School Meals (National, State and Territory estimates)

	Annual spend on food & ingredients	No. of schools	No. of regional schools	Catering model
Tas	$778,800	45	29	School Lunches – Centralised kitchen with single social enterprise provider makes meals for 62% of schools; remainder produce meals inhouse
ACT	$1,000,000*	5	0	***School Breakfasts and Lunches** – Centralised kitchen with single social enterprise provider
NT	$1,544,399	unknown	73	School Nutrition Program
WA	$910,000	unknown		School breakfasts provided by Foodbank WA
Victoria	n/a			
NSW	n/a			
National value	**$4,233,199**			

2.2.9 TAFE

This expenditure is for food used in hospitality courses provided at TAFE institutes. Data on this procurement was found only in NSW, Victoria, and WA.

Table 10 – TAFE (National, State and Territory estimates) for hospitality courses

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients
NSW	$4,400,000
Victoria	$10,530,392
WA	$297,249
National total	**$15,227,641**

2.2.10 Antarctic Island Bases and Field Trips

Expenditure for food includes procurement for voyages, bases and Macquarie Island.

Table 11 – Antarctica (National estimate)

	Annual $ spend on food & ingredients	No. of meals	No. of bases
National total	**$3,493,497.94**	**47,906**	**4**

2.3 What did we learn while gathering and mapping the data?

- Generally, it was easier to identify Commonwealth spending versus State spending – this may be in part due to different reporting requirements across states and territories. When procurement occurs at a program level with hundreds of providers (e.g. Meals on Wheels) and often across a variety of programs, it is more challenging to quantify the value.
- During data collection we were supported by many people working in State and Territory governments, who provided or identified the most authoritative data available. We thank them sincerely for their help. Only one state required us to undertake a Freedom of Information process to obtain data (NSW for hospital food procurement. We paid $270 for the data).
- We believe that all data on government spending should be transparent and easy to obtain, but sometimes there was significant opacity or missing data. Our observation is that transparency can easily be achieved while still protecting the commercial-in-confidence requirements of suppliers. This will help with future monitoring of the benchmarks we have created through this project, and also uphold foundational principles of transparency around the use of public money.
- Where data for the whole of Australia did not exist, we relied on the expertise of peak bodies, academics, or peer reviewed research to determine costs that could be reasonably extrapolated and indexed as required. Where we have done this it is outlined in the methodology (Appendix A).
- Another challenge is that central procurement managers often do not have oversight of what is termed *off-contract* purchasing. Simplified, this is purchasing done directly by institutions (often from local businesses) but not through the central channels or portals. This is particularly relevant for regional areas, where distance and delivery schedules impact their ability to meet shortfalls quickly. **This means our best estimates are lower than the real value. We have not estimated the off-contract amount, with the exception of Queensland Health who were able to provide this data directly.**
- Outsourcing of food service provision to private catering companies, such as Compass, ISS, and Sodexo, who run on-site or central production kitchens for institutions, has also confounded our efforts. We were not able to quantify their food procurement value as contracts do not specify food service as a separate line item and are aggregated into a range of services provided. **Again, this means our best estimate underestimates the total value of publicly funded procurement.**

Section 3

Procurement practice and constraints in Australia

Overview

- Contracts, standing offers and panels are the common mechanisms for managing procurement at a state government level.
- A jurisdiction map indicates key timelines for procurement arrangements across Australia, providing an opportunity to advocate for adoption of more sustainable practices in the short to medium term.
- Structural barriers can challenge Indigenous business participation in procurement.
- We identify hospitals, residential aged care, and long day care as key settings for implementing policy and practice around sustainable food procurement.

3.0 Introduction

3.0.1 Why Procurement Practice Matters

Procurement is where food policy becomes action. How governments, hospitals, aged care providers and schools purchase food determines not only what is served but which producers and processors thrive, how land is cared for, and whether public spending supports health, economic, equity, and climate goals. Understanding current procurement practice – mapping the systems, contracts and decision points that shape institutional supply chains, and highlighting where champions are already driving change – is essential in guiding Australia's transition to sustainable food systems.

Building a truly sustainable procurement system must be grounded in Indigenous knowledge, leadership and food sovereignty. Respecting Country, supporting local Aboriginal enterprises, and valuing cultural foods and practices are essential to ensuring that sustainability transitions are not only low-carbon but also just and regenerative. This means:

- Creating procurement pathways for Indigenous producers and suppliers, including contract exemptions where appropriate,
- Embedding cultural food knowledge in nutrition standards and menu design, and
- Ensuring that procurement reforms contribute to self-determination and economic participation.

Contextual Note:
Indigenous Australians have long practiced sustainable land and food stewardship. Their deep knowledge offers valuable insights, yet Indigenous perspectives were not clearly reflected in this rapid review of hospital food systems literature – highlighting an opportunity for culturally informed approaches.

This section combines research evidence and practical experience from the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) and its Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) members to unpack how food purchasing currently works, and where reform is both needed and possible.

By combining policy analysis, practitioner experience and Indigenous leadership, this section provides a clear and actionable evidence base for transforming food procurement from a compliance function into a catalyst for health, resilience and reconciliation.

3.1 How Governments Procure Food in Australia

Australian governments purchase food for institutions such as hospitals, aged care facilities and prisons using a variety of mechanisms. These mechanisms can help to identify advocacy opportunities for healthier and more sustainable procurement. Commonly, food procurement is approached in the same way as all other types of procurement – but this means that staff are often procurement contract experts rather than food systems experts.

3.1.1 Procurement Mechanisms

Mechanism	Definition & Typical Use	Duration	Advocacy Opportunity
Contracts	Legally binding agreements with a defined scope, value and supplier. Used for large, ongoing operations such as hospital catering, correctional food services or whole-of-government food supply	3–5 years for supply contracts; up to 25 years for Private Public Partnerships.	Engage 12–24 months before renewal to influence sustainability, nutrition, or local sourcing criteria.
Standing Offers	Pre-approved supply arrangements where goods are purchased as needed at agreed prices. Common for high-volume categories like frozen, dry and chilled food.	3–5 years + extensions.	When new offers are issued or extended, advocate for local and low-carbon sourcing, and inclusion of sustainable production standards.
Panels	Prequalified groups of approved suppliers for specific categories. Used for fresh produce, bakery goods or regional procurement where flexibility and local supply matter.	3–5 years, often refreshed mid-term.	During panel refresh cycles, advocate for inclusion of SME, regional, Indigenous and sustainable suppliers.

KEY DISTINCTIONS

- Contracts provide certainty and continuity but limited flexibility; renewal windows are the key leverage points.
- Standing Offers manage routine purchasing efficiently and can embed uniform sustainability or nutritional criteria.
- Panels can promote diversity, agility and local participation in public supply chains.

3.1.2 Policy Implications

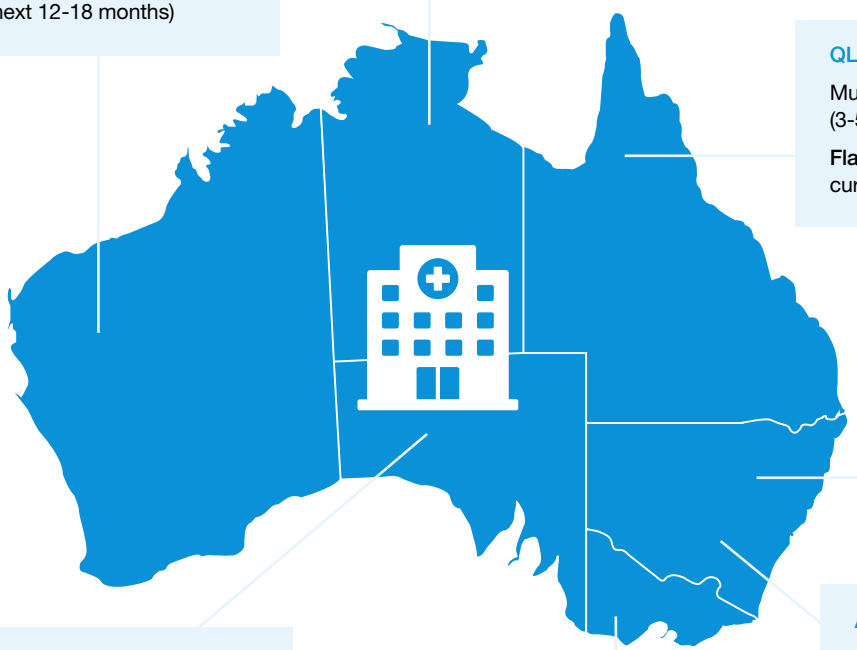
Embedding sustainability, health, and regional economic objectives into procurement mechanisms is vital for food security, climate and community wellbeing. Advocates should map and review timelines and target engagement 12–24 months before renewals or extensions: the period when contract and panel criteria are most open to change.

3.2 Jurisdiction Maps

The following two jurisdictional maps outline the current practices and flags procurement review opportunities for advocacy on contract criteria and policy levers.

Jurisdiction	Lead Agency + Example Contracts
NSW	HealthShare NSW – centralised; mandatory whole-of-government food supply contract C801 details (info.buy.nsw)
VIC	HealthShare Victoria (HSV) – central food policy & panel frameworks HSV Procurement guidance
QLD	Queensland Health – System Procurement via QTenders Queensland health procurement
WA	Health Support Services (HSS) – whole-of-health contracts Acacia contract details Tenders WA
SA	SA Health Procurement Supply Chain & Finance Branch – central oversight SA Health Tenders
ACT	ACT Health Directorate / Procurement ACT Panel arrangement ACT Health procurement policy
NT	NT Health Procurement & Logistics NT procurement reform
TAS	Tasmanian Dept of Health – procurement Tenders Tas Purchasing Tasmania

Hospitals



WA

Hospital food supply: state-wide contracts (typical 3-5 years + options)

Flag: Extension decision due 2025/26 (i.e., within next 12-18 months)

NT

Standard government procurement cycles (3-5 yrs) — recent reform Oct 2025

Current Tender till 2026

Flag: With reform in 2025, review window opens around 2026-27

QLD

Multi-year standing offers/panels (3-5 yrs + options)

Flag: around 2026–2028 for current panels

NSW

State-wide food supply contract C801 (mandatory) ~4-5 years, current term: 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2029.

Flag: From 2027–2028 start planning (18-24 months ahead of end June 2029)

ACT

Internal procurement frameworks; standard 3-5 year cycles > current panel arrangement

Flag: Review window likely 2026–2028

SA

Local Health Networks under PSCF; typical term ~4-5 years

Flag: extension decision or retender by ~2026-2027

VIC

Majority in-house or central production kitchen; supply panels with ~3-5 year terms + options

Request For Information 2025

Flag: 2026 review window

TAS

Largely in-house meals; local supplier contracts ~3-5 years

Flag: Review window approximately 2026

Prisons

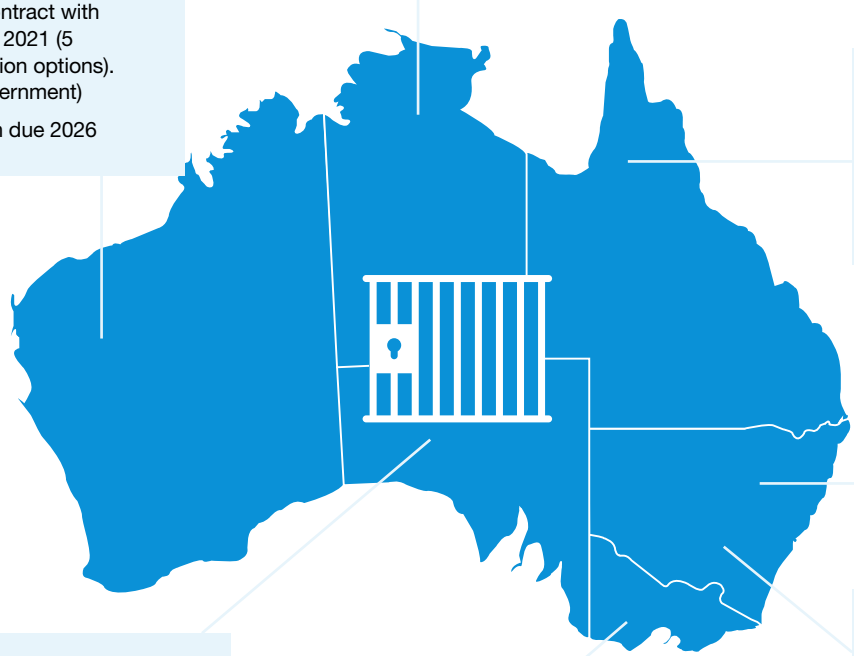
Notes for Advocacy & Policy Influence

The “Estimated Review / Renewal Window” column highlights when procurement criteria, sustainability mandates, local-supplier provisions, nutritional standards or contract KPIs could be revisited. Building relationships with buyers and suppliers early is critical.

For large/state-wide contracts (hospital supply panels and prison operator contracts), advocacy should begin 12-24 months ahead of the listed window.

In jurisdictions where contracts include extension options, the decision to exercise an option is itself a key advocacy point (e.g., WA Acacia, SA Mount Gambier).

Some contracts (e.g. long-term public-private partnerships) span decades; although renewal is distant, mid-term performance reviews provide intervention opportunities even before full re-tender.



NT

NT Correctional Services public-run; food services under government frameworks

Current Tender till 2026

Flag: With reform in 2025, review window opens around 2026-27

WA

WA Corrective Services – meals via Corrective Services Industries; private prison (Acacia Prison contract with Serco commenced May 2021 (5 years) + two 5-yr extension options). (Western Australian Government)

Flag: Extension decision due 2026

QLD

Queensland Corrective Services public-run majority; few private contracts

Current contracts expire March 2027

Flag: 2026–2027

NSW

Meals in prisons mainly in-house via Corrective Services Industries; privatised site (Clarence) 20-year operator contract

Centralised contract closed in September 2025

ACT

Alexander Maconochie Centre – public operation; food services procured internally.

Flag: Review window likely 2026–2028

SA

Mount Gambier Prison (G4S) contract began Dec 2017 (5 years + 5-year option)

Tenders/contracts

Flag: extension decision or retender by 2026

VIC

Mixed public/private; Ravenhall Public Private Partnership (PPP) is for 25 years (2017-2042)

Flag: Long-term — flag strategic review of PPP in next 5-10 years

TAS

Tasmania Prison Service public-run; food procured via DoH central contracts

Flag: Review window approximately 2026

3.4 Indigenous participation in food procurement

The Commonwealth and several states in Australia have social procurement frameworks and policies (see Section 4) which aim to increase the participation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), social enterprises and Indigenous owned businesses in public procurement. However, the good intention of these frameworks does not always result in implementation. We caught up with Joshua Gilbert to gain his perspective on this.

3.4.1 Yarning with Joshua Gilbert, Worimi man

In mid-October 2025, Joshua generously caught up with the project team for a yarn. We wanted to explore issues relating to Indigenous Food Sovereignty and how we can embed Indigenous knowledge and governance wisdom in future procurement processes and the pathways to action.

First, a little about Josh. He is a farmer and Indigenous leader in the Australian agrifood system, connecting the conversations between farming, supporting Indigenous businesses and truth-telling. Josh sits on a variety of Boards to develop the sector and lead change. He advocates for truth-telling as a key component of creating effective pathways for Indigenous people in agriculture and the broader food system. He is a polymath working as an author, academic and PhD Candidate, and environmentalist. He recently wrote an insightful piece for The Conversation about how stories of agriculture often remove or sanitise history, impacting future opportunities for Indigenous farmers.[42]

In his recent book *Australia's Agricultural Identity – An Aboriginal Yarn*, Josh explores how to combine ancient Indigenous land knowledge and practices with emerging technology and insights, which he believes will be critical in the face of climate change. Concurrently, he claims, we must acknowledge the mixed history of Australian agriculture's relationship with Aboriginal people. His research, alongside other academic literature, shows that racism in farming communities continues to drive young Aboriginal farmers and workers away from the sector,[43] even though increased participation of Aboriginal people could help address workforce shortages. [44]

"Indigenous people have a connection to the land that goes beyond words, and this contains knowledge of climate adaptation from old times. They've survived drought, extreme weather and floods for tens of thousands of years. The knowledge we have gathered can help both farmers and scientists understand how to adapt to a changing climate. We should tap into and value this and embrace what Indigenous Australians have to offer."[1]

3.4.2 Key policy take aways from our yarn with Josh

Indigenous participation in Australia's agricultural economy remains constrained by structural, financial and policy barriers. Despite deep agricultural knowledge and historical contribution to the sector, there are fewer than 50 formally recognised Indigenous-owned agricultural businesses, reflecting ongoing systemic gaps in data, access, policy alignment, and investment.

CHALLENGES

Psychological and cultural safety concerns persist for Indigenous farmers and workers: many farmers avoid identifying publicly as Indigenous due to racism, unfair market treatment and tokenism fears. Josh says, "People think, I'll just be subject to racism rather than get any benefit out of it."

Current Indigenous food procurement and agriculture policy settings at a Commonwealth and State government level are often narrow, prioritising native food enterprises and not Indigenous-run mainstream agricultural production, and/or large contracts that exclude smaller producers.

> We need to work on the supply as much as the demand – the demand is easier; the supply isn't there yet."
>
> Joshua Gilbert

Upcoming Commonwealth Government business ownership rule changes (requiring 51% Indigenous equity from 2026) risk excluding family ownership partnerships from becoming accredited Indigenous businesses.

Access to finance for Indigenous-owned businesses and particularly land back for agricultural endeavours is a key barrier, with limited fit-for-purpose lending pathways and currently minimal agricultural investment. The recent inclusion of agriculture as a key sector by Indigenous Business Australia provides hope, but it is still in the early days.

There are only a small number of Indigenous people with agricultural expertise who occupy multiple boards, creating risks for conflict of interest and an over-reliance on a small pool of leaders.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Stronger inclusion of Indigenous businesses through

- Reforming procurement through using targets to reflect the growing population share of Indigenous people,
- Formally recognising partnership structures (such as family-owned businesses) in the new definitions for certification of Indigenous businesses, and
- Creating an Indigenous Agricultural Research & Development Corporation to drive leadership development, innovation, business and workforce pathways.

Social Procurement Frameworks should, through targeted procurement practices, carve out smaller, culturally safe contracts within large government procurement contracts. This is a critical enabler for increasing Indigenous participation, especially beyond the supply of bush foods.

Authentic inclusion in food systems governance and procurement opportunities requires truth-telling about historical dispossession and ongoing inequities. Coupling this with investment in the next generation of Indigenous farmers and building culturally competent government and industry partnerships could create significant opportunities.

The 2025 *Sleeping Giant Rises* report provides evidence that Indigenous businesses create

$42.6B

of social value each year for business owners, employees, households, and communities.[45]

Supply Nation (SN) is a key organisation in facilitating the connections between governments and Indigenous businesses. SN works with Indigenous businesses, along with procurement teams from government and corporate Australia to shape the evolving Indigenous business sector. They host the largest directory of certified Indigenous businesses in Australia.

Supply Nation recently funded research exploring the impacts of investing in Indigenous businesses.

The 2025 *Sleeping Giant Rises* report provides evidence that Indigenous businesses create $42.6 billion of social value each year for business owners, employees, households, and communities.[45] This equates to $3.66 of economic and social value created for every dollar of revenue generated. This social value is experienced as:

- agency and control over their lives
- expanded aspirations
- financial security through employment
- pride
- physical health and mental wellbeing
- improved family relationships
- stronger connections to Culture and Country

3.5 Key Settings – context and levers

In this section we highlight three key settings – hospitals, residential aged care, and long day care – where the context suggests there is an environment supportive of change. This context includes timelines for contracting arrangements, new sustainability reporting requirements, and expert advocacy-driven approaches. We identify these settings as future focus areas for designing policy and institutional practices around sustainable food procurement.

3.5.1 Hospitals

Hospital-based action

This section captures a rapid review of Australian literature relating specifically to the hospital operational environment. Hospitals can choose to advance more sustainable approaches by aligning food initiatives with their health, economic and sustainability goals. Collaboration within and between hospitals and external partners is a crucial driver of innovation in this space. Key enablers include:

Leadership-Driven Advocacy – Passionate kitchen staff, foodservice managers, dietitians and nutrition professionals champion sustainable food systems by promoting plant-forward menus, linking with local producers, wholesalers and other farmer-value

chains, reducing waste, and linking health with environmentally responsible procurement and service.[46] [1, 2, 4, 7, 10]

Enabling Conditions – Strong leadership and management commitments, flexible infrastructure, and staff education, paired with patient-driven demand for better food and the operational advantage of on-site kitchen, create fertile ground for sustainable foodservice transformation. [1, 2, 9]

Peer-Led Sustainability Shift – Hospitals leading in sustainable food service have inspired others through knowledge sharing and staff engagement (chefs, food service managers and dietitians) exchanging expertise, and educational initiatives have accelerated adoption across institutions. [1, 4, 7]

Integrated Approach to Sustainable Food Service – Hospitals can drive sustainability through plant-based, seasonal menus, reducing waste – including through reducing portions and meat portions, lower carbon meal choices, making untouched meals available at discounted prices, and using creative budgeting. [2, 4, 7] Staff training and leadership from nutrition professionals strengthen capacity – they can bridge the gap between healthy diets and environmentally sustainable food procurement. [1, 2, 4, 10] University partnerships support evidence-based practices through research.

3.5.2 Operationalising Sustainability in Food Service Kitchens

UK research[47] has found that chefs are central actors in sustainability transitions – where everyday operational choices shape environmental outcomes.

KEY SKILLS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

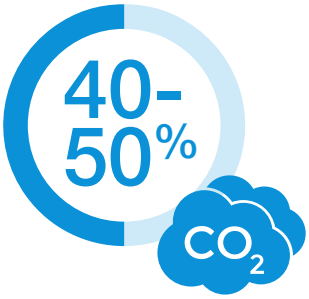
Chefs need both technical and non-technical competencies:

- Culinary mastery and ingredient knowledge to minimise waste and design efficient menus,
- Food systems literacy to understand how sourcing and cooking affect emissions,
- Creativity and innovation to repurpose ingredients and reformulate dishes, and
- Leadership and communication to motivate teams and align sustainability with business goals.

THE IMPACT OF CHEFS' DECISIONS

Menu design and purchasing decisions directly influence food waste, supply-chain emissions, and customer diets. Sustainable menus and repurposing practices can cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to 40–50%, improve resource use, and manage costs.

Sustainable menus and repurposing practices can cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to



Enablers: strong kitchen leadership, sustainability-focused training, cost pressures encouraging waste reduction, and growing public demand for sustainable dining.

Barriers: limited time and staffing, human resource management focused on recruitment and welfare rather than sustainability, patchy sustainability knowledge, and outdated culinary education.[48]

While there is increasing awareness of the environmental impacts of food service, kitchen procurement, and menus, this must be matched with practical competencies and institutional support to translate intent into action.

Raffaele Persichetti

Chef, Distiller and Commercial/Institutional kitchen and food service consultant/designer

Case Study: In the Kitchen

The pain points in institutions

People who work in kitchens can provide valuable perspectives and are critical to successful practice change. Where sustainability transitions have been successfully executed in other countries, kitchen workers have been key partners in both design and implementation.

We caught up with Raf in October 2025 to talk about possible barriers to hospital kitchens adopting new approaches to food procurement.

Institutional infrastructure can constrain changes to practices. In older buildings, loading bays can be a long distance from kitchens. Kitchen staff see consolidating suppliers as a way to better manage this pain point; conversely, having more suppliers exacerbates it. Even in newer hospitals, the location of loading bays can be an afterthought. Kitchens in close proximity to the loading bay can manage more deliveries more easily.

Training of chefs and kitchen staff is key. There are perceived gaps in TAFE training around sustainability and seasonality, which limits students' confidence with preparing food from scratch. In contrast, some kitchens are highly adaptable, often reliant on a head chef with good skills and personal values leading them to include seasonal ingredients and support local producers and processors.

Chefs need the right tools for the job. In many kitchens there has been a long-term under-investment in equipment that makes it easier to prepare meals from scratch using fresh seasonal ingredients – including storage, processing and cooking.

Jesse Van Der Snoek
Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer

Case Study: Cultural Care

Bush Tucker Meals at Rockingham General Hospital

About the Program

The Bush Tucker meals initiative at Rockingham General Hospital (RGH) introduces 'Bush Tucker' foods to the regular hospital menu, making cultural connection a tangible part of patient care. What makes this program particularly special is its simplicity – it didn't require any funding or extra resources, just a conversation.

As Jesse explains, "The Bush Tucker initiative here at RGH was a way of tapping into or tweaking existing services to see if there was something we could do to make hospital stays more accommodating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients." The idea emerged while Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers were planning a NAIDOC Day morning tea. "We were looking through cultural recipes, and the thought popped into our head – 'Can we get some of these cultural foods on the regular menu?'"

RGH has the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients under the South Metropolitan Health Service jurisdiction, making culturally responsive care essential. Currently, patients can choose from kangaroo, goat, and wild boar options—Gourmania's Bush Tucker range also included water buffalo until recently. "I had to Google if we even had water buffalo in Australia," Jesse laughs, "Turns out in Central Oz we have water buffalo running around and they're a popular cuisine option for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the area."

Partnership Approach

This collaborative initiative demonstrates what's possible when you work with what you have. Jesse reached out to Jess, the head of kitchen/catering at RGH, who then contacted their current meal supplier, Gourmania, about culturally diverse options. Since RGH doesn't prepare food in a traditional sense – just reheating pre-made meals—the menu is governed by the supplier, making this partnership crucial.

The team involved includes:

- Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers – driving the concept and cultural guidance.
- Rockingham General Hospital Catering and Kitchen Services – coordinating with suppliers.
- Allied Health Services – including dieticians and speech pathologists.
- Gourmania (meal supplier) – sourcing and preparing the bush tucker options.

Impact and Feedback

The patient response has been powerful and often emotional. "Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients are actually quite shocked and impressed we have the Bush Tucker options," Jesse says. "After I inform them, they usually immediately relate to me a story of the last time they had a decent feed of kangaroo or goat, or childhood stories of hunting out on Country with family. It seems to open a portal in their heart and mind to their Cultural heritage and they momentarily forget the shackles of their current hospitalisation."

The Elders (over 50) especially embrace the options. "A hearty feed of Roo Stew whilst they're kicking back watching NITV … is a sure-fire recipe to forget your worries."

While still in its infancy, word is spreading. More staff are instinctively offering bush tucker to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients on the wards, and Jesse is hoping to create a pamphlet for staff to distribute on arrival. The program may also appeal to non-Indigenous patients, increasing its sustainability as a menu staple.

The Little Things

Jesse captures it perfectly: "It may not seem like a big deal to some, but when you're in hospital and bed/room bound – you look forward to the little things. In fact, the little things become big things, because there's not too many highlights in your day. Especially when you're away from Country and get no visitors."

For Indigenous patients experiencing the trauma of hospitalisation – away from home, family, culture and Country – these meals offer connection. "Food in Aboriginal culture is deeply connected to identity, traditions and the land," Jesse explains. The initiative embodies respect for Country, land, and centuries of traditional knowledge, fostering trust in the health service while improving patient wellbeing through the simple, powerful act of cultural recognition.

> "It may not seem like a big deal to some, but when you're in hospital and bed/room bound–you look forward to the little things. In fact, the little things become big things, because there's not too many highlights in your day. Especially when you're away from Country and get no visitors."
>
> Jesse Van Der Snoek

3.5.3 How to unlock opportunities for sustainable hospital food procurement

Hospitals and producers across Australia are showing that food procurement can deliver both health and economic benefits, but only when the right enablers are in place. We conducted a rapid review of Australian research to better understand this context.

It highlights that while hospitals are eager to purchase more local and sustainable food, producers and suppliers still face complex barriers: pricing, delayed payments, strict delivery terms, and limited infrastructure for aggregation or minimal processing.[49 50 51 52 53]

At the same time, hospital food service teams must manage tight budgets, staff shortages, and compliance requirements. Without dedicated leadership and investment, sustainable procurement will remain a "nice-to-have" rather than a system norm.[54]

From Barriers to Action

Strengthening Supply Chains and Local Access. Small-scale farmers are often excluded from institutional markets due to insurance, certification, and food safety requirements.[6] Connecting producers with institutions through dynamic procurement platforms, farmer-to-farmer mentoring, and value-add processing hubs can remove many of these barriers.[12] [55] Group Purchasing Organisations (GPOs) can further streamline contracting, assure food safety, and make it practical for hospitals to buy from local suppliers.[2] [5]

Investing in Processing and Infrastructure. Hospitals depend on centrally processed produce to meet food safety and labour constraints. The lack of pre-processed options — such as peeled or chopped vegetables — limits engagement with local growers.[56] Developing regional "light-processing" or food-hub facilities can make local food both compliant and convenient for institutional kitchens.[8]

Empowering Producers and Buyers. Producers are motivated by social and environmental values and will engage when supported to meet institutional expectations.[6] [57]Training in compliance, certification, logistics, and the use of Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Guides[58] can open new market channels and foster long-term partnerships between hospitals and local suppliers.

Enabling Leadership and Investment. Sustainable procurement succeeds when leadership comes from within hospitals – particularly from foodservice teams, executives, and clinicians.[59] [60] Sharing success stories and embedding cultural and seasonal food elements can inspire uptake across departments and networks.[61]

Tackling Cost and Budget Perceptions. Although sustainable sourcing can appear more expensive initially, evidence shows long-term savings through waste reduction, better patient outcomes, and streamlined purchasing.[62] [63] Hospitals can leverage collective purchasing power via GPOs, adopt phased implementation, and attract grants or philanthropic co-funding to offset start-up costs.[64] [65]

Pathways Forward

- Align menus with seasons and work with local producers and suppliers to ensure consistent supply and reduce waste.[66] [67]
- Develop traceability systems that track origin, food safety, and sustainability credentials to build procurement confidence.[68]
- Embed cost-justified sustainability, integrating health, climate, and regional-development benefits into budgeting and performance frameworks.[69]
- Invest in leadership and workforce capability, providing champions with food systems and operational training, peer networks, and recognition.[70]

Why It Matters

Hospitals are anchor institutions — large, stable purchasers capable of transforming regional food systems. Investing in sustainable food procurement is not only a supply-chain reform; it's a public-health, regional-development, and climate-resilience strategy. With government and philanthropic support, hospitals can become catalysts for food system transformation, creating markets that reward quality, fairness, and sustainability — making good food the default, not the exception, across Australia's health sector.

3.5.4 Practices to improve food system literacy in hospitals

Dietitian Leadership in Sustainability. Roles such as Sustainable Food System Clinical Lead in Melbourne show how dietitians can lead food waste audits, local procurement, and sustainability education. [7] Embedding sustainability goals into healthcare requires organisational support and leadership that shapes practice norms. [71]

Organisational Collaboration. Green committees and ambassador programs empower dietitians to integrate sustainable food systems. [72] Success depends on supportive managers, aligned strategies, and strong community engagement, including for cultural food elements. [73]

Policy-Driven Change. Under the United Kingdom's Net Zero Strategy, people in roles such as Net Zero Dietitian lead low-carbon meal planning and staff education. [74] Denmark's Organic Action Plan shows how government funding and regulation can drive organic adoption, especially when leaders have prior knowledge of organic systems. [22]

Government Support. Grants and local procurement frameworks provide essential startup support for sustainable practices. [75]

Recognition and Professional Support. Award systems, like Global Green and Healthy Hospitals network, can foster motivation and a culture of sustainability. [6] National dietetic associations (e.g., Dietitians Australia and the British Dietetic Association) offer resources and guidance, although wider adoption depends on supportive environments and evidence use. [7]

Farmer Engagement and Market Access. Farmers need clearer pathways to institutional markets and education on food safety. [2] Tools like Local Harvest and farmer-to-farmer training help bridge gaps. [76] Initiatives from Healthcare Without Harm and the UK's National Health Service show that clear targets, education, and auditing embed local procurement into hospital strategies. [6]

The EAT-Lancet Commission planetary health plate

Systemic Alignment with Sustainability Goals

While not directly linked to sustainable procurement, the following insights highlight broader systemic issues that support sustainability in institutional food systems.

Planetary Health Advocacy. The Eat-Lancet Commission encourages healthcare professionals to promote the planetary health diet through education, dietary guidance, procurement reform, and advocacy – positioning sustainability as a core health responsibility.[77]

Sustainability Networks. Organisations like Global Green and Healthy Hospitals, Nourish, and Healthcare Without Harm offer resources, benchmarking, communities of practice and peer networks to support sustainability in healthcare. [78]

Sustainability in Education. Sustainability is currently not well integrated into nutrition and dietetics training. Reforming curricula is essential to align future professionals with global standards, especially in Australia.[79]

Dr Steph Carino

Sustainable Health Manager, Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA)

Case Study: Climate-resilient hospitals through food

Community of Practice

Dr Steph Carino is Sustainable Health Manager at the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), Australia's peak body for climate and health, which is leading a growing national movement for climate-resilient and sustainable healthcare. As the Pacific regional coordinator of Health Care Without Harm's Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) network since 2011, CAHA connects hospitals, health services and governments committed to reducing their ecological footprint and promoting public and planetary health. Dr Carino contributed this case study.

Across Australia and New Zealand, more than 170 organisational members — including public and private health services, dental and mental health providers, professional associations, and all state and territory health departments — are part of the GGHH network. Internationally, the movement now spans 87 countries and over 70,000 health services, demonstrating the health sector's global potential to drive decarbonisation and resilience.

GGHH members commit to progress on a framework of 10 interconnected goals, working on areas such as energy, waste, chemicals, buildings, and food. In 2021, Health Care Without Harm's *Global Roadmap for Healthcare Decarbonisation* set out a pathway to zero emissions by 2050, identifying seven high-impact actions — one being the provision of healthy, sustainably grown food and support for climate-resilient agriculture.[80] The roadmap highlights how health-system procurement of sustainably and locally produced food can strengthen local economies, biodiversity, and food security while cutting Scope 3 emissions.

Policy Leadership and National Impact

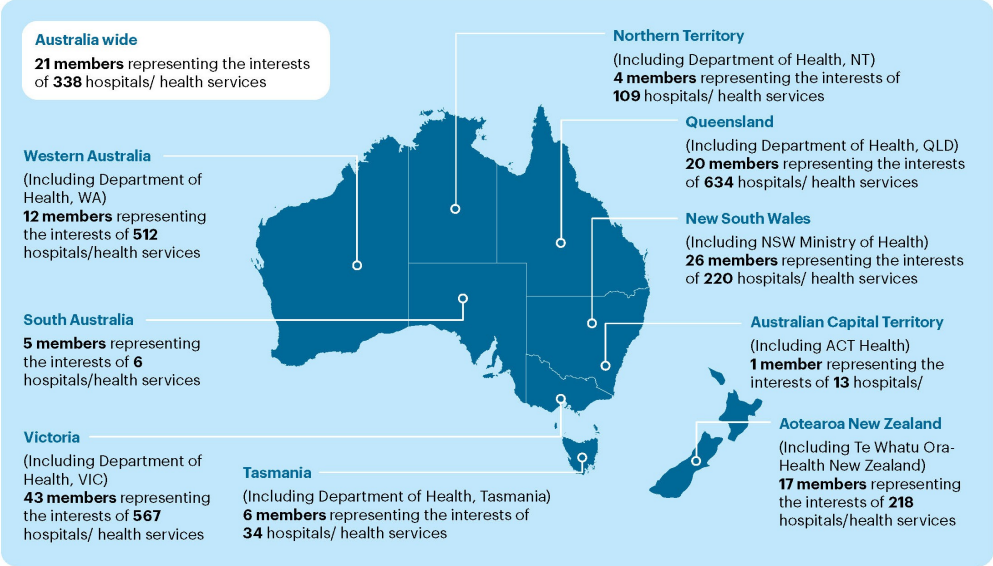
CAHA has played a key policy role in embedding sustainability and food into Australia's health agenda. It co-led the development of the Healthy, Regenerative and Just framework — a foundation for Australia's first *National Climate and Health Strategy*.[81] This strategy sets objectives to build a sustainable, high-quality, net-zero health system, including reviewing nutrition standards and how sustainability is embedded in food policies across states and territories.

449 kt CO_2-e

The Australian Centre for Disease Control research found that food and catering contribute an estimated 449 kt CO_2-e, representing 10 percent of Scope 3 emissions from health-sector purchasing. This is a clear signal that food procurement is a strategic opportunity for emissions reduction and systems transformation.[82]

Figure 2 – Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Pacific members

Global Green and Healthy Hospitals have 167 members in the Pacific region representing over 2,815 hospitals and health services



Driving Practice Change: GGHH Pacific Food Community of Practice

Recognising that capability and capacity are major barriers, CAHA established the GGHH Pacific Food Community of Practice (CoP) in November 2023. The CoP now connects members from across Australia and New Zealand — including sustainability officers, dietitians, chefs, foodservice managers, and procurement leads — who share a commitment to embedding sustainable food practices in hospitals.

Through webinars and collaborative sessions on topics such as food waste auditing, food donation and reuse, and sustainable procurement models, the CoP has become a practical engine for peer learning and problem-solving. Members consistently report that participation helps them avoid 'reinventing the wheel', accelerates the spread of ideas, and builds confidence to act. The combination of **grassroots innovation** and **large-scale system perspectives** has fostered new networks and momentum across jurisdictions.

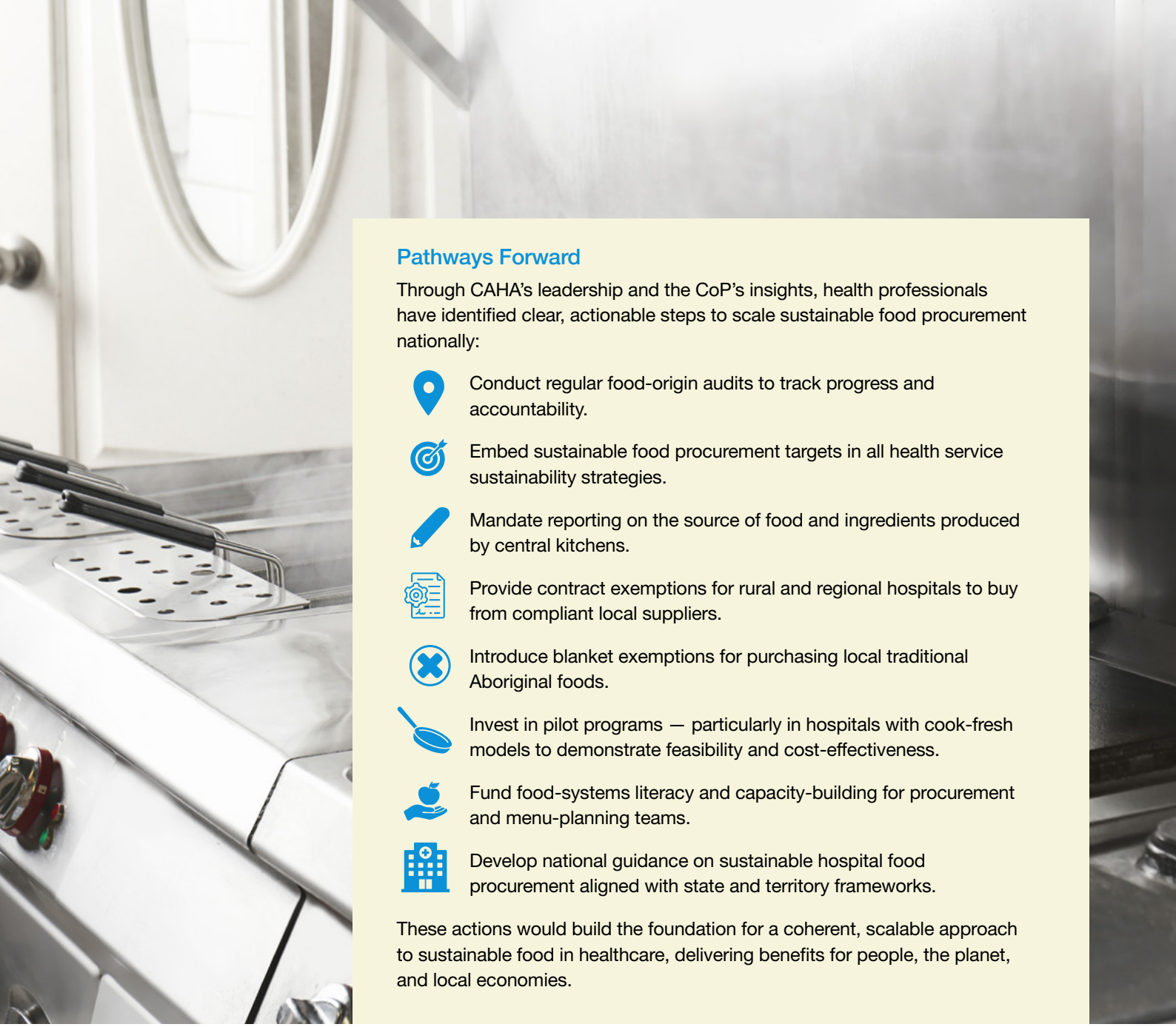
Translating Ambition into Action: Lessons from Dubbo Hospital

Western NSW Local Health District covers one of the largest geographic areas in the state. Its Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2023–2027 embeds sustainable procurement, including a commitment to use locally based and owned suppliers.

At Dubbo Hospital, a 200-bed facility, operating a cook-fresh service on a 14-day cycle, many ingredients are already sourced from regional suppliers, including local butchers and fruit and vegetable wholesalers. This approach strengthens community ties and enhances resilience: short-notice deliveries are possible, maintaining menu consistency and service quality even in remote settings.

"Because we are remote, it helps to have vendors that we can rely on to deliver the same day if needed." ~Debby, Catering Manager, Dubbo Hospital

However, shifts toward centralised contracts have begun to erode this flexibility – for example, bread once sourced from a local bakery now comes through a statewide supplier. Such changes risk undermining local economic benefits, responsiveness, and sustainability goals.



Pathways Forward

Through CAHA's leadership and the CoP's insights, health professionals have identified clear, actionable steps to scale sustainable food procurement nationally:

- Conduct regular food-origin audits to track progress and accountability.
- Embed sustainable food procurement targets in all health service sustainability strategies.
- Mandate reporting on the source of food and ingredients produced by central kitchens.
- Provide contract exemptions for rural and regional hospitals to buy from compliant local suppliers.
- Introduce blanket exemptions for purchasing local traditional Aboriginal foods.
- Invest in pilot programs — particularly in hospitals with cook-fresh models to demonstrate feasibility and cost-effectiveness.
- Fund food-systems literacy and capacity-building for procurement and menu-planning teams.
- Develop national guidance on sustainable hospital food procurement aligned with state and territory frameworks.

These actions would build the foundation for a coherent, scalable approach to sustainable food in healthcare, delivering benefits for people, the planet, and local economies.

Why it matters

The health sector's influence on food systems is immense. Hospitals are not only major purchasers; they are trusted anchors in every community. Investing in sustainable hospital food procurement unlocks multiple returns: lower emissions, healthier meals, regional economic development, and stronger public trust in climate action.

Philanthropic and government partners have an opportunity to accelerate this transition by funding demonstration projects, communities of practice, and national coordination, embedding food sustainability as a measurable lever for climate-resilient healthcare.

3.6 Residential Aged Care

Figure 3 – Aged care providers, sites, and spaces[83]

AUSTRALIAN SECTOR OVERVIEW

736 providers

2617 sites

223,691 spaces

Funded by the Commonwealth Government

Nutrition for Australians living in residential aged care

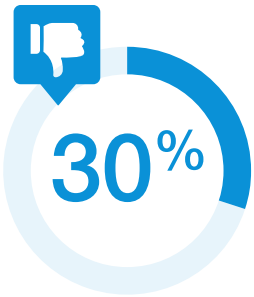
Aged care residents consistently identify fresh, familiar meals and positive dining experiences as their top priorities, signalling the need for high-quality, culturally appropriate menu items.[84]

The consequences of poor nutrition are significant and often irreversible for older people. Malnutrition is associated with a range of health risks, including an increased incidence of falls and fractures, infection, and time needed to heal or recover from injury.[85] In Australians over 65, injuries from falls account for 65% of hospitalisations and in 2023, 31% of people living in aged care experienced a fall.[86] Unplanned weight loss is also aligned with malnutrition, and in January 2023, 8.6% of residents experienced unplanned weight loss of 5% or more compared to their previous quarter's weight.[87]

80%

of lunch and dinner meals did not meet protein recommended portions

Malnutrition is common in aged care residents, partly due to inadequate protein intake. Australian research found that 80% of lunch and dinner meals did not meet protein recommended portions. Relative protein intakes from a typical menu are below recommendations. Reform to menu guidelines, including provision of high-protein foods, is important to ensure protein adequacy among residents of Australian aged care homes.[88]



of residents responded that they ‘never’ or ‘some of the time’ like the food[89]

Improving nutrition in aged care

In the 2022-23 annual Aged Care Residents Experience Survey, residents identified food as the least positive aspect of the aged care experience, with 30% responding that they ‘never’ or ‘some of the time’ like the food.[89] Residents asked for improvements to food quality and variety. Food in aged care was also one of four areas identified for immediate action by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

New aged care regulatory obligations

The implementation of the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards (from 1 November 2025) brings a significant change, including a new, dedicated Standard 6 focused on Food, Nutrition & Dining. Under this standard, meals will be required to be nutritious, appetising, and in line with the needs and preferences of older people.[90]

Food and nutrition reporting

Every residential aged care provider must complete a Quarterly Financial Report (QFR). For residential providers, this includes a food and nutrition report for each approved residential aged care service. The required data includes:

- The food preparation model (catering type, location) .
- Food catering/ingredient costs (including classification of “fresh” foods). We used the reported ingredient costs to estimate the value of food procurement across Australia and by state (see Section 2).
- Hours spent on food preparation.

Of note, if a provider spends less than $10 per resident per day on food and ingredients, they may be flagged or referred for review by the Aged Care Quality & Safety Commission for investigation.

The Food, Nutrition & Dining Advisory Support Unit undertakes targeted assessment contacts (visits) to aged care homes, with 1 in 10 of highest-risk visits including dietitians. Providers may also be subject to review if complaints relate to food, nutrition or dining practices.

Funding for food in aged care

Funding for food is covered under non-care daily living costs within the Commonwealth residential care subsidy. From October 2022, the previous Basic Daily Fee supplement was rolled into the general funding model, meaning that it is no longer a discrete supplement for most residential providers (with the exception of some Multi-Purpose Services and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program[91] services, which continue to receive it discretely).

Why It Matters

Across Australia, 736 providers operate 2,617 residential aged-care sites with 223,691 funded places[92] and every meal served represents a powerful opportunity to improve health and wellbeing. Food procurement decisions determine not only what residents eat, but whether menus deliver the protein, freshness, and cultural familiarity that older Australians say matter most. Yet 80% of lunch and dinner meals still fail to meet protein recommendations, contributing to widespread malnutrition, unplanned weight loss, and high fall rates.

Values-driven procurement to source high-quality, nutrient-dense, and locally produced foods can directly reduce these risks. With new Aged Care Quality Standards mandating explicit nutrition outcomes and scrutiny of spending below $10 per resident per day, food procurement has become a lever for transformation of the aged care sector toward improved resident outcomes, health, and dignity.

3.7 Long Day Care

Long day care is a critical setting where action to improve food provision is in development. We are grateful to Dr Ros Sambell and her research team at Edith Cowan University for their assistance in assessing this setting. Their research has been key to understanding the nutrition challenges in long day care.

In 2024, a Western Australian study costed existing Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) menus[93] for metropolitan and a very remote area. For the same menus, food cost per child per day were twice as much as in the very remote area compared to the costs in metropolitan areas. In the very remote area, one-fifth of required ingredients had to be substituted due to limited availability and this may in part explain the increased cost estimate. Importantly, the research found that food cost is not a proxy for menu quality. In metropolitan and very remote locations, some services whose menus met the requirements for three core food groups from the Australian Dietary Guidelines were spending similar or more per child per day than the average expenditure of services whose menus met all five core food groups in these locations.

Across both metropolitan and very remote settings, on average most services were not spending enough to provide adequate serves of food from all core food groups, highlighting a structural rather than an isolated service-level issue. This research underscores the disparities between regional/remote and metropolitan ECEC services and makes a strong case for targeted government action: including subsidising food provision for ECEC services, funding on-the-ground menu development and nutrition support, and setting clear regulatory requirements, so that children, particularly those in very remote communities, are provided with enough good-quality food each day for optimal growth, learning and development.

> **Around half of Australian children aged 0–5 years attend early childhood education and care for up to 10–11 hours each day, where they may receive as much as 70% of their daily food intake.**
>
> These early years are the foundation for lifelong learning, health and wellbeing, making ECEC services a vital setting for nourishing children through quality, safe and sustainable food embedded within a positive, whole-of-service food environment.
>
> To achieve this vision nationally, we must recognise that not all services start from the same point. Centres in areas of social or geographic disadvantage face real pressures that constrain food quality and menu variety. A coordinated approach that combines targeted food provision subsidies, on-the-ground support to help services plan and prepare quality meals, and regulatory changes that facilitate consistent food standards would reduce inequities across the sector. Together, these measures would ensure every child, wherever they live, can access nourishing, culturally and contextually appropriate meals that support their learning, play and wellbeing."
>
> Dr Ros Sambell

Dr Ros Sambell is a researcher and lecturer at Edith Cowan University with a special interest in nutrition and food environments within Early Childhood Education and Care settings. In 2025 she received a funding grant to develop a Best Practice Guide for Food Environments in Early Childhood Education and Care.

Ros is the Chair of the National Nutrition Network (NNN) – Early Childhood Education and Care, a community of practice made up of 34 influential research academics, senior health practitioners within government organisations, and members of nutrition related not-for-profit organisations from every state and territory in Australia.

The NNN's mission is to promote nourishing and sustainable food environments within (ECEC) settings to positively impact the learning and developmental outcomes for children.

Why It Matters

Long day care centres shape children's lifelong health and learning, yet access to nutritious food depends on effective government policy and procurement systems. Dr Ros Sambell's 2024 study, outlined above, showed that market forces alone cannot ensure quality or fairness.

Strong government leadership is needed to embed nutrition and sustainability standards, stabilise prices, and fund equitable access to healthy, culturally appropriate meals. Standards must be accompanied by support through food systems connection infrastructure and capacity building. With nearly half of Australian children aged 0–5 eating up to 70% of their daily food intake in ECEC, smarter and sustainable food procurement is one of the most powerful tools to improve child health and reduce inequality.

3.8 Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels (MOW) first began in Australia in 1953, when Mrs E. Watts delivered meals by tricycle in South Melbourne, in Victoria. The first formal service was established in Port Adelaide in 1954, led by Doris Irene Taylor MBE, whose advocacy for older people laid the foundation for expansion across the country.[94] By the late 1950s, similar programs operated in most states, coordinated locally by councils and community volunteers. In 1989, MOW Australia was established as the national body representing over 590 community-based services.[95]

The program's purpose has remained constant – supporting predominantly older Australians to live independently through nutritious meals, daily contact, and social connection – but its operating environment has changed markedly. Since the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the client group has expanded. It now includes people with a disability (including those who may be younger), and the use of NDIS packages has diversified the program's income stream.[96] Services now operate under strict food safety, quality, and aged care regulations, often using large-scale kitchens for meal production. Yet the volunteer workforce remains the cornerstone of the

45,000+

volunteers nationwide prepare, pack and deliver meals, providing not only food but also vital welfare checks and social interaction[97]

model: over 45,000 volunteers nationwide prepare, pack and deliver meals, providing not only food but also vital welfare checks and social interaction.[97]

Recent years have brought new pressures on the program. Rising food, fuel and labour costs, combined with the transition from the Commonwealth Home Support Programme to the new Support at Home system (effective 1 November 2025), have challenged the financial sustainability of MOW.[98] This plus the highly competitive home delivery market, also covered by the NDIS program, means the program is operating in a new environment.[99] Despite these hurdles, Meals on Wheels continues to be an example of community resilience. It is a partnership between government funding, local councils, and the vast volunteer base.

Quantifying the meals paid for through the NDIS program is currently not possible as support categories that include food also include a range of other services, aggregated together. This is an existing data gap.

3.9 The role of corporate food service companies

Large corporate-owned food service companies play a central role in delivering institutional meals across Australia's hospitals, aged care homes, schools, and correctional facilities. Major national and multinational providers such as Compass Group, ISS, Spotless (Downer), and Sodexo manage large-scale catering contracts on behalf of government agencies and non-profit operators. Their influence potentially extends beyond food preparation, as they shape menu design, supplier selection, and procurement systems that determine the nutritional quality, cultural relevance, and sustainability of millions of meals served daily. This sector is predicted to grow in future years as institutions outsource their inhouse catering.[100]

Because food service companies control high-volume purchasing, these firms have significant power to drive improvements in food standards, local sourcing, and supply chain transparency. However, this can be constrained by contract specifications; when criteria focus solely on cost or efficiency, nutritional and sustainability outcomes can suffer. Embedding sustainability, health, and equity targets into institutional catering contracts would enable these companies to become key partners in achieving better public health, environmental, and regional economic outcomes.

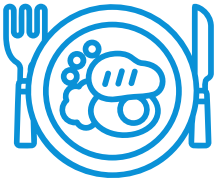
3.91 Case Study: Industry Perspectives

Sustainable Procurement in Practice

Lessons and insights from Compass Group

Compass Group is Australia's largest food service provider operating across 700 sites, employing **16,000+** staff, and generating **$2 billion in annual revenue**. Compass Group operates across seven major sectors, mining, defence, education, healthcare, aged care, business and industry, and stadiums. **Compass Group in Australia procures, prepares, and serves more than 61 million meals per year**. It is Australia's largest food service contractor, managing multi-million-dollar procurement portfolios and extensive supplier networks. The company serves as a window into the opportunities and challenges of embedding sustainability into large-scale institutional food procurement. Food procurement is managed by Foodbuy, a separate Compass business entity. Food makes up about 1/3 of their operating costs.[101]

We caught up with Compass in October 2025 to talk about procurement.



Compass Group in Australia procures, prepares, and serves

+61M

meals per year

Momentum and Drivers for Change

Compass acknowledges that sustainable food system transformation is underway but slow, influenced by policy, procurement frameworks and regulation rather than by institutional demand. They regard current food procurement as both a lever and a limitation. They identify key levers for change as:

- Mandatory sustainability reporting under the new Australian Sustainability Reporting Standards (ASRS) and future Scope 3 emissions requirements (by 2028).
- Procurement criteria and contracts that progressively prioritise climate-aligned, socially responsible sourcing.
- Growing client expectations for transparency, ethical sourcing and local economic impact.

They believe that government-led frameworks and targets will create the consistency and accountability needed for system-wide change, while business can provide the delivery infrastructure.

The Role of Government and Procurement Criteria

The leadership of governments is critical in setting the policy and regulatory direction that will make sustainability a core, rather than optional, element of food procurement.

- Government contracts, particularly in Defence and Health, increasingly include Indigenous and SME procurement KPIs, shifting from "nice-to-have" to mandatory.
- Future progress depends on clear national sustainability criteria and targets within tender specifications — especially regarding emissions, food waste, and protein sourcing.
- Regulatory visibility will enable suppliers and caterers alike to invest confidently in lower-emission, regenerative, and locally based food systems

Positive Actions

Compass has moved beyond compliance to active contribution through:

- **Reconciliation Action Plan (2025)** – exceeding goals with 50+ Indigenous suppliers and $24 million in procurement in the last financial year.
- **Social procurement leadership** – partnerships with Supply Nation and Social Traders
- **Inhouse "Seed" Supplier Incubation Program** – mentoring SMEs in sustainability, food safety, governance, and modern-slavery compliance, helping them be ready to reliably supply procurement contracts and meet the required standards.

A Realistic but Hopeful Outlook

Currently Australian food service providers lack the market power to drive upstream change, unlike internationally where they can influence supply chains. This is because the Australian commercial food service market is relatively small, and supermarkets dominate supplier relationships. Compass emphasised that meaningful sustainability shifts will require regulation and national reporting standards to drive transparency and accountability across the supply chain.

Compass views Australia's transition toward sustainable procurement as "slow but inevitable." While the Australian cultural diet and consequent emissions remain barriers, regulation, data transparency, and procurement reform can accelerate the shift. Their experience shows that major food service providers can contribute to food system capability, inclusion and accountability across the supply chain, turning procurement from a compliance exercise into a catalyst for food system change. They recommend that governments prioritise building SME readiness to participate in food procurement arrangements.

Section 4

Policy as an enabler: a menu of options

Overview

- The international food procurement policy environment provides ample demonstration of instruments, approaches and models used that could be adapted in Australia.
- However, Australia's policy setting is immature and ineffective by comparison.
- Effective policies include mandatory targets, clear criteria, investment in capacity building, and connection infrastructure that promotes collaboration across government and the broader food system.

Coherent and connected government policies have the ability to shape food procurement and the food system. As part of assessing Australia's readiness to act, we reviewed policies close to home as well as international examples.

4.0 Introduction

International Insights on Public Food Procurement: Mechanisms, Impacts, and Enablers

This section provides a high-level summary of the international policy scan undertaken for this project. With over 40 documents, peer-reviewed papers, and expert reports analysed, the output was extensive and detailed. Appendix B provides a complete and fully referenced analysis of the scan, including a recommended reading list.

Globally, governments are using public food procurement as a strategic lever for food system transformation. More than 40 countries now embed sustainability provisions in policy, directing billions of dollars in public expenditure toward locally produced and environmentally responsible food. This approach influences the meals served daily in hospitals, schools, aged care, childcare, prisons, universities, and government workplaces. By contrast, Australia's public food procurement frameworks generally prioritise price over long-term health, social, economic and environmental benefits.

4.1 Global Enablers and Mechanisms for Change

4.1.1 Civil-Society and Multi-Stakeholder Mobilisation

Public support is essential to reform. In France, Denmark, and Brazil, parents, teachers, and health professionals were central advocates for healthy school meals. Partnerships with universities, civil society organisations, and consumer groups framed procurement as a matter of public value rather than cost. Movements such as the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (USA) and Scotland's Good Food Nation demonstrate the power of broad coalitions to maintain momentum and legitimacy.

4.1.2 Whole-of-Government Coordination

Countries with leading practice adopt mission-oriented approaches that connect food procurement with economic, health, and environmental policy. For instance, Denmark's Organic Action Plan (1987–present) involved ministries of health, defence, and education, with shared metrics and advisory services. Austria's *ÖkoKauf Wien* aligned climate, procurement, and public health goals. Brazil's Food Acquisition Programme links ministries of agriculture, education, and social development to secure stable markets for smallholders supplying schools and hospitals.

4.1.3 Embedding Targets, Mandates and Guidelines

Evidence consistently shows that mandatory, enforceable criteria outperform voluntary guidance. The World Health Organization recommends procurement standards that are specific, measurable, and applied universally. France, Germany, Sweden, and Brazil have legal organic or local-sourcing targets (20–100%). Scotland's Procurement Reform Act introduced a Sustainable Procurement Duty, and Italy and Uruguay legislate family-farmer quotas of 30% or higher. Monitoring and certification bodies such as Sweden's organic not-for-profit and France's regional inspection systems ensure accountability.

4.1.4 Procurement Practice Reform

Procurement is increasingly values-based. Cities like Copenhagen and Ghent use tender scoring for sustainability, animal welfare, and social inclusion. Governments provide

templates, dynamic purchasing systems, and digital platforms connecting producers and processors of all scales to public buyers, simplifying tenders and allowing flexible, dynamic and seasonal purchasing.

4.1.5 Storytelling, Data, and Evidence

Successful programs frame meals as investments in national wellbeing. Quantitative indicators – jobs created, waste reduced, CO_2 saved – are combined with human stories to sustain public and political support. As our policy reviewer Dr Stephanie Godrich notes, "The art is in the storytelling – share the impact widely to inspire momentum".

> "The art is in the storytelling – share the impact widely to inspire momentum."
>
> Dr Stephanie Godrich

4.2 What Success Looks Like: International Impacts

International experience demonstrates tangible environmental, economic, social, and nutrition outcomes when procurement is used as a driver of systemic change.

Please refer to Appendix B for references to peer reviewed papers and expert reports for the examples summarised here.

4.2.1 Environmental Sustainability

Across Europe and Latin America, sustainability targets and reporting frameworks have cut food waste, reduced emissions, and driven organic production. Belgium, Denmark, France, and Ireland integrate food-waste strategies with procurement rules, achieving waste reductions of up to 40%. Hospitals in Belgium and Switzerland use digital ordering systems to align production with demand, while Austria and Italy reuse surplus food through composting or biogas conversion. Denmark's mandatory reporting for contractors on food waste has normalised waste prevention across institutions.

France mandates that **50%** of school-meal ingredients are locally sourced

Low-emission procurement models are widespread. France mandates that 50% of school-meal ingredients are locally sourced, and the USA's Farm to School initiative links farmers directly with local school districts. Copenhagen and Scotland embed seasonal menus and green-transport criteria in tenders, with measurable reductions in emissions. Sweden and Denmark's organic action plans have stimulated domestic organic markets and diversified production systems.

Many countries legislate against single-use packaging or bottled water. France, Italy, and Denmark have banned single-use utensils and replaced bottled water with tap systems in public facilities. The EU's Green Public Procurement Scheme prohibits overfished species and mandates sustainable palm oil, while Austria's EcoBuy program aligns energy-efficient kitchen equipment with food policies.

Animal welfare and plant-forward menus are now standard in many countries. The EU and UK require cage-free eggs and high-welfare meat, and Los Angeles' Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) increased animal-welfare-certified sourcing by 50%. Denmark, France, and Austria mandate vegetarian menu options weekly, often linked to climate action plans.

4.2.2 Economic and Social Wellbeing

Procurement reform creates inclusive and resilient local economies. Scotland's *Good Food Nation Act* and *Procurement Reform Act* link food contracts to community wealth-building. Italy and France embed local sourcing to stimulate regional economies, while

Brazil legislates that at least

45%

of public food budgets purchase from family farms

Brazil and Uruguay legislate that at least 30% of public food budgets purchase from family farms. Brazil increased this target to 45% in October 2025. These measures have increased rural livelihoods, created stable institutional markets, and fostered food sovereignty.

Simplified procurement systems – such as Paraguay's streamlined tenders, Slovenia's online platform, and Sweden's dynamic purchasing – remove administrative barriers for SMEs. Brazil's bidding waiver allows family farmers to sell directly without lowest-cost competition. Such approaches empower small and Indigenous farmers, improve supply diversity, and strengthen food system and business resilience.

Social inclusion is also embedded in procurement policy. The EU reserves contracts for enterprises employing people with disabilities or disadvantages, and Portland (USA) prioritises women- and minority-owned suppliers. Fair trade and living-wage standards in Sweden, Italy, and Los Angeles' GFPP ensure decent work and ethical supply chains. Cultural preservation is another benefit – Japan's Basic Plan supports the Washoku dietary tradition, and Brazil's agroecological procurement has revitalised Indigenous and regional cuisines.

Procurement also functions as a social safety net. France's ÉquiTables program subsidises organic school meals for low-income students, while the EU Child Guarantee mandates at least one healthy meal per school day. Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) ensures universal access to nutritious meals sourced from local farmers, demonstrating how food policy can deliver equity and economic development simultaneously.

4.2.3 Nutrition, Health and Food Security

Nutrition standards are increasingly embedded in procurement law. Fourteen EU countries restrict salt, sugar, and saturated fat in public meals, and Scotland, the UK, and the USA have established national nutrient standards for school and institutional meals. Sweden's and Denmark's programs promote plant-forward diets, reducing red meat while increasing pulses, grains, and vegetables. Singapore's and San Francisco's catering guidelines institutionalise healthy choices across government workplaces through catering guidelines, procurement standards, and specific nutrient targets for food and beverages offered. These guidelines ensure that options provided are healthier, for instance by limiting sugar and calories, and by promoting whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Education and participation are key. EU-wide initiatives such as SchoolFood4Change and the EU School Fruit Scheme pair meal provision with education, school gardens, and farm visits. Guatemala's market garden programs and USA's supplier-meet-the-grower events build long-term producer relationships.

Monitoring systems reinforce accountability. Scotland's nutrient standards are legally enforceable, and Brazil's PNAE includes annual reporting on farmer sourcing and nutritional outcomes. This integration of standards, education, and monitoring ensures sustained public health gains and that by having these standards it prevents a commercial, less healthy operative to get school meals contracts.

4.3 Case Studies

4.3.1 Hot off the press!

New criteria for public procurement across the EU

The European Commission aims to reduce the environmental and climate impact of the EU food system while cultivating a prosperous agricultural and food sector for future generations. This commitment is outlined in the European Green Deal and reaffirmed in the Vision for Agriculture and Food adopted on 19 February, 2025. A key action in this vision is to enhance the role of public procurement for food. In November 2025 the EU released new criteria for sustainable (environmental, social, and economic) food procurement, along with best practice examples.[102]

These criteria are not mandatory, although organisations are encouraged to incorporate them into tenders, adapting where necessary to meet specific needs. The criteria are accompanied by concrete examples of sustainable public procurement to illustrate practical application. The following infographic captures the new criteria and processes to deliver them.

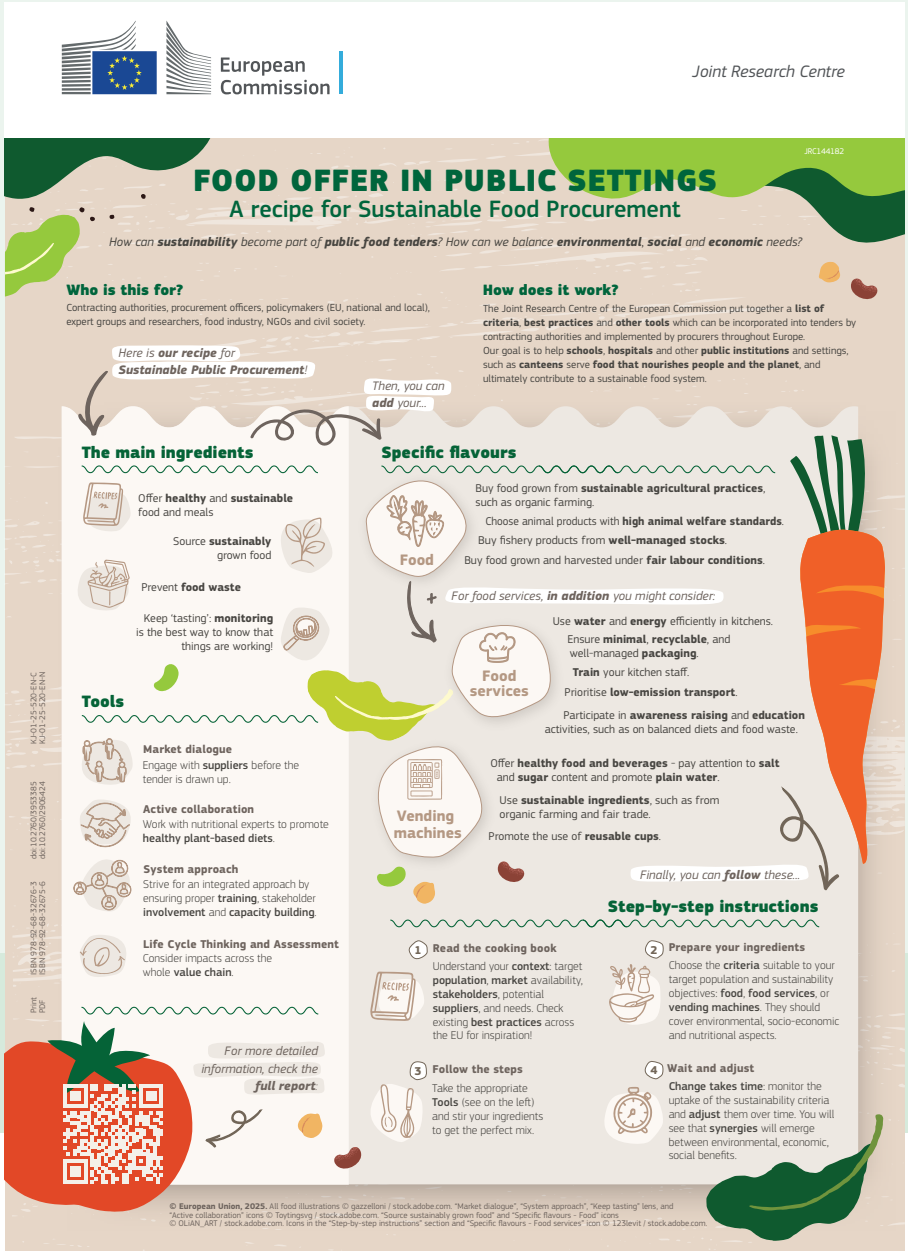


Figure 4 – EU sustainable food procurement criteria

4.3.2 Scotland

A Whole-of-Nation Approach to Good Food Governance

By legislating sustainability and community benefit into procurement law, Scotland has built one of the most coherent public food procurement frameworks in Europe. The *Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014* introduced a Sustainable Procurement Duty requiring public bodies to consider economic, social, and environmental outcomes in every contract. This has been reinforced by the Good Food Nation Act 2022, which mandates national and local food plans promoting health, fairness, and environmental stewardship. In practice, public institutional food service (in education, health, and social care settings) are within scope of the Act. Through these complementary laws and partnerships between government, civil society, and producers, Scotland is positioning procurement as a core tool for community wealth-building, climate action, and equitable access to good food.

4.3.3 Denmark

From Action Plan to Organic Nation

Denmark's success stems from long-term policy coherence. The Organic Action Plan (initiated in 1987) aimed to transition public institutions to organic food while supporting domestic producers. By 2015, 60–90% of all public meals were organic. The procurement practices impact the menus and cooking in over 1000 kitchens, from small to central production kitchens. The program combined mandatory targets, education for kitchen staff, subsidies for organic inputs, and cross-ministerial collaboration. A national advisory service provided technical support, while local governments developed tailored implementation plans. Procurement reforms stimulated new supply chains, particularly in organic production, making Denmark a global leader in sustainable institutional meals.

4.3.4 Brazil

Family Farms Feeding the Nation

Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE) and Food Acquisition Program (PAA) are global benchmarks for inclusive procurement. Legislation mandates that at least 30% of institutional food budgets purchase directly from smallholder and Indigenous farmers, bypassing lowest-cost criteria. The initiatives connect local family farms to schools, universities, hospitals, and social programs, creating stable demand for over three million small farms. Between 2003 and 2013, for example, more than three million tonnes of food were purchased through these programs. Outcomes include increased rural incomes, improved nutrition, reduced food insecurity, and stronger regional food sovereignty.

4.3.5 United States of America

From Local Farm Links to Institutional Leadership

The United States has advanced sustainable and equitable food procurement through both the education and health sectors. Federal programs supported by connection infrastructure – such as the Farm to Institution New England networks – connect local producers with universities, hospitals and schools, reaching millions of students and patients and investing billions in local farm economies. Complementing this, the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP), originating from the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, applies transparent, values-based criteria across five domains: local economies, nutrition, environmental sustainability, animal welfare, and valued workforce. Its adoption by major cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York now influences over US$1.1 billion in public food contracts each year. (See case study in Section 6 for more information on the GFPP.) In parallel, Healthcare Without Harm and Coolfood Pledge have mobilised hospitals nationwide to adopt sustainable procurement standards, prioritising local and organic foods, reducing meat and waste, and supporting fair labour. Together, these initiatives demonstrate how procurement – anchored in public health and environmental goals – can leverage the collective purchasing power of schools and hospitals to transform supply chains, drive climate action, and promote community wellbeing.

4.4 Australian Food System Policy Settings

The recently launched Australian Food System Policy Dashboard maps 56 individual Commonwealth policy activities across 12 federal portfolios exploring:

- The food system activity that the policy directly influences (business services, consumer characteristics, enabling environments, food environment, or food supply), and
- The food system outcome the policy aims to achieve (economy, environment, health and nutrition, or social).

Sustainable food procurement and sustainable food systems do not feature in Commonwealth strategies currently, with the exception of the National Obesity Strategy and National Health and Climate Strategy.

National Obesity Strategy 1.12:

Enable government agencies and other organisations to support health and wellbeing of citizens and customers.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

- Require that policies and practices include healthy and local food and drink procurement, preparation, provision, catering and fundraising, especially in government institutions.
- Provide training and support so people have the skills and confidence to prepare and provide healthy appropriate food and drinks that are enjoyed in community and care settings, like aged care and supported living accommodation.
- Ensure tertiary and training institutions provide safe, affordable and appropriate sport and active recreation amenities, with more healthy food and drink options in catering, food service and vending machines.

National Climate and Health Strategy

INCLUDES ACTION AREAS SUCH AS

4.15 Review of sustainability in nutrition standards in health care

6.6 Taking account of sustainability considerations in the Australian Dietary Guidelines

6.7 Addressing the impacts of climate change on First Nations health and food security

Currently we are not aware of any investments, policy development or programs beyond a nutrition focus that are delivering against these example actions as part of the implementation of the Strategy, but clearly it remains a future lever as it is active until 2032.

There has also been a very modest investment announcement of $700,000 over four years for developing a National Nutrition Policy Framework that will take a multi-sector, ‘whole-of government’ approach to identify, prioritise, drive and monitor healthy eating in Australia.

Below is a summary of findings from our colleagues at Deakin University, who recently conducted a detailed review of the Australian policy context regarding explicit support for sustainable food procurement.

4.4.1 How are governments already reflecting food systems aims in procurement in Australia?

Insights from a policy mapping study

Excerpt from forthcoming research by Dr Carolina Venegas Hargous & Dr Erica Reeve, Deakin University Institute for Health Transformation.

Australia's public food procurement holds immense potential for advancing food security and nutrition, economic and social well-being, and environmental sustainability. The Australian policy landscape is starting to reflect an ambition to reform procurement, as indicated in the forthcoming *Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy* (2025) and the *National Health and Climate Strategy* (2023). There is an opportunity to learn from current policy initiatives on the food systems priorities governments are already attempting to address through procurement, including ways these could be strengthened. Since policy plays a pivotal role in shaping procurement decisions by establishing standards and creating incentives for change, this study aimed to explore how government purchasing power could be further leveraged to achieve health and sustainability goals.

Between March and May 2025, we conducted a systematic search of federal and state-level policies governing public food procurement in Australia. Policy documents were coded against Reeve et al.'s Framework of options to (re)design public food procurement policies to achieve multiple co-benefits across food security and nutrition, economic and social wellbeing, and environmental sustainability.[103] We found 21 public food procurement-specific policies that explicitly include food-related criteria—one at the federal level and 20 at the state/territory level.

Most of these (n=20) govern public food procurement within health services (n=9) or correctional facilities (n=11), while one relates to the procurement of goods and services across all state government departments (Queensland's Buy Local Policy) (Table 12). Across these, there was equal emphasis on promoting food security and nutrition (n=19), economic and social well-being (n=21), and environmental sustainability (n=19). It was promising to see a substantial number of policies reflecting an intention to address all three food system outcomes in one way or another (n=17) (Table 13).

Table 12 – Number of food procurement-specific policies identified by scope, target setting and jurisdiction

	AUS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
General procurement policies with explicit food-related criteria	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Public food procurement policies directed at health services	-	1	1	-	2	1	-	3	1	9
Public food procurement policies directed at health services	1	1	1	-	2	-	1	1	4	11
Total	**1**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**5**	**1**	**1**	**4**	**5**	**21**

Table 13 – Number of food procurement-specific policies reflecting each food system outcome

	Reflects at least one criteria to promote food security and nutrition n (%)	Reflects at least one criteria to promote economic and social well-being n (%)	Reflects at least one criteria to promote environmental sustainability n (%)	All n (%)
General procurement policies with explicit food-related criteria (n=1)	0 (0)	1 (100)	1 (100)	0 (0)
Public food procurement policies directed at health services (n=9)	9 (100)	9 (100)	8 (89)	8 (89)
Public food procurement policies directed at correctional facilities (n=11)	10 (91)	11 (100)	10 (91)	9 (82)
Total (n=21)	**19 (90)**	**21 (100)**	**19 (90)**	**17 (81)**

Food procurement policies pertaining to health services generally promoted food security and nutrition through standards around food diversity and appeal, and alignment with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Some made explicit provisions for allergen identification and compliance with safe food handling practices. Economic and social well-being dimensions were addressed through the provision of culturally appropriate foods, the procurement of local foods where possible, and the donation of surplus food to local charities.

Environmental sustainability in health service food procurement was entirely centred on food and packaging waste minimisation strategies. For example, the nutrition and quality food standards for adults in Victorian public hospitals and residential aged care services recommend a hierarchy of waste reduction approaches: (a) source reduction; (b) donate food; (c) feed animals/worms; (d) industrial uses; (e) composting; and (f) landfill/incineration.[104] Additionally, the inclusion of seasonal, local, and plant-based menu options is frequently encouraged.

In correctional facilities, food procurement policies similarly addressed food security and nutrition through alignment with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, referencing the need to meet prisoners' nutritional requirements. Environmental sustainability was addressed by ensuring low-impact drinking water is available at all times, waste is recycled and composted, and energy- and water-saving equipment is used.

Correctional service policies also noted the need to provide culturally appropriate and/or traditional foods. For example, the ACT Standards for Adult Correctional Services stipulate that: (a) menus are culturally appropriate for diverse religious, cultural, and spiritual requirements; (b) religious requirements for food procurement, storage, preparation, distribution, and serving are fully observed; and (c) efforts are made to make available traditional food and bush tucker with significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detained people.[105]

The Queensland Procurement Policy was the only policy governing the procurement of all goods and services across all state institutions that explicitly included food-related criteria.

It provides measurable targets related to both economic and social well-being and environmental sustainability: “Wherever possible: Increase government procurement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses to three per cent of ‘addressable spend’ and source at least 30 per cent of procurement by value from Queensland ‘small and medium enterprises’.”[106]

The Queensland Procurement Policy was the only document introducing specific, measurable, and achievable targets. It is important to note that most of the policies examined here are considered voluntary and are therefore less likely to be enforceable.

While the effectiveness of these policies remains to be assessed, the inclusion of health, social, and environmental sustainability considerations marks a step towards systemic change. Extending general procurement laws and standards to specifically include food procurement—and then incorporating standards to promote social outcomes—would be an efficient way to advance this agenda. The UK Government Buying Standard for Food and Catering Services (2021) provides a useful example of how this could look.

This research was funded by NHMRC Partnership Project Grant (GNT2024539). Citation forthcoming.

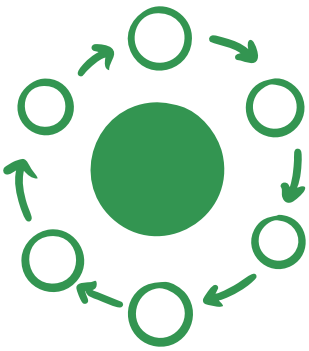
Challenges Identified

Even among global leaders, challenges persist: limited local coordination, underinvestment in capacity building, decentralised delivery, and complex compliance systems all contribute. Some SMEs struggle with procurement requirements. Ensuring consistent application across diverse institutions and regions remains a universal challenge. Beyond government run one off workshops the only support solutions we uncovered was the Gov Ready, a private provider that supports businesses over a 6 week period with business coaching so they are ready to participate in procurement processes.

4.5 What can Australia do?

Food procurement in Australian health, education, aged care, and correctional sectors represent vast procurement potential. To align with best practice identified during this policy review, governments should:

1. Legislate measurable targets for healthy, local, and sustainable food procurement.
2. Mandate sustainability and nutrition standards across all publicly funded institutions and programs.
3. Establish cross cutting governance structures linking agriculture, health, environment, and regional development across government and the food system for improved policy coherence and coordinated action.
4. Invest in enabling systems, including intermediaries, to implement the mandates and legislation, such as *connection infrastructure* that facilitate links between suppliers and kitchens, build capacity in food systems literacy for staff and actors and allies; explore dynamic procurement models that improve transparency and participation of all scales or producers and processors (See 'Dynamic Procurement' box below).
5. Integrate criteria, targets and practices for inclusion of small and medium, Indigenous, local and women-led producers.
6. Use data and storytelling to demonstrate co-benefits and sustain political and community support.



Dynamic Procurement

Tools that help embed more transparent and flexible food procurement practices require a more dynamic approach. Through early pilots with anchor institutions, Dynamic Food Procurement in the UK demonstrated how online buying platforms can increase procurement participation among producers and processors, coordinate logistics to simplify deliveries, and reduce costs.

Dynamic procurement works best when digitally enabled and coupled with regional coordination. It provides a practical route for food producers who struggle with the entry barriers of traditional procurement models. This early UK innovation has now been scaled to support the delivery of the Buy Better Food Procurement Framework continuing the use of the cloud-based platform as a single access point for high-quality, regulatory-compliant products from national, regional, local and SME suppliers.

All suppliers comply with the Procurement Policy Note to take account of carbon reduction requirements, which is increasingly important as requirements around reporting of scope 3 emissions are fast approaching in Australia.

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Section 5

Scenarios of public food procurement as a lever for food systems transformation

Overview

- We share evidence of proven global approaches to sustainable food procurement.
- We outline our framework for change and demonstrate what could be achieved, from incremental change through to transitional and transformational impact.
- We demonstrate how and to what degree these approaches impact our focus areas of strengthening local livelihoods, generating environmental benefits, and improving nutrition and health outcomes.
- We outline recommended pathways for Australia to adopt these approaches.

Food policy coherence can be defined as the alignment of policies that affect the food systems with the aim of achieving health, environmental, social and economic goals, to ensure that policies designed to improve one food system outcome do not undermine others.[108]

5.0 Introduction

Public food procurement is a powerful catalyst for transforming food systems around the world. Recognised as a genuine "game-changer," strategic and purposeful procurement can simultaneously advance social, environmental, and economic objectives.

Jurisdictions worldwide have adopted varied policy approaches, each tailored to their priorities. Some emphasise health outcomes, others focus on environmental sustainability, while many pursue economic development. What makes food procurement particularly compelling is that these benefits rarely remain isolated. For example, a health-focused policy promoting fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, for instance, can reduce the consumption of carbon-intensive processed foods, delivering environmental co-benefits alongside improved nutrition.[107] This interconnection is procurement's greatest strength: strategies designed to work in concert amplify collective impact, propelling us toward a food system that is regenerative, nourishing and equitable.

5.1 From Incremental Change to Transformative Impact

To understand the full spectrum of public procurement strategies and their potential impacts, we have drawn on global evidence to categorise approaches by their depth of change. Using Australia's current state as the baseline, we identify three levels of systemic action: incremental, transitional, and transformative. Meaningful reform in public procurement will not happen overnight—it requires deliberate, staged intervention that can take multiple forms.

Learning from international examples, this section explores potential scenarios for Australia. We examine strategies grouped by their transformative potential (see Table 14 below), considering how approaches tested in other jurisdictions might translate to the Australian context.

Table 14 – Scenarios for Change

Type of Change	Definition	Focus Area	Action Pathway
Incremental	Gradual improvements within existing systems and structures. Incremental strategies modify current practices without fundamentally altering underlying power dynamics, supply chains, or decision-making frameworks.	General	Voluntary Non Enforceable Action
Transitionary	Mid-level reforms that begin to shift system dynamics and relationships. Transitional strategies introduce new mechanisms, partnerships, or governance structures that challenge—but don't entirely dismantle—existing arrangement	Regional economic development	Local Procurement Targets
			Buying it Forward
		Environmental Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability Targets
			Procurement of Better Meat
		Health	Nutrition-Related Targets
Transformational	Fundamental redesign of system structures, power relations, and operating logics. Transformative strategies actively dismantle extractive models and build regenerative alternatives	All of the above	All of the above

5.2 Incremental Change

This scenario represents the current state, or "business as usual" of public procurement in Australia: a system where policy discussions remain marginal and lack the systemic pressure needed for genuine transformation. Action here attempts to nudge toward better outcomes while working within this existing paradigm, primarily serving to introduce stakeholders, institutions, and policymakers to values-based procurement concepts. **These scenarios can build political will but lack the levers necessary to bring about transformative change.**

5.2.1 Focus Area: General

Action Pathway: Voluntary and Non-Enforceable Action

Stepping stone toward transformation, but risks becoming an endpoint with minimal impact.

Global Evidence
International experience demonstrates the critical limitations of voluntary, non-binding approaches to public procurement reform.

Cleveland, Ohio established policies recognising the importance of local farmers and community economies, yet purchasing practices remained unchanged due to unrealistic, unsupported targets.[109]

In the **United Kingdom,** research explicitly concluded that public procurement reform requires mandated, uniform public sector requirements. The absence of binding targets undermined compliance and measurable impact.[110] Without accountability mechanisms, transparency gaps emerge-the UK discovered that school and hospital supply chains carried elevated risks of modern slavery.[111]

Spain's policies were constrained by a low local procurement target of 3%, despite adequate supply. [112]

A comparative study of school procurement models across **Europe** identified clear, strict contract award criteria as essential to translating ambitions into actual local economic benefits.[113]

The evidence is clear: mandated targets coupled with robust support systems are necessary to drive systemic food shifts. When explicit procurement strategies are embedded into formal policy documents with enforcement mechanisms, measurable shifts occur.

Some jurisdictions have used voluntary guidelines as an initial legitimacy-building phase, demonstrating feasibility before mandating standards.[114] However, this approach only succeeds when voluntary efforts genuinely lead to enforceable policies backed by targets and accountability measures, in addition to support to build capacity and capability.

Pathway for Australia

If Australia adopts an approach of non-mandated policies without clear, enforceable targets, outcomes would likely remain marginal. Without accountability mechanisms and binding requirements, meaningful improvements in health, environmental, and economic dimensions would be unlikely to materialise at scale.

Health includes impacts for 'eaters' that create health benefits

Livelihoods includes impacts for individual businesses and/or regional economies

The environment impacts include improving biodiversity and/or reducing climate change emissions

5.3 Transitional Interventions

These interventions begin to disrupt existing systems while laying groundwork for deeper transformation. Transitional approaches pilot new models, build essential infrastructure, and demonstrate that alternative pathways are viable. This section explores selected scenarios that reflect the diversity of actions needed to advance values-driven procurement. Rather than attempting comprehensive coverage, we spotlight promising initiatives from local and global contexts that offer relevant lessons for the Australian setting.

Our focus centres on scenarios that advance three interconnected priorities: strengthening local livelihoods, generating environmental benefits, and improving nutrition and health outcomes.

5.3.1 Focus Area: Build Local Livelihoods

Why is this an issue?

Australian farmers, producers, distributors and enterprises are struggling to generate a liveable income, due to the supermarket duopoly.[115] A small group of actors controls design and profit flows, currently operating without accountability to public good. This concentration creates multiple harms: corporations maximise profits through price increases and wage suppression, resulting in worker exploitation. Corporate dominance undermines local markets, forcing greater reliance on volatile global markets and fragile supply chains, while industrial intensification accelerates environmental degradation. (See also Section 1.)

In Australia, the supermarket duopoly has transformed the Australian food supply into a “just-in-time” economy, creating acute vulnerability to disruptions.[116] The rapid expansion of supermarkets and fast food chains displaces smaller fresh food markets, draining economic value from communities. Research demonstrates that locally spent money recirculates within communities at rates exceeding 50%, compared to just 15–30% for non-local purchases.[117] The shift toward corporate-controlled food systems thus represents not only a loss of food system resilience but a systematic extraction of community wealth, which can be rebalanced through local procurement practices.

Research demonstrates that locally spent money recirculates within communities at rates exceeding

50%

Action Pathway: Local Procurement Targets

Mandated targets for local food procurement redirect public spending into regional economies, circulating wealth within communities and building more resilient local food systems.

Global Evidence

Local food procurement creates measurable economic benefits through the multiplier effect: money spent locally stays local. When institutions source from local producers, those producers spend within their communities, circulating funds multiple times. A 2020 comparison of local procurement case studies found that for direct sales the multiplier was $1.03 to $2.40, and for employment from $0.49 to $3.30.[118]

In the United States, research has found that optimising school meal procurement would generate $971 million in additional wages and create 19,552 new local jobs.[119] Further research investigating local food procurement programs found increased local food trade, greater sales for farmers, more widespread local food commerce, greater visibility for local foods and farmers, and higher employment not only for growers but also within distribution and warehouse systems such as truck drivers, pickers and packers.[120]

Other economic impacts include:

Brazil's PNAE school feeding program guarantees income for 120,000 family farmers.[121]

Analysis of local food procurement at a **Vermont** hospital found that every additional dollar spent on local purchasing generates an additional $0.78 cents to $1.27 in the local economy.[122]

In **Ontario, Canada**, a group of nine aged care homes set a modest 5% target for increasing local food procurement. They increased local food procurement by 20.9% across fresh food categories with no impacts on cost.[123]

In the **United Kingdom**, Nottingham University Hospital sources 77% of ingredients locally, saving 150,000 food miles and £6 million a year.[124] Another UK analysis found that a universal school meal program could create £600 million in annual local procurement opportunity.[125]

In terms of the economic impact of local food procurement, a comparison of five European countries demonstrated that meal budgets with greater levels of local expenditure generated higher economic multiplier ratios. Local food sourcing contributes to these ratios, as does employing local catering staff.[126]

Local procurement also strengthens food systems and community resilience by stabilising incomes for smallholders and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, helping families weather economic shocks, build connections across the food system and improve food systems literacy. It also supports in securing food supply for institutions from local producers, minimising disruptions to supply chain during adverse weather events and other stressors.[127]

Anticipated Co-benefit: Health

Local and regional procurement policies can indirectly support better nutrition outcomes. Locally produced food is often fresher, due to shortened supply chains, and seasonal variation which increases diversity. Stronger relationships with farmers can improve food

literacy and enjoyment of nutritious food, contributing to improved dietary habits.[128] An Illinois program focused on local procurement reported increased student consumption of fruits and vegetables.[129]

Programs integrating local procurement with meal provision, such as school meals, have demonstrated improved nutrition and health outcomes.[130] However, local procurement alone is insufficient. Global comparisons of public procurement policies found that focusing solely on local food provision without adequate nutrition standards can result in high-fat meals, with healthier items like fruits and vegetables frequently wasted.[131]

Anticipated Co-benefit: Environmental

As reported in a 2022 study, ultimately, local procurement strategies alone are insufficient for addressing environmental concerns- to meaningfully address the environmental impacts of our food system, these policies must be combined with those that reduce carbon-intensive food.[132]

The environmental impact of local food procurement is difficult to quantify, particularly in the Australian context, where the contribution of food miles to overall emissions is not well understood. Refrigeration and trucking are significant contributors to food miles, and Australia relies heavily on both for food distribution.

Tasmania is currently the only Australian state with comprehensive baseline data on local (sourced within Tasmania) procurement of fresh food.

Pathway for Australia

Local procurement targets can significantly shift economic prosperity, meaningfully support producers and supply chain workers, and help dismantle the current corporate control of our food system. However, establishing effective targets requires three critical foundations.

1. ESTABLISH CURRENT BASELINES

Without knowing the current baseline of local procurement, setting meaningful targets is virtually impossible. Targets set without this foundation risk being either unambitious or unachievable. **Tasmania is currently the only Australian state with comprehensive baseline data on local (sourced within Tasmania) procurement of fresh food.** The origin baseline study found that there were significant opportunities to increase local sourcing, between 33-61% more products, depending on the fresh food category (fruit and vegetables,grains/bread, dairy, meat and alternatives).[133] Research from two

Victorian hospitals reveals the challenge: one hospital sourced 3% of food locally while another sourced 25% (with "local" defined as within Victoria). Even within these individual studies, researchers found that the sources of many ingredients remained unknown.[134][135] This significant inconsistency across just two hospitals demonstrates the importance of baseline data for setting realistic targets.

2. UNDERSTAND LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM CAPACITY

Before establishing targets, Australia must assess whether local food systems can meet increased institutional demand. Modelling conducted in 2015 estimated that Melbourne's food bowl had the capacity to meet around 41% of Greater Melbourne's food needs.[136] However, with ongoing urban sprawl and changing land use, this figure is likely outdated and requires re-assessment.

The Food Connect Foundation (FCF) is encouraging early preparation for the 2032 Olympics. In 2024, FCF hosted the inaugural South East Queensland (SEQ) Food Summit, where food system actors (1300 participants attending four events over three days) discussed what would it take for 30% of the food consumed in SEQ to be regionally produced in time for the Brisbane 2032 Games.[137]

The goal was to envision how the Games could create a resilient food system legacy that delivered benefit to regional producers and processors. The Summit found that there was significant support for the 30% goal, and that greater assessment of the system needs and capability and coordination are needed to deliver it. This is consistent with assessment undertaken during the development of the Brisbane Food Plan, showing that growing capacity of the Brisbane region must inform realistic goal-setting.[138]

3. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

Targets alone cannot deliver community benefits without the necessary support systems. Local supply chains need intermediaries (connection infrastructure), *missing middle* investment, and infrastructure to meet institutional demand effectively. When these enabling elements are absent, targets become aspirational goals rather than practical drivers of change. The critical factor is value chain coordination-connecting people, organisations, and resources to build functional linkages between infrastructure (such as processing and storage) and procurement needs.[139][140]

For targets to be meaningful, they must be accompanied by strategic infrastructure development and food system actor capacity building. This ensures local producers have the capabilities and reliability to fulfill institutional demand consistently.

5.3.2 Action Pathway: Buying It Forward

Multi-year forward purchasing agreements provide security to farmers and support transition towards regenerative practices.

Farmers face unprecedented instability, with climate shocks, supply chain disruptions, and the fragility of globalised food networks threatening their livelihoods. Additionally, transitioning to regenerative farming practices – essential for addressing planetary boundary overshoots caused by industrial agriculture – requires genuine financial security, not just market demand. Demand creation alone is insufficient; short-term purchasing commitments cannot sustain farmers through the costly transition period. Farmers need something more to de-risk their transition: assurance of long-term buyers before they can invest in regenerative practices.

Watch this short video to see how it works and the impacts from the farm to the kitchen.

Global Evidence

The Georgia ACRE Collective has demonstrated the power of forward purchasing agreements that provide farmers genuine economic security.[141] Schools and hospitals commit to purchasing specific food volumes 2–3 years in advance – a timeframe that allows farmers to plan, invest, and transition to more regenerative farming with confidence. The impact has been substantial. Over $500 million in forward contractual commitments now flows to a network of small-scale farms, many African-American owned. But the model goes further: the collective uses these resources to fund regenerative transition support and establish farmer loan programs, addressing the structural barriers that trap farmers in conventional practices. For participating institutions and communities, the benefits cascade: local food supply stays within communities rather than flowing elsewhere, food systems become more resilient, employment increases locally, and access to healthy food expands across schools, hospitals, and businesses.

A complementary model, the Advanced Market Commitment, is currently being trialed in the US Midwest by a systemic funding organisation, Transcap.[142] This model operates as a buyers' club with multiple corporate buyers pooling commitments and pledging specific annual spending for defined periods on particular commodities. Currently this is focused on private sector buyers, but the principle could be easily applied to the public sector. This approach sends market signals to farmers that regenerative produce is genuinely demanded, while guaranteeing them secured income and reducing the risk of their transition.

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Implications for Australia

Australian farmers operate on planning cycles that span years or decades, reflecting agricultural realities. Yet government contracts typically work on shorter timelines, creating fundamental misalignment. Meanwhile, farmers face structural barriers that make the shift to regenerative practices feel impossible. Current economic models trap them in debt cycles; traditional bank financing requires substantial arable land holdings, which pressures farmers to intensify production and expand biodiversity-destroying practices.

As Sustainable Table's landmark *Regenerative Investment Roadmap* documents, breaking these cycles requires innovative capital mechanisms.[143] 'Buying It Forward' offers a pathway forward. By aligning public procurement with farmers' planning horizons, Australia could unlock cascading benefits: farmers gain the confidence and capital needed to transition toward regenerative practices, rural livelihoods strengthen, and local food security improves. The ripple effects would be far reaching.

5.3.3 Focus Area: Environment Sustainability

A core objective of this project was to establish environmental sustainability as a central driver for public food procurement policy and practice. Growing evidence highlights the significant co-benefits yielded by this approach, directly impacting health and economic outcomes.

Action Pathway: Environmental Targets for Food Procurement

Mandating environmental performance standards for procured food reduces ecological harm and creates market incentives for regenerative farming transitions.

Why is this an issue?

Our food system is a major driver of environmental degradation. The 2025 EAT Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems reports that food drives five planetary boundary transgressions – including land system change, biosphere integrity, freshwater degradation, and biogeochemical flow disruptions – while accounting for approximately 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions.[144]

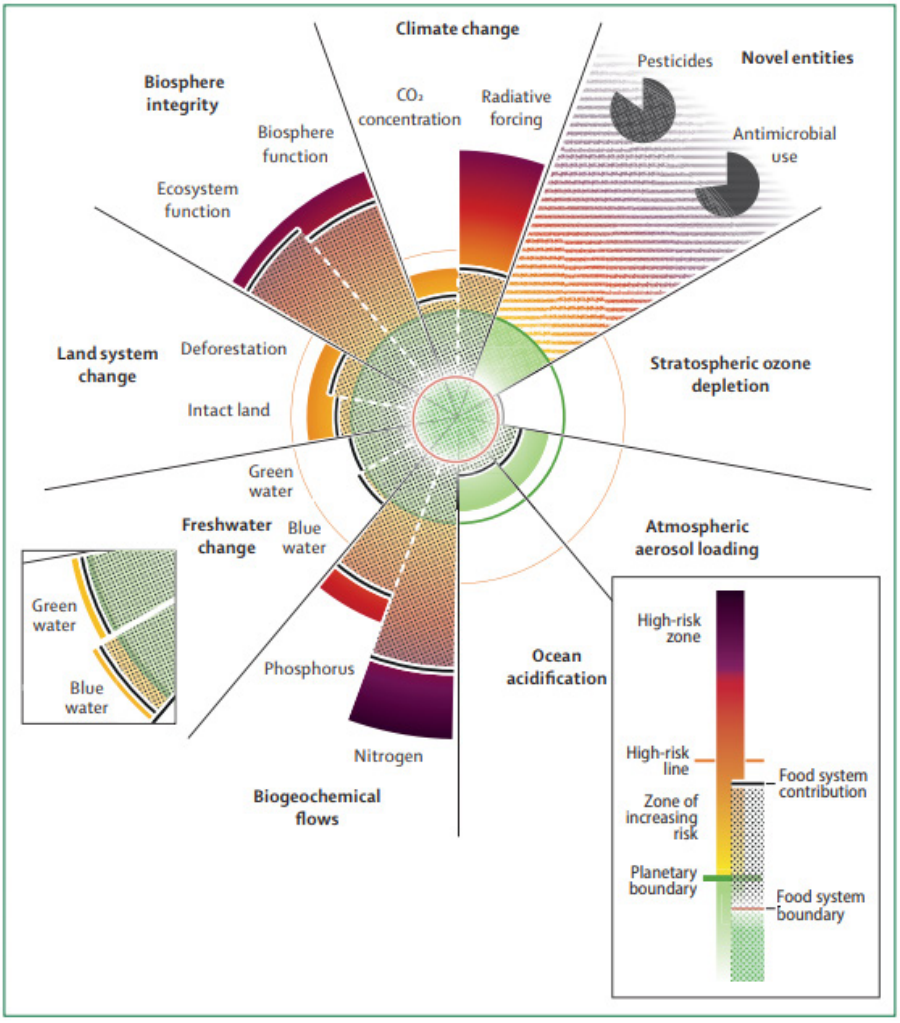


Figure 5 – Food systems and planetary boundaries[145]

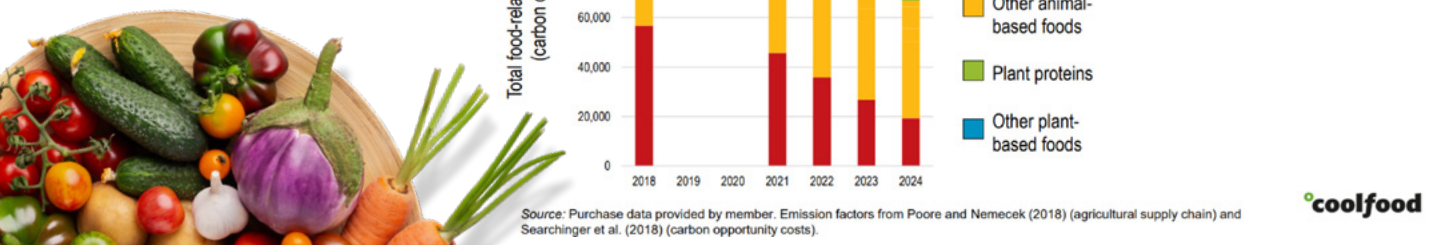
Critically, even if global energy transitions away from fossil fuels, food systems alone will breach the Paris Climate Agreement's 1.5°C target.[146]

In Australia, agriculture contributes 17% of total greenhouse gas emissions, with 79% from methane.[147] Australian agriculture significantly impacts the nation's resources, consuming over 70% of its freshwater supply and utilising 42% of its total land area, primarily for animal farming.[148][149] The adoption of plant-forward menus in public institutions represents a practical solution to mitigate these environmental pressures – a concept explored in the following section.

Global Evidence

Cities worldwide have achieved substantial emissions reductions through plant-forward procurement.[150] Copenhagen reduced its emissions by 38% between 2005 and 2017, setting the target to become carbon neutral by 2025.[151] The 2019 *Copenhagen Food Strategy* forms a key part of this plan, with tactics including adopting plant-forward menus, increasing procurement of organic food and reducing food waste.[152] The greatest contribution to this reduction was achieved through decreased ruminant meat purchases.[153] The graph below shows the reduction over time through the menu and procurement changes.

Figure 6 – Emissions reduction achieved through the Copenhagen Food Strategy 2018-2024[154]



Dutch hospital data shows that vegetarian meals produce **50% less** greenhouse gas emissions than animal-based meals, with beef being a particularly significant contributor.[260]

Dutch hospital data shows that vegetarian meals produce greenhouse gas emissions, with beef being a particularly significant contributor.[155] New York Health & Hospitals' plant-based default program for inpatient menus achieved a 36% reduction in carbon emissions from all meals.[156] Turkish menus aligned with the Mediterranean diet achieved 2.2%–23.4% reductions in carbon footprint and 37.5%–58.6% reductions in water footprint.[157] Notably, a Swedish municipality found that reducing meat purchases by just 6% of total food kilograms achieved a 44% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.[158] Federal analysis projecting a 50% replacement of the US government's $1 billion in beef purchases with plant-based proteins estimated 15% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and 16% reductions in land use, with modest 5% reductions in water use.[159] Similarly, Australian modelling evidence suggests that a shift from existing average Australian diets to a diet consistent with the existing Australian Dietary Guidelines will greatly reduce the environmental impact of diets.[160]

Beyond emissions reductions, environmental procurement targets actively support greater biodiversity. Brazil's school feeding program sources native biodiverse crops, demonstrating how public procurement can increase demand for indigenous and biodiverse varieties.[161] Sweden's 2006 requirement for public sector organic food purchasing to reach 25% of total procurement catalysed significant farmland conversion: organic farmland share increased 20%—from 6.9% in 2003 to 19.8% in 2016, with total hectares under organic cultivation rising from 10,800 to 26,300 hectares.[162] Copenhagen's procurement strategy prioritises fruit and vegetable diversity – one tender included 86 apple varieties from seven wholesalers, many being small and medium-sized suppliers, thus demonstrating how procurement can support diverse producers and crop varieties.[163]

Shifting toward a plant-forward diet and menu supported by procurement policies is essential for reducing environmental impact. While plant-forward diets can be defined in various ways, the most widely recognised globally is the EAT-Lancet Planetary

Health Diet, released in 2019 and reinforced in 2025 reports as critical for reducing environmental impact while improving health.[164] The diet comprises mostly fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, and nuts, with minimal animal-source foods.

A recent study demonstrated that those who closely adhered to the Planetary Health Diet had approximately 18% less greenhouse gas emissions than those with least adherence.[165] Further research has found that aligning US university dining programs with the Planetary Health Diet would result in a 46.1% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.[166] Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have integrated this diet into their dietary guidelines to inform procurement policies.[167][168] The C40 Good Food Cities Accelerator pledge includes a measure aligning food procurement to the Planetary Health Diet with signatories including Guadalajara, Lima, and Seoul.[169] While Sydney and Melbourne are signatories to the C40 Cities program, they have not become signatories to the Good Food Cities accelerator.[170]

Food Waste in Public Procurement

When a sustainable food procurement approach is adopted, food waste measures are often implemented first. However, the *National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study* (2021) found that institutions account for approximately 3.6% of total food waste—the lowest level across the supply chain.[171] Significantly greater waste occurs elsewhere in the food system, such as in households, primary production, and manufacturing.

Addressing institutional food waste remains important, however, and can be advanced through strategies. Local sourcing, for example, can reduce food spoilage and increase freshness, making food less likely to be discarded. However, meaningful food waste reduction requires preventative measures targeting earlier stages of the supply chain. For example, 23% of horticulture waste occurs on farms, largely caused by:

- Lack of coordination and value adding and processing infrastructure
- Over production to meet contracts
- Lack of workforce and skills, and
- Unrealistic and unnecessary standards set by the corporatised food system.[172]

Anticipated Co-Benefits: Health

While environmental targets do not automatically ensure healthy food – for example, low carbon footprint can coincide with ultra-processed options – alignment with the Planetary Health Diet delivers health benefits. Research found participants most closely adhering to the diet had 32% lower incidence of type 2 diabetes than those with least adherence.[173] In the US, serving the Planetary Health Diet in university dining programs would better align diets with the national dietary guidelines.[174] However, environmental and health outcomes are not always linked – an investigation of Copenhagen childcare centers adhering to the city's low carbon footprint strategy found that while the policy did not substantially change nutritional content, it also fell short of recommendations for calcium, iron, vitamin D, sodium, and total and saturated fat.[175]

Anticipated Co-Benefits: Livelihoods

The previously mentioned study of US universities showed that aligning to the planetary health diet would see an average 9.7% reduction in food costs for institutions.[176] However, for local livelihoods to be supported, local procurement strategies would be needed to complement a plant-forward menu.

Pathway for Australia

CSIRO data shows that Australia's food system generates 6.8 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent per person annually.[177] Compliance with the Planetary Health Diet could reduce this by between 18% and 46%, bringing emissions down to between 5.8 and 3.7 tonnes.[178] [179]

From January 2025, Mandatory Climate Related Financial Disclosures mean large Australian businesses and government will need to report annually on scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions as well as climate resilience, risks, opportunities and targets.[180] Scope 3 emissions are indirect greenhouse gas emissions occurring throughout an organisation's value chain from suppliers and consumers. Given the complexity of food supply chains and the high carbon footprint of Australia's food system, this reporting requirement will likely reveal substantial emissions from procurement. Transitioning toward plant-forward procurement – replacing high-carbon foods including red meat with vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses grown regeneratively – has significant potential to minimise government Scope 3 emissions.

Adopting a plant-forward approach also addresses health impacts. Less than 5% of Australians consume fruit and vegetables consistent with dietary guidelines.[181] The average Australian diet contains higher-than-recommended animal-based proteins and overconsumption of discretionary foods (i.e. junk food). A shift toward plant-forward menus and procurement could meaningfully improve dietary compliance across institutions and communities.[182]

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Cultural Considerations and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Implementing plant-forward procurement policies must prioritise cultural responsiveness and Indigenous food sovereignty. Policies must not disadvantage cultural groups and communities where traditional practices and rituals centre on meat consumption.

Indigenous peoples' food sovereignty must be respected first and foremost. This includes recognising and incorporating bush foods and other dietary practices integral to Indigenous health and wellbeing (as demonstrated in the Rockingham case study) and ensuring that procurement of these foods supports the economic prosperity of Indigenous communities (see Section 4).

Procurement of 'Better Meat'

Not all beef carries the same environmental impact. Cattle feeding practices, living conditions, and land management significantly influence the carbon footprint of beef production. **While reducing ruminant meat consumption remains the most effective strategy for lowering food system emissions, meat consumption patterns in Australia means this is a longer term valuable transition. The short term focus for procurement of meat could be on meat produced by specific farming practices that can substantially reduce the environmental cost of meat consumption.**[183] **Regenerative beef production prioritises soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem support, offering a pathway to lower-impact meat within existing consumption patterns.**[184]

Some US institutions have embedded regeneratively raised meat into procurement policies. The University of California, serving over 600,000 meals daily, has committed to sustainable purchasing from independent ranchers and regional producers.[185] Intermediaries like Beef2Institution bridge the gap between farmers and institutions, helping both parties create and meet demand for these products. This includes incorporating secondary cuts—which comprise two-thirds of a carcass—into prepared foods like meatballs, burgers, and stews, Institutions can use higher-quality, lower-carbon products while supporting viable farm businesses.[186]

Australian producers are following similar models. Macka's Beef produces low-carbon and carbon-neutral beef, through carbon sequestration techniques. While their steaks are widely popular, they are also currently supplying aged care facilities and major corporate buyers with cuts suitable for pies, sausages, and meatballs. Their buyers are primarily motivated by carbon footprint reduction and Scope 3 emissions targets, demonstrating market demand for regenerative products.

Health considerations

The nutritional profile of regeneratively raised cattle shows promise, with meat containing elevated levels of omega-3 fatty acids, Vitamin E, and other beneficial compounds.[187] However, these improvements don't eliminate health risks associated with high red meat consumption, including cardiovascular disease.[188]

Economic impact

Procurement policies targeting regeneratively grown meat would generate ripple effects throughout local food economies, especially in regional areas. By creating reliable institutional demand, these policies enable farmers to sell into domestic markets rather than remaining dependent on export channels, strengthening both farm viability and regional economic resilience while also supporting regenerative transitions.

5.3.3 Focus Area: Health

Why is this an issue?

Australia faces a diet-driven health crisis. Ultra-processed foods – laden with salt, refined sugar, saturated fat, and trans fat – constitute 42% of the Australian diet.[189] These nutritionally empty foods fuel cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other non-communicable diseases while increasing the risk of depression and adverse mental health outcomes.[190]

The problem extends beyond what Australians eat to what they don't: most fail to consume recommended servings of fruits and vegetables or adequate fibre.[191] Meanwhile, Australia ranks among the world's highest meat consumers, with consumption continuing to climb.[192] The economic toll is staggering, as diet-related diseases impose an immense burden on our healthcare system.[193]

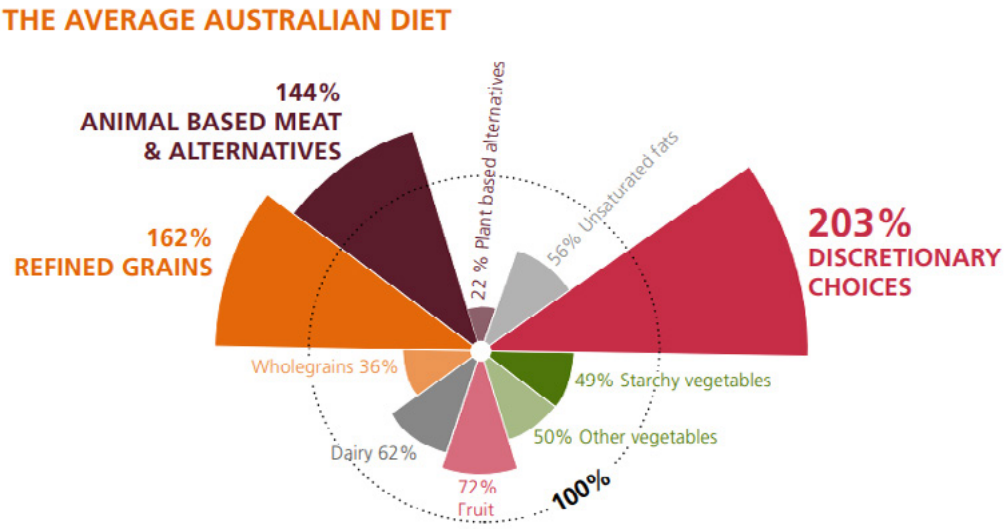


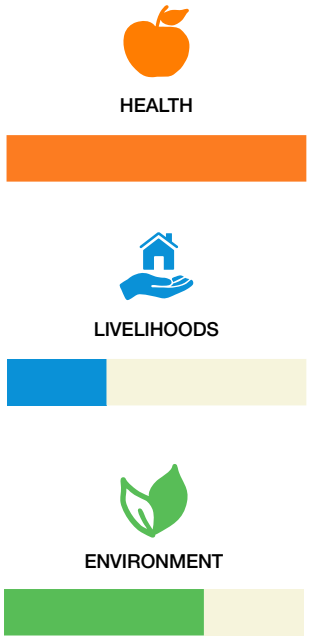
Figure 8 – Comparison of the average Australian diet (adults 19-50) with the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines.[194] The average Australian diet is expressed as a percentage of the benchmark recommendations. The red dashed line represents 100% of the recommendations in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Action Pathway: Nutrition-Related Targets

Setting nutritional quality standards can reduce ultra-processed food consumption and promote more nourishing diets within communities.

Global Evidence

A comprehensive 2014 review found that healthy food procurement programs were nearly always effective at increasing availability of healthier food while decreasing less healthy options.[195] These shifts translated to measurable behavior change: increased purchases of healthier foods and reduced purchases of items high in fat, sodium, and sugar. Where programs tracked health metrics, results were tangible. Interventions led to improvements in blood pressure and body mass index. Some programs proved popular with participants, improved attitudes toward healthy eating, and increased both total food sales and healthier food purchases. Health economic modeling from Los Angeles projected that broadly implemented government healthy food procurement policy would reduce disease rates and healthcare costs.[196] Research comparing school meal procurement programs identified a clear pattern: robust, well-resourced implementation of nutritional standards, particularly involving professional nutritionists in menu design, is the strongest driver of nutritional quality.[197]



Anticipated Co-Benefits: Environmental

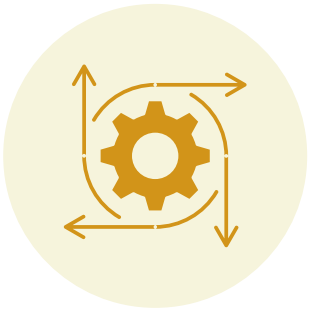
While nutrition standards and environmental sustainability may not automatically align, they can reinforce each other powerfully, if designed intentionally. A 2016 UK study quantified this potential: if institutional meals met healthy standards by limiting salt, free sugars, and saturated fat, they would save 136.9 million kg CO^2e compared to current emissions.[198] Research also found that procurement policies designed purely for child health and nutrition "quite unintentionally" generated significant positive environmental outcomes.[199]

The solution lies in integrated frameworks, such as the FAO, Climate action and nutrition – pathways to impact which include procurement actions.[200] [201]Targets like the Planetary Health Diet explicitly address both nutrition and environmental sustainability, enabling procurement to deliver co-benefits rather than trade-offs.

Pathways for Australia

Australia already has foundations to build upon. State-based food guidelines, such as Victoria's Healthy Choices Guidelines – currently mandatory for in-house retail outlets in public health services – provide tested frameworks ready for extension to procurement policies. However, any such extension must ensure these standards are culturally responsive, avoiding the privileging of Western food preferences that could further marginalise multicultural and Indigenous communities.

In the Australian context, nutrition standards enjoy broader acceptance and utilisation than environmental standards. This presents an opportunity: by identifying synergies between nutritional and environmental goals, alongside targets that support local livelihoods, policymakers can leverage an important entry point for change. Critically, policies must not inadvertently favour processed meals from corporatised supply chains over locally prepared, environmentally sustainable alternatives. A systems approach – one that balances nutrition, local economic impact, and environmental sustainability – is necessary to achieve meaningful reform.



5.4 Transformation: Reimagining Public Procurement

The strategies outlined above demonstrate the transformative power of public procurement as a lever for food system change. While implementing any single approach can yield positive results, the greatest impact emerges when multiple strategies are layered to work cumulatively. Transforming the food system requires the deliberate integration of complementary strategies:

- Meaningful, aspirational yet achievable targets for local procurement, including innovative approaches such as Buying it Forward.
- Carbon and environmental footprint targets for public food procurement, including sourcing meat from regenerative producers.
- Mandated nutrition standards for public procurement.

These strategies must be designed and implemented in concert to fully realise their collective co-benefits. Together, they can propel us towards a food system hardly imaginable in Australia, but increasingly commonplace in other countries.

5.5 Foundational Values

Underpinning these strategies must be a shared commitment to fundamental values guiding all procurement decisions to create food system resilience.

1. **Indigenous Food Sovereignty.** Australia's post-colonial food system has inflicted profound harm upon Indigenous peoples through land dispossession, exploitative labour practices, and the continued erosion of Indigenous food and agricultural knowledge systems. Any procurement strategy must prioritise alignment with Indigenous food sovereignty, working in concert with existing State-based Treaty processes. Such strategies must meaningfully advance the economic prosperity of Indigenous communities while ensuring that procurement practices neither undermine nor impede Indigenous peoples' access to their traditional foods.

2. **Equity and Justice.** Our food system has become increasingly inequitable, transforming adequate nourishment into a privilege rather than a right. Communities on low incomes, residents of food-insecure geographic areas, people from multicultural backgrounds, people with disabilities, and other structurally marginalized groups face systemic disadvantage. Procurement strategies must be guided by principles of equity and justice, actively rebalancing entrenched power dynamics to ensure that those historically disadvantaged by the food system can access nourishing food equitably.

3. **Place and Context Specific.** Australia's vast continent encompasses extraordinary bioregional diversity. For procurement strategies to be genuinely meaningful, they must respond to the specific context of their implementation and the distinct needs of the communities they serve. A uniform approach cannot adequately address the varied realities of urban environments, regional communities, and rural and remote areas.

4. **Community Agency.** The current food system has left citizens and communities powerless over their own nourishment. Restoring agency and fostering empowerment must be central to procurement strategies. Co-design principles and meaningful community engagement would enable communities to reclaim their sense of ownership over local food systems, fostering connection to food sources and autonomy in their food choices.

Figure 9 – Foundational Values

Section 6

Recommendations – Pathways to Action

Overview

- We share the proposed Pathways to Action Framework drawn from the earlier report content.
- Under each of the action areas we provide insights and examples relevant to the Australian context.
- We ask you to consider how you can contribute to achieving the pathway to action.

PATHWAYS TO ACTION – Framework

Achieved through clear goals that leverage food procurement for food system change: supporting health, equity, sustainability and resilience. We need:

Leadership

- **Government officials** at all levels of government working on procurement policy/regulation and administering relevant funding programs
- **Institutional staff** in universities, schools, residential aged care facilities, prisons, hospitals, and long day care responsible for translating policy into procurement practice
- **Civil society actors** including researchers, entrepreneurs, farmers, business owners, and social enterprise leaders who supply regeneratively produced food and advocate for systemic change
- **Indigenous leaders** including food system experts, farmers, and advocates to ensure indigenous food sovereignty is respected and embedded throughout all processes
- **Philanthropic organisations** and impact investors

Investment & Time

- Increase food systems literacy
- **Short term** – detailed feasibility and scoping to **identify readiness** and context for **demonstration and quick actions**, including coordination and capacity building to create an equipped workforce
- **Medium term** – support actions in targeted settings identified
- **Long term** – scale up to other regions and cities
- For a minimum and consistently for 10 years, acknowledging contracting cycles and the significant transition needed across the food system

Measurable Action Coupled with Monitoring

- Codesign and embed agreed **targets/ standards/criteria** to achieve system goals
- Introduce supportive **regulation**
- **Produce guidelines** to embed and achieve the targets for impact and effectiveness
- **Regular monitoring** of institutional practices, policy and food system change/impacts to inform progress, identify enablers and barriers, and scale implementation

Governance & Partnerships

- Include academics as partners in applied research to inform progress and demonstration site decisions
- **Cross-sectoral**, across government, and including food system actors and civil society
- Include **Indigenous representatives** and food sovereignty acknowledgment

Coordination & Capacity Building

- Expand food systems literacy
- Invest in connection infrastructure for all levels of system and resilience planning and demonstration projects – place/regions, state/territory and Commonwealth
- Use **Communities of Practice** to build skills in institutions and with food system actors; deliver **public campaigns** to improve food systems literacy
- Codesign across value chains with all scales of farmers, processors, anchor institutions (e.g. procurers/ buyers, sustainability managers, chefs and food service staff, menu planners), Indigenous people, wholesalers/ aggregators, government and civil society. Consider on farm planning and seasonality

PRIORITY SETTINGS

Short term (quicker wins; 2-4 years) in place-based/ regional projects with anchor institutions – such as long day care, residential aged care and Meals on Wheels due to their dispersed nature; the emerging food and nutrition requirements and connection with community; Antarctic base supplies (an annual arrangement); COP 31; social supermarkets[202]

Medium term (3-6) – Schools, hospitals and corrections (due to contracting cycle, procurement guidelines reform and scale); Olympics 2032 Food Vision

Longer term – Defence

Visualising a regional demonstration model

Anchor Institutions

(any one or combination of)

- Residential Aged Care
- Long Day Care
- District Hospital
- Prison
- Schools
- Residential Accommodation
- Social Supermarkets

Connection Infrastructure

(value chain coordination)

FACILITATES

- Mapping, applied research, project planning, and system codesign
- Network/ partnerships making
- Farm to Institution connections
- Capacity and capability building
- Governance
- Policy making
- Monitoring/evaluation
- Grant and finance discovery

Suppliers

- Farmers/producers
- Processors
- Wholesalers
- Cooperatives
- Food Hubs

Services

- Logistics
- Aggregation

Food Service

- Menu planning
- Food service model (cook fresh)

Procurement mechanisms

- Contracts/off contract
- Baseline measurement
- Targets, criteria

Partners

- Governments
- Farmers groups/ peak bodies
- Civil society
- First Nations
- Universities

ENABLERS

Leadership | Time (3-5 years for phase 1) | Investment | Policy | Strengthened food systems literacy | Dynamic procurement practices | Cross-sectoral governance

The following section provides more detail on each of the Pathways to Action, including examples, insights, and ways of working.

6.1 Leadership

For sustainable public food procurement to become a reality in Australia, diverse actors across the system – those in close proximity to procurement practices and those who may not yet see themselves as agents of change – must identify and fill meaningful roles in delivering transformation.

Government officials

The limited progress in Australia signals that bold rethinking is required from those working in policy and program spaces across all levels of government. Government must recognise and embrace the opportunity before it: the power to reshape its own procurement practices in service of public good. As this terrain may be unfamiliar to many policymakers, bureaucrats and decision makers, new competencies and skills will need to be developed. Coherent policy frameworks are essential – ensuring that procurement, trade and regulatory decisions reinforce rather than undermine shared goals. Aligning national dietary guidelines with emissions reduction targets and state-level sustainable procurement policies, for example, allows institutional food budgets to serve as a lever for both public health protection and regional economic resilience.

Institutional staff

Institutions are anchors for action, and the people who work within them are crucial to creating the stable relationships and trust necessary for procurement to function meaningfully at scale. New skills, competencies and supplier networks may need to be developed. Leadership within institutions must foster innovation, embrace calculated risk, and adopt longer-term, systems-level thinking in decision making – moving beyond compliance-driven approaches to procurement as a strategic tool for change.

Civil society actors

Researchers, entrepreneurs, farmers, business owners and social enterprise leaders who supply food and products, design sustainable supply chains and centre social good in their work are essential to this transformation. These actors not only demonstrate what is possible on the ground but also advocate for the policy and market conditions needed to scale their innovations and transition. Their knowledge, networks and entrepreneurial energy create both proof of concept and political and community momentum.

Indigenous leaders

Genuine transformation requires that Indigenous leaders are given the space, resources and agency to meaningfully participate in and design procurement practices that uphold Inidgenous food sovereignty. This creates pathways for economic participation and positive impact for Indigenous communities, while honouring knowledge systems that have sustained this continent for tens of thousands of years.

Philanthropic organisations and Impact Investors

Philanthropic organisations and impact investors play a catalytic role in unlocking the early-stage capital needed to begin this work. This includes seeding a coordinating entity to act as intermediary and broker, supporting regional procurement demonstration projects that test new models, and de-risking innovation that governments can embed and scale. Their flexible, patient capital enables the groundwork that makes systemic change possible.

- **Improving food systems literacy.** Leaders who are food system literate can recognise how procurement, production, and consumption decisions affect population health, climate resilience, and community wellbeing. This systems awareness enables them to make more coherent, future-focused policy and investment decisions, identify leverage points for change, and navigate trade-offs across sectors. Enhanced literacy also fosters collaborative and adaptive leadership, helping leaders engage meaningfully with diverse stakeholders, build cross-sector coalitions, and communicate the rationale for reform. In practice, this leads to more effective governance, stronger institutional accountability, and greater capacity to implement sustainable procurement and food system transformation initiatives. Improving food systems literacy can be greatly enabled by public information campaigns like Buy Better Food.

  Food systems literacy is the understanding of how food systems operate – including production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste – as well as the socio-ecological, economic, cultural and political factors that influence them, and one's capacity to act within and influence these systems.[203] Leaders should have a suite of competencies related to food systems literacy, across Indigenous food systems, sustainability, governance and the full food-system chain.[204]

- **Embedding Indigenous knowledge**. Leaders should appreciate Indigenous place-based, holistic understandings of land, water, food, and community as essential for creating resilient and equitable food systems. Indigenous knowledge systems emphasise care for Country, reciprocity, and long-term sustainability, aligning with contemporary goals for environmental protection and community wellbeing. Including this knowledge in policy and procurement decisions not only supports self-determination and cultural continuity, but also enriches mainstream approaches with proven ecological and governance practices grounded in thousands of years of observation and stewardship.

6.1.1 Leadership in our Region

World Health Organisation in the Asia Pacific – Food systems transformation

The Asia Pacific Centre for Environment and Health (ACE) Strategic Plan (2025–2029), released in October 2025, is structured around **three pillars**: resilient health systems, **transformed food systems**, and healthier urban and island environments.

- In the 'transformed food systems' pillar, ACE aims to engage in work that integrates health, climate, and environment domains with food systems.
- A recent regional roundtable on 'Food Systems, Climate, Environment and Health' was convened by ACE in July 2025, indicating that food systems (including aspects of how food is sourced, produced, distributed) is a priority domain in the implementation of the strategy.[205]
- The October 2025 Lancet commentary "A centre of gravity: Asia–Pacific leadership in global food systems" describes how ACE is acting as a regional leader on food systems transformation, including leveraging procurement.[206]

The ACE's 'transformed food systems' pillar will draw on WHO and global guidance for **public food procurement** policies.

The WHO's Public food procurement and service policies for a healthy diet is an action framework offering guidance on how governments and public institutions can use procurement to promote healthy diets.

Key principles include:

- Aligning procurement standards with nutrition/dietary guidelines
- Embedding sustainability criteria (environmental/climate) alongside health criteria
- Prioritising local, seasonal, and smallholder-sourced foods
- Considering social equity, inclusion, and support for vulnerable producers
- Monitoring, enforcement, and evaluation of procurement compliance[207]

According to WHO, public food procurement should not simply be awarded on lowest cost, but should also incorporate health and sustainability metrics.[208]

Another WHOresource, the WHO Food Procurement Frameworks for Sustainability and Health, argues that governments and public institutions should lead by example in shifting to healthier, more sustainable diets via procurement.[209]

6.2 Investment and time

Transitioning to a more sustainable approach to food procurement, as demonstrated by the international examples in this report, is a long-term systems reform requiring sustained investment and coordination across government, business, and community sectors. The shift involves changing not only what food is purchased, but how institutions plan, contract, prepare, and evaluate food services. It takes time to build workforce capability, align policy frameworks, and embed new practices into supply chains and organisational cultures. A minimum ten-year investment commitment is essential to allow for contracting cycles, infrastructure renewal, market development, and behaviour and practice change.

Short Term (Years 1–2): Scoping, Feasibility and Capacity Building

The initial phase focuses on establishing readiness and clarity of purpose. This includes detailed feasibility and scoping studies to identify key partners, allies, and demonstration sites where early implementation can showcase success. Investment in food systems literacy and workforce capacity is critical, enabling procurement teams, caterers/kitchens, and suppliers to understand sustainability principles, nutritional standards, and local sourcing opportunities. Early actions should also map existing policy settings, procurement timelines and levers, and baseline data to inform evaluation frameworks and guide priorities. It is also advisable to keep an eye on settings where there is new activity emerging – for example, the emphasis on sustainable food procurement in the University of Tasmania's 2023 *Healthy, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Strategic Plan* indicates that universities could be a future focus area.

Case Study: Sustainable Procurement Tasmania

Sustainable Institutional Food Procurement Tasmania (SIFPT)

In 2023, the State Government of Tasmania (through their Healthy Tasmania funding) and Sustainable Table funded an Australia-first project to scope and map the feasibility of a more sustainable approach to food procurement in Tasmania. The project was designed and led by Leah Galvin (our project co-lead) and was an opportunity to test the findings from her Churchill Fellowship in 2022, when she visited seven countries exploring government and business approaches to sustainable food procurement. (You can view a one- page infographic of her fellowship here and the full report here.)

Project activities

- Undertook scoping and mapping for the whole of the state engaging with institutions, food service providers and suppliers, and farmers and processors.
- Commissioned public polling to gauge community sentiment.
- Identified settings and or programs for conducting procurement 'experiments'.
- Engaged with political and policy leaders to shift the policy settings.
- Shared lessons and tools with stakeholders across Australia to build momentum and workforce capacity.

Key learnings and achievements

- Via a partnership with Public Health, a high-level decision was made for 2024 procurement contracts to include food origin and establish future monitoring mechanisms with suppliers.
- Independent public polling demonstrated strong support for a more sustainable approach to food procurement (91% for food to be healthy, 91% for food to be sourced from within Tasmania, 80% for procurement to include SMEs, and 76% for consideration to be given to climate and environment impacts in procurement decisions).
- The project model and approach became embedded in several policies and action plans of the government – including the *Agricultural Emission Reduction and Resilience Plan* as a case study – and was recommended for funding as a project that demonstrated government agencies embedding climate considerations in policies and programs.

Sustainable Institutional Food Procurement Tasmania (SIFPT) (cont.)

- A baseline study of procurement of fresh ingredients was undertaken, identifying key opportunities for increasing Tasmanian sourcing in procurement (33-61% across the fresh food categories).
- In May 2025, a cross-government and cross-sectoral (food systems actors) Round Table was hosted by the Minister for Primary Industries, with seven departments attending and committing to future action through their respective portfolios.

What's next?

A budget submission was made for a Farm to Institution program to continue the work. Regrettably, this was not supported by the Treasury, despite being recommended for funding by the Minister for Primary Industries. The project 'paused' in June 2025. This project is an excellent example of why longer-term funding is needed for procurement projects, as the absence of coordination now means the momentum for change is lost.

Medium Term (Years 3–6): Implementation in Targeted Settings

Building on early learnings, the medium-term phase prioritises implementation and support in selected regions and institutional settings identified during the feasibility stage (e.g. hospitals, prisons, aged care services, long day care, or defence food contracts). School meals programs and social supermarkets are key community settings that are emerging in Australia, and offer an exciting potential opportunity to embed good public food procurement practices. This stage consolidates partnerships between anchor institutions, local producers, wholesaler/distributors, and food service providers. It also focuses on integrating sustainability criteria into tender specifications and contract performance measures. Regional coordination mechanisms, such as communities of practice or local food system alliances, help share learning, address barriers, and scale innovation across jurisdictions.

Long Term (Years 7–10): Scaling and System Integration

Over the longer term, investment supports scaling to additional regions and cities, embedding sustainable procurement as standard practice across the public sector. This phase requires sustained government commitment and consistent policy signals to maintain supplier confidence and market readiness. Evaluation and reporting systems should demonstrate the co-benefits achieved, such as healthier diets, reduced emissions, regional economic growth, and strengthened food security.

A consistent 10-year investment horizon ensures that the transition aligns with public sector contracting cycles and gives institutions and suppliers the certainty needed to invest in innovation, infrastructure, and workforce development. By taking a phased approach, governments and funders can move from pilot initiatives to a resilient and scalable model for sustainable food procurement.

Investible Pathways: Turning Evidence into Action

Transforming public food procurement from proven concept to embedded national practice requires deliberate investment, coordination and policy alignment. The analysis in this report demonstrates that the opportunity is not constrained by lack of evidence or public support, but by the absence of collective, collaborative action capable of shifting political will and building public demand.

The Case for Investment

Public food procurement represents $2.14 billion in annual government expenditure. Even modest shifts in how these funds are directed can deliver significant returns across health, food security, climate, regional development and equity outcomes. However, these returns are unlikely to materialise without committed investment in fully investigating, designing and implementing the pathways for action needed to deliver on the goals grounded in the values outlined in this report.

International experience shows that successful procurement reform is consistently underpinned by dedicated coordination capacity, clear policy signals and targets, demonstration projects that de-risk change, and long-term commitment rather than short funding cycles. In Australia, these enabling conditions do not yet exist at scale. This creates both a challenge and a timely investment opportunity.

There are clear pathways for both government, philanthropy and impact investment to play complementary but distinct roles in accelerating change.

Distinct but complementary roles

6.2.1 Government as policy maker, regulator and strategic grant funder

Governments play an indispensable role in creating the conditions for success. Sustainable food procurement cannot be realised without government leadership and commitment. Their critical contributions span three domains.

a) Policy leadership and alignment

Governments should embed sustainable public food procurement by:

- Integrating food procurement into **health, climate, food security, regional development and Indigenous economic participation policies**
- Embedding sustainability, nutrition and equity objectives into procurement frameworks, guidance and standards
- Signalling long-term intent through strategies, targets and whole-of-government commitments

Critically, procurement should be recognised not only as an operational function, but as a **systems-level policy instrument**.

b) Regulation and market signalling

Within existing procurement law, governments should:

- Set minimum standards and performance criteria for food procurement
- Introduce or strengthen social and sustainable procurement requirements
- Use contract renewal cycles as leverage points for reform
- Improve transparency and reporting of food spend and outcomes

These actions provide the **market certainty** producers and suppliers need to invest in healthier and more sustainable production.

c) Strategic grant funding

Governments should support:

- Capacity building within institutions and procurement agencies
- Data, monitoring and evaluation systems
- Scaling of successful procurement models across jurisdictions

6.2.2 Philanthropy as a catalytic seed funder

Philanthropy has a distinct role in enabling transformation – particularly in the early stages where coordination, innovation and mandate-building are required.

a) Seeding a dedicated coordinating entity

The report identifies the need for a **new, independent coordinating entity** or function to drive sustainable public food procurement in Australia. Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to:

- Seed-fund the establishment of this entity over an initial 3–5 year period
- Provide flexible, mission-aligned capital not tied to short government funding cycles
- Enable independence, systems leadership and cross-sector credibility

This entity would not replace government functions, but would:

- Coordinate across jurisdictions and sectors
- Support implementation of government policy objectives
- Act as a trusted intermediary between institutions, suppliers and communities
- Build and steward communities of practice
- Aggregate learning, data and evidence nationally

International precedents show that such entities are often the **missing infrastructure** between policy ambition and practical action.

b) De-risking innovation through demonstration projects

Philanthropic investment can also support **targeted demonstration projects** that:

- Test sustainable procurement approaches in real institutional settings
- Work across the supply chain, from producers to kitchens
- Generate practical, transferable learning for governments
- Build confidence among procurement agencies and institutions

By absorbing early risk and incentivising innovation, philanthropy can unlock subsequent public investment and policy uptake.

c) Building the evidence–practice bridge

Philanthropy can also invest in:

- Applied research partnerships with universities
- Development of practical tools, guidance and metrics
- Food systems literacy and narrative design

These investments help translate evidence into action and support a shared national story about why public food procurement matters.

6.2.3 Impact Investment as Infrastructure Capital

Impact investors play a unique role in building the physical infrastructure sustainable procurement requires. This includes:

a) Financing regional food system infrastructure

- Regional food hubs providing aggregation, storage and distribution
- Processing facilities enabling value-addition for mid-scale producers
- Cold chain infrastructure connecting farm to institution
- Technology and data systems supporting traceability and coordination

b) Bridging the finance gap

Traditional commercial finance often deems regional food infrastructure too risky or insufficiently profitable. Philanthropic grants alone cannot build infrastructure at scale. Impact investment provides patient, risk-tolerant capital that:

- Accepts modest financial returns in exchange for measurable social and environmental outcomes
- Enables infrastructure to achieve operational sustainability over 5-10 year horizons
- Can be structured as loans, equity or blended finance depending on project needs

c) Leveraging public procurement as de-risking mechanism

Government commitment to sustainable procurement creates the stable demand signal impact investors need. Long-term institutional contracts provide revenue certainty that makes infrastructure investments viable. This creates a powerful feedback loop: procurement policy enables infrastructure investment, which enables producers to meet institutional requirements, which validates further procurement reform.

A shared investment logic

Government, philanthropy and impact investment are most powerful when their roles are intentionally aligned. Impact investment builds the infrastructure. Philanthropy seeds coordination, convenes stakeholders and de-risks innovation. Government embeds transformation through policy, regulates markets and redirects public expenditure at scale. Together, working in partnership, they can move beyond fragmented pilots, build durable physical and coordination infrastructure, create the conditions for long-term system change, and ensure public food procurement delivers maximum public value.

6.3 Governance and partnerships

A high-functioning cross-sectoral governance model for supporting the roll-out of sustainable food procurement in Australia could take the form of a multi-tier food governance council (national, state and regional), anchored in statute or an intergovernmental agreement. The Council would bring together representatives from agriculture, health, environment, procurement, Indigenous affairs, government, civil society and private sector actors. Such a council would co-design performance benchmarks (e.g. local sourcing targets, nutrition and sustainability criteria for public procurement), resolve trade-offs across sectors, and oversee monitoring and evaluation, thus engendering policy coherence rather than silos. This kind of mechanism is consistent with theory in sustainable food governance, which sees the "orchestration of multiple food systems and policies" as a core dimension of effective governance.[210]

In Australia, such a governance body could build on institutional architectures already being created: for example, the Australian Government is establishing a National Food Council to advise on Australia's upcoming *Feeding Australia* food security strategy.[211]

This cross-sectoral architecture supports sustainable public procurement in multiple ways:

- It ensures that procurement policy is aligned with national food security, climate, health and regional development goals;
- It gives voice to regional producers to negotiate procurement terms;
- It enables adaptation to local climatic or supply shocks; and
- It embeds accountability via system-level reporting on food security outcomes, resilience indicators, and procurement performance.

At regional levels, governance forums with broad food systems membership could codesign and integrate State/Territory, local Government, and regional agricultural bodies to develop food procurement action plans. These Food Action Groups (often called Food Policy Councils internationally), engage actors across sectors including agriculture, social services, public health, economic development and others, to develop local solutions to local food issues. Internationally, they have achieved impacts such as increasing healthy food access, knowledge and/or demand for healthy food, equity, economic development, environmental sustainability, and food system resiliency.

Exemplar food procurement strategies include increasing nutritious meals in schools, or prioritising locally-grown food in public food procurement. Their strong, agile partnership mechanism facilitates information-sharing, sources new markets quickly and efficiently for small-medium enterprises, supports farmers with funding applications, and advocates to the government for policy change.[212]

In sum, by creating a trusted multi-stakeholder mechanism that bridges the traditional siloes of agriculture, health, environment, and public procurement, Australia can better leverage institutional demand to drive food security, equity, and sustainability outcomes. Our recent conversation with Elisabeth Lette gave us practical insights into what using procurement as a lever looks like on the ground.

Elisabeth Lette
Australian procurement leader

Practical how-to lessons from an Australian procurement leader

Elisabeth Lette is a seasoned procurement specialist with over two decades of experience in public sector and social procurement reform. She authored the Victorian Government's *Social Procurement Framework*, the first of its kind in Australia, while working in the Department of Treasury and Finance. The Framework includes social and sustainability objectives, as well as a range of tools to support implementation. She later led Queensland and Northern Territory operations for procurement and supply chain consultancy for ArcBlue. She now operates independently, focusing on government and not-for-profit procurement capability building and using procurement as a lever for regional economic development. She generously had a chat with the project team in mid-October 2025, sharing valuable insights and lessons from her work.

Elisabeth emphasised that the **authorising environment** is the critical foundation for success:

> "Number one would be the authorising environment, the mandate that puts in place an imperative to do this. Without that, you don't get the same traction … You'll have individuals that bring goodwill and a desire, but it's fragmented and slower."

She explained that in Victoria, strong early direction from the Government and Premier about mandatory implementation and accountability reporting for each department created good momentum. Meanwhile, in her observation, Queensland's softer policy approach has meant comparably slower progress. When top-down mandates are absent, she recommends building capability and capacity from the bottom up.

Place-based ways of working together

QSeed is a Townsville based initiative delivered with Central Queensland University, Smart Precinct NQ and philanthropic partners. The initiative, while not necessarily food related, has a highly transferable approach. Its objective is to apply procurement principles and practice as a lever to keep money in the local economy, and through this create training and jobs for young people. The Action Plan and program design combines:

- Common tender clauses linking local employment to procurement,
- Supplier support and readiness training through a range of activities, including a 5-week workshop program and one-on-one mentoring,
- Youth development and evaluation led by the university, and
- A shared reporting dashboard.

QSeed has demonstrated how place-based collaboration and shared agreed purpose can substitute for formal mandates.

> "There is no one body responsible … we have created a goodwill environment … bringing together all these buying organisations and all these supply organisations to jointly drive outcomes."

She described this as a multi-pronged bottom-up approach that through *connecting infrastructure* builds relationships and trust, shared understanding, and consistent practice across public, private, and community actors. A hallmark of success was that local businesses *"took pride in investing in their town, our kids, our neighbours, our sons and daughters"* and this pride was harnessed for good outcomes.

The **connecting infrastructure** has created a goodwill environment and used a place-based and capacity-building approach, which offers a replicable model for regions without a central mandate, linking social outcomes with procurement reform.

Targets, Guidelines, and Accountability
Elisabeth distinguished between **targets** that drive behaviour and **guidelines** that depend on culture and capacity:

> “Guidelines can work if there’s a whole lot of capacity wrapped around it … but if it doesn’t have it, then it just relies on goodwill and people having the same values.”

She warned that when responsibility is unclear, teams can tend to deflect responsibility back on the central procurement team, as a lack of investment in capability leads to a perception of unimportance. To address this, she recommended training and practical tools such as a “*consistent bible of model clauses*” for example, to help buyers include social objectives and ensure suppliers face consistent expectations including monitoring of the delivery of the objectives.

Connect with Elisabeth Lette through her LinkedIn.

6.3.1 Partnerships with industry

Industry is a welcomed and essential partner in the transformation of food procurement. Some of the challenges faced by industry could be resolved through governments and institutions adopting more flexible approaches to procurement, menu planning and food service meal preparation. For example, the 2024 *Horticulture Sector Action Plan Technical Report* identifies waste as a key challenge, including significant losses on farms and through processing and distribution.[213] The sum of this waste is greater than household waste, which is often prioritised over systems action by governments.

There are some simple procurement initiatives that could make a difference here – for example, vegetables sourced from Australia (and within local regions) should replace imported vegetables in institutional kitchens, thereby improving freshness, reducing waste, and boosting nutrition. Projects in regions within the horticultural sector, from all

scales of production, could identify losses and waste and work together with anchor institutions to design solutions. Acknowledging, investment in connection infrastructure will be key to achieving this. The outcomes will strengthen farmer and processor livelihoods, reduce waste emissions, and increase the freshness of ingredients used in kitchens. Exploring these solutions is a potential win for all.

Matthew Baker of Neighbourhood Farm, Brisbane

6.4 Measurable Actions Coupled with Monitoring

Delivering sustainable food procurement at scale requires clear targets, transparent reporting, and adaptive governance. Measurable action provides the accountability and confidence needed for governments, funders, and partners to invest and – importantly – stay engaged over the long term.

A first step is to co-design agreed targets, standards, and performance criteria that directly support system goals for health, sustainability, and equity. These should be developed collaboratively with institutions, suppliers, and communities to ensure they are feasible and contextually relevant. Embedding these targets within procurement policies, contract specifications, and performance frameworks creates the mechanisms for consistent implementation across jurisdictions and settings.

To reinforce compliance and accelerate progress, governments can introduce supportive regulation – for example, requiring public institutions to meet sustainability and nutrition benchmarks, report on local sourcing, or demonstrate carbon reduction outcomes. Complementary guidelines should translate these requirements into practical steps for procurement staff, food service managers, and suppliers, outlining how to integrate targets into tender documents, menus, and reporting systems.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are critical. Regular assessment of public procurement practices, supplier performance, and food system outcomes allows stakeholders to track progress, identify enablers and barriers, and refine approaches. Transparent reporting builds trust and supports scaling successful models across regions and settings.

Effective monitoring frameworks should combine quantitative indicators (e.g. percentage of local or sustainable food procured, reduction in food waste, workforce participation) with qualitative insights from practitioners, communities, and suppliers. Together, these provide a comprehensive view of impact and guide adaptive management. Measurable, well-monitored action ensures sustainable food procurement moves from aspiration to enduring, system-wide change.

Case Study: Good Food Purchasing Program

The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) in the USA adopts a food procurement framework based on five core values: local & community-based economies, community health & nutrition, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability,within a metric based, flexible framework of equity, accountability & transparency. US institutions who have adopted the GFPP framework produce over 450 million meals per year and have a procurement spend of over US$1.1 billion per year.

This values-based food purchasing program gives equal consideration to each food system value and creates a vision and framework for food system transformation through purchasing. The program helps join the dots by assessing baselines, developing metrics to meet targets, and connecting institutions with suppliers. The program acts as a intermediary with institutions and local grassroots food policy coalitions. Since its inception in 2012, the GFPP has tested and developed a range of tools for assessment, planning and contracting to assist institutions in managing the transition. There is also a kit for allies and civil society to map the procurement landscape by exploring the laws and policies related to values-based public food procurement in their region.

Figure 10 – The five values of the Good Food Purchasing Program

The GFPP was developed by the Center for Good Food Purchasing, which is a member of The Anchors in Action (AiA) Alliance, a partnership established in 2015 between the Center for Good Food Purchasing, Health Care Without Harm, and Real Food Challenge. Together, these three organisations support values-based food procurement at over 65 public institutions in 25 major cities, 2,000 hospitals, 7,800 elementary and secondary schools, and 100 colleges and universities across the country. These 'anchor institutions' are forerunners in a nationwide movement to use public food purchasing as a way to invest in community values and wellbeing.

6.5 Coordination and Capacity Building

6.5.1 Connection Infrastructure

When we think about how to use connection infrastructure to strengthen coordination and build capacity with our partners, we are not starting from scratch. There are many examples of success. What has so far been absent – and remains a significant challenge – is long-term investment to maintain the connections and coordination. The changes we propose cannot be 'side of desk' work; there must be specific roles created to bring together stakeholders, build trust, develop an agreed vision and targets, acknowledge the group's contributions, and tap into their expertise in a relational rather than transactional way. We propose resourcing an entity to guide and coordinate this work

Every member of our research team knows what good collaboration looks like. We have seen plenty of well-designed plans that should have been implemented, but the reality is that Australia has a poor track record when it comes to long-term investment in connection infrastructure. There is significant expertise to map feasibility, develop visions, and set pathways, but funding streams are short and therefore fail to acknowledge the complexity of change.

What could it look like in action? Watch this short video to see the impacts.

Models for regional-level action

In this section, four case studies illustrate work that is underway, explored, and investment-ready; or a key demonstration of impact.

Case Study 1

Food Action Groups putting public food procurement on the agenda in Western Australia

A group of community members and interest holders has prioritised public food procurement as an activity led by a proposed Food Action Group (Food Policy Council). Participants in focus groups and a series of co-creation workshops discussed a range of potential activities, with public food procurement highlighted as a priority. In the Wheatbelt region, public institutions – such as a hospital, childcare centres, schools, and aged care homes – are being explored as settings to support food grown in the region (or surrounding regions). More information is available in the Narrogin Food Action Group Co-creation Workshop Report.

The WA Department of Health has encouraged sustainable food procurement through the development of a recent fact sheet on Public health planning and climate change, Healthy and sustainable food systems. As part of supporting local government public health planning, this resource suggests that local governments develop a sustainable food procurement policy for council events.

Case Study 2

The ‘missing middle’: Building a Regenerative Food Future in South East Queensland

The Challenge

Australia’s food system is ready for renewal. For too long, globalised supply chains have left farmers and communities exposed to shocks – climate events, pandemics, market volatility. **Small to mid-scale regenerative farmers — the ‘missing middle’ — sit in a structural blind spot: too big for farmers’ markets, too small for supermarket contracts.**

This project, led by Food Connect Foundation (FCF) in 2023-2024 with support from the Macdoch Foundation, has proven there’s another way. A values-based short supply chain coordination model (VBSC) can reconnect farmers, buyers, and communities through trust, transparency, and shared purpose. In South East Queensland (SEQ), we’ve shown what happens when relationships replace transactions — when food moves through care, not just commerce.

What We Did

From our base at the Food Connect Shed in Brisbane, we:

- Built coordination capacity – recruited, trained, and mentored a dedicated Supply Chain Coordinator to activate networks across growers, processors, buyers, and government.
- Engaged deeply – through 5 workshops, 310 participants, 46 stakeholder interviews, and direct contact with 155 farmers across SEQ.
- Created jobs – including a Food Hub Manager and grain miller at Salisbury Mill, kick-starting a regional grains economy.
- Strengthened governance – 500+ community shareholders, a refreshed board, and integration of the Brisbane Food Plan as a practical procurement policy tool.

What We Learned

1. **Relationships build resilience**
   Values-based coordination fosters trust, fairness, and accountability — ensuring growers receive fair returns while buyers access healthy, regeneratively grown food.

2. **The 'infrastructure of the middle' is essential**
   Coordinators, food hubs, and logistics connectors are the missing links. They give small and medium producers access to institutional markets — and a fighting chance to compete.

3. **Demand is surging**
   Hospitals, aged care homes, hotels, and schools all want local, ethical, and low-emission food. Yet procurement systems remain opaque and often biased toward big suppliers.

4. **Barriers are solvable**
   - Short-term funding limits coordination capacity.
   - Buyers need support to understand local supply and seasonality.
   - Policy frameworks still reward commodity efficiency over regional resilience.

What's next–recommendations for scalable, achievable action

1. **Invest in Coordination Capacity — the 'Infrastructure of Connection'**

Provide multi-year funding for coordinators who can bridge the gap between producers and institutional buyers. Enabling roles provide the foundation through resource prospecting, policy advocacy, fostering relationships, research, and accountability.

2. **Anchor Public Procurement**

Partner with hospitals, aged care, hospitality, and education to secure long-term contracts for regenerative producers. Every contract shifts millions in public and private spending toward resilience.

3. **Strengthen Regional Infrastructure**

Invest in local processing, milling, and logistics to keep value circulating regionally and reduce transport emissions.

4. **Grow a National Community of Practice**

Scale through shared learning — demonstration sites, online exchanges, and cross-sector workshops to replicate success in other regions.

5. **Influence Policy for Lasting Change**

Champion sustainable procurement in Queensland, advocate for regional value chain coordinators, and embed recognition of Indigenous foodways in national frameworks.

Read more in the full Value Chain Coordination Project Report.

Case Study 3

The Food Justice Wholesaler: Building middle-infrastructure for equitable and regenerative public food systems

For over a decade, The Community Grocer (TCG) has been a cornerstone of Melbourne's community food system, offering fresh, affordable, and culturally relevant produce in and around public housing. The model supports community level food security through dignity, social connection, and local economies, keeping prices around 35% lower than supermarkets.

The Challenge

As climate, cost-of-living, and supply pressures intensify, TCG faced a new challenge: Can a social enterprise integrate regeneratively grown food into its supply chain while keeping food affordable and producers fairly paid?

Institutions may want to buy from local, ethical producers but lack the infrastructure, systems, and procurement pathways to do so. This 'missing middle' infrastructure limits transformation of our regional food economies.

What we did

In 2024, supported by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, TCG launched an 18-month pilot to reimagine its supply chain:

Strengthened systems for ordering, pricing, tracking, and supplier management.

Partnered with small and medium regenerative growers across metropolitan and peri-urban Melbourne.

Established a central aggregation hub in Alphington with cool storage for direct producer drop-off.

By the end of the trial, 20% of TCG's supply was regeneratively grown, proving that values-based procurement could scale without compromising affordability or producers' livelihoods.

Images from a TCG weekly market

What's next–From Pilot to Platform: The Food Justice Wholesaler

Building on these results, TCG and partners began developing the Food Justice Wholesaler (FJW), a values-driven intermediary linking regenerative producers with institutional buyers. The FJW is designed as public-good infrastructure, prioritising equity, sustainability, and community benefit over profit.

Core Features

- Dual Value Chain: Strengthens both demand (institutions ready to buy local food) and supply (farmers needing fair, stable markets).
- Values-Based Procurement: Supports buying criteria around local sourcing, fair labour, cultural relevance, and health outcomes.
- Flexible Pricing and Subsidies: Builds affordability through tiered pricing, philanthropic support, and institutional cost-sharing.
- Shared Infrastructure: Uses existing logistics and cold-chain facilities, avoiding costly duplication.
- Collaborative Governance: A coalition model anchored by a backbone organisation to maintain accountability and equity.

Deliverables and Impact

- Operational Model: Proof-of-concept for an urban-regional wholesaler serving institutions with regenerative produce.
- Policy and Practice Integration: Framework for embedding sustainability and equity criteria into procurement.
- Economic and Social Returns: Enables farmers to scale production, supports local economies, and ensures affordable access for low-income communities.
- Systems Change: Demonstrates how blended finance (philanthropy + institutional budgets + policy incentives) can create enduring food system infrastructure.

The Call to Action

TCG is now working with partners across Melbourne to establish the first operational Food Justice Wholesaler Hub, designed to aggregate and distribute, serve as a replicable model, and act as a backbone for a networked, fair and resilient food economy. Philanthropic, government, and institutional partners are invited to co-invest in scaling the Food Justice Wholesaler. Find out more in the full Food Justice Wholesaler Report.

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[228] Tasmania: Food supply for prisons is included in a centralised Department of Health contract, and it was therefore not possible to access prison-specific data. To avoid double-counting, we did not estimate Tasmanian prison food spend here.

[229] WA: Each prison is procured for separately, and contracts for some prisons were available on the website but others were missing. To estimate food spend for the missing prisons, we calculated an average per prisoner annual spend based on the existing contracts and the capacity of the prisons they supplied, then multiplied this by the number of prisoners in the prisons where contracts were not available. (Boronia Pre-Release Centre was excluded as it is self-catering.)

[230] NSW: As food to NSW prisons is supplied by Corrective Service Industries, we used their fact sheet stating an annual food cost of $28.5 million in 2019, adjusted according to the June 2025 CPI: https://correctiveservices.dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/csnsw-fact-sheets/corrective-services-industries.pdf

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[241] https://www.aihw.gov.au/hospitals/topics/admitted-patient-care

[242] https://health.nt.gov.au/media/pdf/annual-report/nt-health-annual-report-2023-24.pdf

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[247] Estimated using QLD data and patient days for SA

[248] Data provided via direct Department of Health communication

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[250] https://www.aihw.gov.au/hospitals/topics/hospital-resources

[251] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release

[252] https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/about

[253] https://mowsa.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/9000232643-annual-report-24-25

[254] https://mowtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Annual-Report-2024-2025.pdf Red Cross Australia is also a MoW supplier in northern Tasmania.

[255] https://mealsonwheels.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MOWA-AnnualReport2019.pdf

[256] https://nswmealsonwheels.org.au/services/tweed/our-meals

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Appendix A

Appendix A: Mapping Methodology

Setting	Type of service/care	How many people access meals through these services?	How many meals do these people consume?	How much does it cost to feed them?	How many institutions are operating and where?
Residential care[214]	Crisis accommodation	Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) monthly data[215] provided the number of clients accommodated in emergency accommodation in June 2025 Across all SHS users, an average of 47.3% require meals[216] We therefore assumed that 47.3% of clients in crisis accommodation were accessing meals	The Special Homelessness Service Annual Report 2023-24 dataset[217] provided the average number of nights spent in crisis accommodation by state/territory We assumed three meals per night spent in accommodation	Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, a social enterprise running food service in four SHS facilities, estimated their ingredients cost at $6.50 per person per day[218] For each state, we multiplied 6.50 by the number of clients accessing meals by the average number of nights stayed (in June 2025) to generate a monthly food spend We multiplied this by 12 to generate an annual food spend	For state and territory numbers of agencies, we used the Special Homelessness Service Annual Report 2023-24 dataset[219] No data on regional/metropolitan location of services was available
	Residential mental health accommodation	Residential mental health care data[220] provided numbers of residents by state and territory for 2022-23[221]	Residential mental health care data[222] provided the average residential care days per episode, and average episodes per resident. As the average episode per resident was 1 in every state except WA, the average residential care days per episode stood in for the average number of care days per resident. We assumed three meals per client per residential care day	Using the estimation of $6.50 per person per day, we multiplied this by the number of residents by the average number of residential care days in 2022-23 to generate an annual food spend	Residential mental health care data[223] provided the number of mental health organisations reporting to the National Residential Mental Healthcare Database for each state and territory.[224] No data on regional/metropolitan location of services was available
Correctional facilities	Prison	ABS Corrective Services data provided the number of prisoners in full-time custody[225] In states with private prisons, we subtracted those prisoners from the total (assuming all private prisons operated at 100% capacity) AIHW data provided the number of people in youth detention facilities on an average night[226]	We assumed three meals per day per inmate	We searched each state or territory government's tenders website or open data portal for recent food supply contracts awarded by the Department of Corrective Services (or equivalent)[227][228][229][230] Where these contracts ran for more than a year, we divided them by month and then multiplied the monthly value by 12 for a rough annual spend We used the midpoint of each contract as the original CPI, and adjusted the value according to the June 2025 CPI Where possible, we followed the same methodology for Youth Justice, but these contracts were unavailable in every state except Queensland and South Australia We added these adjusted contract values to generate an annual food spend	We searched each state and territory's Department of Corrective Services (or equivalent) website for the number and location of prisons and youth detention centres, then manually categorised these as either metropolitan or regional/rural

Setting	Type of service/care	How many people access meals through these services?	How many meals do these people consume?	How much does it cost to feed them?	How many institutions are operating and where?
Defence	Multiple – inhouse, in the field	Although the Department of Defence Annual Report 2023-24[231] provides defence personnel numbers, we cannot assume that all personnel are accessing meals. Meal consumption is influenced by factors such as deployment, living in accommodation, training, etc., but as there is no publicly available data on these variables, we were unable to make an estimate	Unable to calculate – see previous explanation	To gain a representative snapshot of annual spending, we searched tenders.gov.au for Defence food and beverage contracts with start and/or end dates in the 2024/25 financial year We separated these into two categories: those with spend contained completely within FY 2024/25, and those with partial spend in FY 2024/25 For contracts with partial spend, we calculated a daily spend over the whole contract, then multiplied this by the number of days falling in the 2024/25 FY We used the midpoint of each contract as the original CPI, and adjusted the value according to the June 2025 CPI We then added together the adjusted spend for both categories (whole and partial) to get the total spend over the 2024/25 FY	Not applicable
Residential aged care	Inhouse care	GEN Aged Care data provided the number of aged care clients in each state and territory[232] We limited our analysis to permanent residential care and respite residential care (as institutions serving food)	We assumed three meals per day for each client	The median food and ingredients cost in aged care was $15.12 per resident per day in Q3 2024-25[233] We adjusted this using the June 2025 CPI to $15.22 We multiplied 15.22 by the number of residents for a daily food spend, then multiplied this by 365 for an annual food spend	GEN Aged Care data provided the number of residential care services in each state and territory[234] For each state and territory, we downloaded the aged care service list of residential care services[235] and then manually excluded metropolitan locations to calculate the number of regional services

Setting	Type of service/care	How many people access meals through these services?	How many meals do these people consume?	How much does it cost to feed them?	How many institutions are operating and where?
Long day care	Daily child care	The Child Care Subsidy data tables[236] provided the number of children in centre-based childcare and the average weekly hours of attendance	Assuming attendance for 10 hours per day and 48 weeks per year, we calculated the average annual days of attendance for each child We assumed three meals per child per day, noting that one or two of these 'meals' are likely snacks	In 2024, the average ingredients cost per child per day was calculated at $2.50 for Victoria and $3.38 for WA (averaged across remote and metro areas)[237] Where state-based figures were not available, we used the national figure of $2.15[238] We adjusted these for inflation using the June 2025 CPI We multiplied the daily cost by the number of children in care to get an average daily spend We then multiplied this by the average annual days to get an annual spend	The Child Care Subsidy data tables provided the number of centre-based services in inner regional, outer region, remote, and very remote Australia[239] This data was not broken down by state and territory, and we were unable to find this information elsewhere.
Antarctica and island bases	Multiple – staff meals on bases and in transit	We calculated the average value of the winter/summer population ranges provided by the Australian Antarctic Program website[240]	We assumed three meals per person per day	We searched tenders.gov.au for food and beverage contract notices from the Department of Climate Change, Energy and water over 2024/25 We adjusted contract values for inflation according to the June 2025 CPI (where the midpoint of the contract fell before then)	Not applicable
Public Hospitals	Services for admitted patients	We used patient days to calculate a daily spend, rather than meal numbers	23,313,614 patient days[241] x 3 meals per day = 69,940,842 per year	Most states/territories have some or complete transparency of contracting arrangements. Where it was is publicly available we made a request through FOI or made estimates based on the QLD (per hospital daily spend) and NSW (complete C801 value) data which were provided directly and most detailed. For SA we calculated using the QLD data based on patient days. Only partial data was available as private contractors deliver food service in major hospitals In Victoria we calculated using the NSW data based on patient days. Only partial data was available as private contractors deliver food service in some major hospitals or via a central production kitchen.NT[242], ACT[243], NSW[244], QLD[245], Victoria[246], SA[247], Tasmania[248], WA[249]	701 public hospitals, 65,900 beds [250]

Setting	Type of service/care	How many people access meals through these services?	How many meals do these people consume?	How much does it cost to feed them?	How many institutions are operating and where?
Meals on Wheels	Home delivery meals	We estimated the meal numbers using Annual Reports from state and territory providers (NSW, QLD, SA, Tas, ACT). Where data was not provided, due to the high number of providers, fragmenting data collection, we estimated meal numbers using the available state data and adjusted based on ABS[251] and AIHW[252]. Estimations were also required for meal numbers because many providers bundle "meals / food preparation / in-home meals" under broader home support or aged care services, so they may operate meal delivery without branding as "Meals on Wheels".	A meal per day	We obtained detailed costing data from two state peak bodies, SA[253] and Tas[254] and used this to estimate costs for other states if the data was incomplete or unknown. There has not been an updated national estimate of meal numbers since 2019.[255] Prices varied across states [256] [257] and also across programs that fund the meals.[258] We used a single cost to the customer of $4.50 to calculate the value of the total spend, where the expenditure was unknown.	There are over 600 MoW providers across Australia. There are significant complexity and variation across the states and territories in the delivery of the MoW program. In some states/territories there is a central coordinating peak body, but not all. This contributes to fragmented reporting. For example, in Victoria the 79 local governments[259] have carriage of delivering the program. In NT there is no peak body for MoW. In WA Meals on Wheels WA indicates over 38 local providers serving 129 shires across ~90 service locations.

Appendix B

Appendix B:
International Policy and Enablers Review – a menu of options

Introduction

Public policy for food procurement in Australia is comparatively underdeveloped and lagging behind when compared with the international environment. Internationally, countries are spending significant amounts of public money on organic, nutritious, sustainably-produced food sourced from small, local farms – a fundamentally different picture from Australia. While we may be lagging, we can learn much from the international experience and exemplars to inspire and adapt to our own policy settings to drive food system change.

A Food and Agriculture Organization 2017 review identified 41 countries globally had provisions for sustainable public procurement embedded into policy frameworks. These [1]provisions influence supply chains, menus and meals fed to millions of people through institutions including public hospitals, kindergartens, schools, nursing homes, childcare centres, prisons, universities, public building canteens, social programs, and government workplaces.[2] Public food procurement has been described as a 'game changer' to guide what food is purchased (e.g. local, healthy, shorter supply chains), and from whom (e.g. small and medium, family farms), and through which production method (e.g. regenerative, reduced inputs). Given the sheer scale of public food procurement across many institutions in Australia, it has the potential to over time monumentally shift food production and consumption patterns, delivering multiple co-benefits.[2]

While the extensive evidence that exists, summarising global food procurement achievements, demonstrates how far behind Australia is, the opportunity is substantial, to transform institutional food procurement. Given the scope and depth of school-based institutional food procurement achievements globally, other institutions such as childcare, aged care and hospitals, should apply similar values, principles and processes. In Australia schools remain a setting with greatest public interest and growing political will to act, given the strong case that exists supporting children being provided with nourishing food.

Enablers

The food system change required will take time, actors across government and the food system and political will. To build the required momentum, our research found that the following mechanisms can support advocacy to gain traction for healthy, local and sustainable food procurement:

Civil Society

- Building a support base of people who will be impacted by the policy, such as parents, is important, to enhance demand for healthy food procurement.
- Partnering with a range of groups, such as tertiary institutions, civil society, health associations, and consumer engagement groups.

Coordination

- Create a 'mission-oriented industrial strategy'[3] that is integrated within a range of strategies to incentivise food supply chain actors to adopt more sustainable practices.
- Engaging the media to maximise the reach of key messages.
- Reframe meal provision as 'investment' rather than 'cost'.[3]
- Developing messages that resonate with a variety of target groups, led by appropriate working group members.[4]
- Appealing to decision makers with change champions.
- Storytelling about the potential benefits of healthy food procurement, incorporating stories of those potentially impacted by the policy.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative data to measure success.
- Considering potential barriers to policy success and developing strategies to mitigate them.[4]

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1 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2018). Strengthening Sector Policies for Better Food Security and Nutrition Results. Policy Guidance note. Retrieved from: Strengthening sector policies for better food security and nutrition results.

2 Swensson, L. F., Hunter, D., Schneider, S., & Tartanac, F. (2021). Public food procurement as a game changer for food system transformation. *The Lancet Planetary Health, 5*(8), e495-e496.

3 Mazzucato, M., Spanó, E., & Wainwright, D. (2025). Rethinking the Economics of Public Procurement: Towards a mission-oriented approach.

4 World Health Organization (2021). Action framework for developing and implementing public food procurement and service policies for a healthy diet. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021

Government and other funders

- Highlighting the achievements of other countries or regions who have successfully introduced healthy public food procurement.
- Leveraging existing diet and/or food data and aligning policy with broader national nutrition goals.
- Garnering support from policy-makers and government officials, through the dissemination of information about the co-benefits of public food procurement.
- Government policies help local producers and their products compete with larger entities in public food procurement.[4]
- Supporting a range of government departments to frame procurement from their perspective, relevant to the desired outcome.[8]

Procurement Practice

- Enhancing existing policies that include public food purchasing, preparation or sales rules;
- Springboarding off an existing policy to create a new healthy public food procurement policy, such as expanding a school health policy.[4]
- Imposing stricter regulations and enforcements on animal welfare, labour standards, environmental standards[5] and connecting these with food standards.
- Tailoring policies for different target populations, e.g. aged care residents, childcare, and adapting policies in cases where the target population resides there full time.

It is worth noting that the World Health Organization has argued **policy** will have the greatest **impact** if **criteria are mandatory, specific, enforceable, and applicable** to **all government** food **purchases** and **all food** served or sold in public settings.[4]

Commonly countries incorporate public food procurement into legal frameworks, such as laws or guidelines governing contracts, which may target producers, suppliers or purchasers.[6] These legal frameworks are a key enabler to their success.

The following section synthesises international policy examples from other countries to demonstrate how globally institutions are supporting healthier, values-based, and more sustainable food. This summary is extensive but not exhaustive. The policy outcomes, goals and countries where we have included examples are captured in the Table below. This section of the report uses Reeve et al's framework of actions for public food procurement as a framework, and includes examples across local, state and federal governments. As many countries use different government level language, municipal government is often equivalent to our state government's roles and responsibilities.

Procurement Policy Outcome	Goals	Example Countries
Environmental sustainability	Prevent and manage food waste	Belgium, Denmark, France Ireland, Brazil, Switzerland, Austria, UK, Italy
	Promotes harm–minimising production methods	France, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Latvia, Denmark, Brazil, Denmark, Japan, UK, Austria and Scotland
	Minimises unnecessary CO2 impacts associated with the food value chain	Brazil, USA, Belgium, UK, Scotland, Denmark
	Minimises resource inputs and pollution	France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, USA
	Enhances or protects animal welfare	USA, UK, Canada, France, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark

[5] Lawrence, M., Parker, C., Johnson, H., Haines, F., Boatwright, M., Northcott, T., & Baker, P. (2024). An ecological reorientation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission could help transform food systems. *Nature Food, 5*(7), 557-562.

[6] Reeve, E., and Thow, A.M. (2025) et al. Leveraging food systems outcomes in public food procurement:
A framework of actions. Research brief V1, updated August 13, 2025. A product of the SHINE Partnership, Deakin University, University of Sydney and the World Health Organization. For more information or (forthcoming) publication, contact Dr Erica Reeve at e.reeve@deakin.edu.au

Procurement Policy Outcome	Goals	Example Countries
Economic and social wellbeing outcomes	Preserves community and rural livelihoods	Scotland, Italy, France, US, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, El Salvador, Peru, Dominican Republic, Canada, Argentina, Belgium, Slovenia, UK
	Promotes inclusion	EU, Brazil, US, UK
	Advocates human rights and decent working conditions	EU, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, Italy, US
	Protects local food culture and tradition	Germany, Japan, Brazil, Columbia, Spain
	Contributes to social safety nets	France, EU, Brazil, Italy, Korea
Nutrition, health and food security outcomes	Promotes healthy population dietary intake	EU, Scotland, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, Korea, US, Latvia, Sweden, UK, US, Brazil, Thailand
	Ensures dietary adequacy and sufficiency	Scotland, Uruguay, US, EU
	Lifts demand for, and exposure to, healthy food	Chile, Scotland, Sweden, US, UK, Denmark, France, Guatemala, Italy, Spain, Bolivia, Italy

Environmental sustainability outcomes

Prevent and manage food waste

Four European Union countries include public food procurement food waste actions through dedicated food waste strategies (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland). Many countries use targets (e.g. "Reduce canteen waste by 40%") or reduce waste within timeframes.[7] Brazil's Urban and Family Agriculture Supply Center provides small-scale farmers with warehouse infrastructure to supply institutional markets.[8] A local government developed a 'Protocol of Intent' to foster institutional cooperation, and collaboration, which has subsequently been signed by 13 local governments. Hospitals have significant potential to reduce food waste, with strategies in Belgian hospitals including the preparation of large volumes of items such as soups, which are pasteurised and frozen for up to six weeks.[9] Some countries (e.g. Denmark, France) include 24-hour hospital menu ordering via IT systems, which matches food provision to need, rather than providing a standard number and portion of meals per day.[15] Other strategies include the requirement for inpatients to pre-order food (e.g. Switzerland), to avoid excess preparation,[15] shorter time periods in which to order food, a plated food service, decreased portion sizes and an education campaign displaying large stockpiles of bread (e.g. Austria).[15] In Belgium, standardised hospital menus and kitchen production monitoring determines which food ingredients can be used in subsequent days.[15] Loyalty programs, and 'reuse discounts' for staff who return and reuse food containers occur in the United Kingdom.[10] Voluntary food waste targets (e.g. United Kingdom) encourage hospitals to reduce food waste, while waste is being managed in Belgian, Danish and Swiss hospitals, through conversion into biogas.[15] Within school settings, central purchasing systems (e.g. France), include a list of products deemed local, high quality, and organic.[15] Education is used as an additional strategy in Denmark, with educational materials provided,[11] that focus on organic food and sustainability.17 French secondary schools (Île-de-France region) are not permitted to deem surplus food that can still be consumed, unfit for human consumption.[12] Sorting tables, salad bars, cooling cells, compositing and methanisation processes are additional waste reduction strategies.[13] One school has even recovered biogas from food waste.[14] The Italian government introduced a Legislative Decree to reuse school canteen leftovers.[15] Some countries (e.g. Denmark) recirculate nutrients extracted from institutional wastewater through organic farms,[11] or compost food waste (e.g. Spain). The Danish government appointed a working group to facilitate collaboration among government, industry

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7 European Commission, Joint Research Centre (2024). Overview and analysis of sustainable product procurement criteria in the EU food sector, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

8 Future Policy (2020). Belo Horizonte's Food Security Policy. Retrieved from: www.futurepolicy.org

9 Cioci,G., Hernandez Olivan, P., Pinzauti, I. (2016). Fresh, healthy, and sustainable food: Best practices in European healthcare. Retrieved from: https://europe.noharm.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/4680/HCWHEurope_Food_Report_Dec2016.pdf

10 Ibid

11 Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries of Denmark (2015). Organic Action Plan for Denmark; Working together for more organics.

12 Condamine, P (2020). France's law for fighting food waste: Food Waste Prevention Legislation. Retrieved from: https://zerowasteeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/zwe_11_2020_factsheet_france_en.pdf

13 World Health Organization (2022). How together we can make the world's most healthy and sustainable public food procurement? Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

14 Judenne, P (2020). The action of the Ile-de-France region for more sustainable food in high schools. Retrieved from: https://letsfoodideas.com/en/initiative/the-action-of-the-ile-de-france-region-for-more-sustainable-food-in-high-schools/

15 Food and Agriculture Organization, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and Editora da UFRGS. 2021. Public food procurement for sustainable food systems and healthy diets–Volume 2. Rome. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cb7969en

and organisations to support source-separated service sector organic waste.[16] Contractors must also "register, report, and prevent food waste", which does not include food provided to food banks or animal feed. Within the university sector, Cagliari (Italy)'s green food procurement initiative monitors meals and leftovers, to decrease food waste.[15]

Promotes harm–minimising production methods

Many countries have mandatory targets to facilitate organic institutional food procurement. For example, France, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Latvia, Denmark,[17] and Scotland[18] have organic targets ranging from 50-100%, and their 2030 targets range from 20% (France, Germany), Finland (25%), 60% (Sweden)[3] to 100% (Brazil).[3] Sweden achieved 15% organic produce by 2010, and 25% by 2013.[19] While the federal government set targets, local and state governments were expected to set their own food procurement goals, with more than 80% doing so. Progress was monitored by a government-appointed not-for-profit organisation. This local-level action drove markets for regional food products and included private food system actors.[22] Denmark set a target for 60%-90% of Danish public sector meals being organic between 2009-15.[20] The Ministries of Defence and Health increased organic food in their institutions, and most of the 900 public kitchens in Copenhagen are now 90% organic.[21] Austria's mandatory valued-based public procurement initiative, ÖkoKauf Wien ("EcoBuy Vienna") has supported the 30% organic food procurement target. Increases in organic food consumption have been measured in daycare centres (51%), hospitals (38%), schools (18%), and aged care homes (25%).[22] French schools introduced a target of all high school canteens having 50% organic foods and 100% local foods in school meals by 2024.[14]

Countries frequently include policy mechanisms such as plans, certification schemes and wrap-around support to deliver their procurement goals. For example, Japan's Basic Plan for Food Agriculture and Rural Areas,[23] and Brazil's Belo Horizontes Food Security Policy that supports agro-ecological food production on public land through technical assistance. The Food Acquisition Programme has created institutional markets for small-scale farmers.[8] The Republic of Korea (National Act)[15] includes an environmentally-friendly certification scheme to promote purchasing of green products. Sweden has embedded organic consumption goals into their Federal environmental governance approach, and Denmark have a long-standing organic food and agriculture policy (1987).[24] Numerous European Union countries incorporate sustainable agriculture and aquaculture in their public food procurement guidelines or legislation.[7] [25] For example, the European Union's Green Public Procurement scheme outlines that institutions cannot purchase fish or their products from those listed as 'fish to avoid'[32], and points are proportionally awarded to tenders that prioritise procurement of fish and their products from stocks protected from over-fishing and biodiversity loss.[26] The UK's Government Food Buying Standards require fish purchased have sustainable certification. Traceability of fresh, chilled and frozen produce is also legislated[27], and authenticity checks can be conducted. Wild caught fish must meet the Food and Agriculture Organisation Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.[34] The UK Buying Standards also requires the sourcing of sustainably sourced palm oil.[34]

Action plans have also been established in the Italian region of Sardinia (e.g. regional action plan in 2009), which aimed **to ensure a minimum environmental standard for public food purchasing**. This supported the development of sustainable tenders through a green catering service tender template. **Critical success factors included a high level of involvement of a range of food system actors, such as hospital and university representatives.** Across the European Union, many countries promote sustainable soy and palm oil management processes.[31] For example, the City of Copenhagen requires the supplier to provide an action plan for phasing out non-certified soya.[4] Denmark's Organic Action Plan supported

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16 Ibid

17 ICLEI (2022). Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU. Retrieved from: https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Manifesto-for-establishing-Minimum-Standards-for-Public-Canteens-across-the-EU_final.pdf

18 Sustain (2025). Enhancing public sector food procurement. Retrieved from: https://www.sustainweb.org/bridging-the-gap/procurement-case-study/

19 Daugbjerg, C. (2023). Using public procurement of organic food to promote pesticide-free farming: A comparison of governance modes in Denmark and Sweden. *Environmental Science & Policy, 140*, 271-278.

20 Ibid

21 Global Alliance for the Future of Food (2020). Systemic Solutions for Healthy Food Systems: A guide to government action. Retrieved from: https://futureoffood.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/GA_SystemicSolutions-HealthyFoodSystems_GovtGuide_Oct2020.pdf

22 City of Vienna (n.d.). ÖkoKauf Wien–programme for sustainable public procurement. Retrieved from: https://www.wien.gv.at/english/environment/protection/oekokauf/

23 Ministry of Agriculture Japan, 2020 Summary of the Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas. Retrieved from: https://www.maff.go.jp/e/policies/law_plan/attach/pdf/index-13.pdf

24 Bord Bia (2022). Organic Market Sweden & Denmark July 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.irishorganicassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/Organic-Market-Sweden-Denmark-Bord-Bia-2022.pdf

25 European Union (2019). Green public procurement criteria for food, catering services and vending machines. Retrieved from: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f8e9fe10-ff7d-11e9-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

26 Ibid

27 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Areas (2021). Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-procurement-the-gbs-for-food-and-catering-services/government-buying-standard-for-food-and-catering-services

public kitchens to use organic raw materials, through an advisory and training service.[11] **Government certification, technical support through universities, and pesticide testing** by the Health Department[28] are other effective activities. Italy has "organic districts" focused on develop formal Memorandum of Understanding agreements to ensure sustainable management and utilise organic farming[29] techniques.

Procurement contract scoring criteria can also favour sustainability. For example, the City of Copenhagen (Denmark) tender contract scoring criteria include consideration of Marine Stewardship Council/Aquaculture Stewardship Council adherence (20% weighting).[35] The City of Ghent (Belgium) includes organic and fair-trade products in purchasing criteria and menus.[30] Specific requirements include the European Union's Green Public Procurement Scheme, which specifies a proportion of food and drink containing vegetable fats is sourced from farms that comply with soil, biodiversity and organic carbon stock schemes.[26]

Other practical facilitators have included a shared, central kitchen and suppliers (Austria)[9], and food service staff negotiating pricing[31](e.g. United Kingdom). **Collaborative networks are also procurement facilitators.** Participants of the 'network of sustainable canteens' were provided with guidance documents including basic principles, a compliance checklist, sustainable canteen criteria required to be met, and a template to facilitate political support towards sustainable purchasing.[15] Austria's organic food procurement target was facilitated by the Vienna Climate Protection Programme and annual funding through the local government.[22] Specifically, within hospitals, the Vienna Hospital Association acted as a coordinating organisation of 26 hospitals, aged care centres and care homes. **The government engaged in dialogue and set targets for the purchase of organic food with public supply providers**, through the Smart Food Purchases and the Partnership for Public Green Purchasing initiatives,[44] created a certification scheme, and a cross-ministry collaboration through the Organic Food Advisory Council. Cross-institutional collaboration sped up transition to organic food production on Danish public land, provided government subsidies[43] for organic food in public canteens, and accompanying education programs.

Minimises unnecessary CO2 impacts associated with the food value chain

Legislative frameworks have facilitated purchasing from small, family-owned farms, such as Brazil's Belo Horizonte's Food Security Policy. A fundamental pillar ensures direct purchasing from small rural producers, in 30% of school meal contracts.[8] In France, the government requires 50% of products in school meals have signs of origin and include 20% organic produce.[14] French secondary schools are required to promote the purchase of local and seasonal food ingredients.[32] In Belgium, Ghent school children are served a 'Local, environmentally friendly and Fair Trade' [39] ("LEF") lunch, featuring local and organic food. The USA's Farm to School programme, delivered through local governments, **facilitates school meal purchasing from local producers.**[43] Local governments can dictate how their state-level funding is spent, and in 2012, the largest districts collaborated on the Urban School Food Alliance, a community of practice who committed to increase local food purchases by 5% in 2021/22.[33] An example of the programme in action includes the **Geographic Preference option**; higher points are awarded to suppliers from within the preferred geographic radius.[34] Proximity to farms has also been considered by the City of Cleveland (USA)'s resolution that preferences local food within a 150 mile (241 km).[35] Local food is preferred through bid discounts on local bidders, or suppliers who purchase 20% of their food locally, for up to a 4% discount. **Evaluation credit points** also apply to local producers.[36] An USA local government area, Linn County (Iowa), has listed most to least preferred sources provided by food supply chain actors, on their website, which has enhanced the local food system. In addition to considerations for distance and transportation, the City of Copenhagen, t**ender criteria include the use of green vehicles (40% weighting)[4] and had specifications regarding vehicle types, idling, tyres, delivery coordination, and environmentally-friendly driving practices.**[37] The UK Government Buying Standard has also been used to **ensure menus reflect the natural UK growing period, with seasonal ingredients highlighted on menus**.[28] Scotland and Northern Ireland also have legislative frameworks, such as

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28 Mazzucato, M., and Doyle, S. (2025). A Mission-Oriented Approach to School Meals: An Opportunity for Cross-Departmental and Multi-Sector Industrial Strategy. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose.

29 Defranceschi, P., Rut, M., Novello, F., D'Addario, F. (2022). Report on Innovative Criteria and Models for Procurement of Sustainable and Healthy School Meals. ICLEI Europe. Retrieved from: https://schoolfood4change.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/D5.1-Innovative-CriteriaModels-for-Proc-of-SustHealthy-School-Meals.pdf

30 Goossens, J (2016). From strategic to operational goals for the Gent en Garde food policy. Recommendations of the food policy council. Retrieved from: https://ruaf.org/assets/2019/11/Gent-en-Garde.pdf

31 Ibid

32 Ibid

33 Ibid

34 United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2022). Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs.

35 Growing Food Connections (2012). Local, Healthy Food Procurement Policies. Retrieved from: https://growingfoodconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/11/FINAL_GFCFoodProcurementPoliciesBrief.pdf

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

the Procurement Reform in Scotland, **preferencing seasonal, fresh, local food with shorter supply chains**.[15] The City of Copenhagen (Denmark) uses an "annual wheel' to select seasonal fruit and vegetables.[52] The **seasonal goods must be in season within the country they are produced**. In French hospitals, 20% of the food must be seasonal.[9]

Direct farmer to institutional pathways has included the City of Seattle's Farm to Table Partnership Project, which connects local healthy, seasonal food producers with childcare and aged care centres. The associated Good Food Bag program capitalises on the meal scale of these centres to establish small Community Supported Agriculture organisations to distribute produce to local families. These initiatives, providing 2,000 eaters with up to 10,000 meals containing local produce, were viewed as a pilot to progress a local food procurement policy.[36]

Values-based procurement purchasing systems are other facilitators. For example, the L**os Angeles Food Policy Council's Good Food Purchasing Program focuses on nutrition, local economies, valued workforce, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare values**.[21] This provides institutions with a framework through which to direct their buying power. The Los Angeles Mayor encouraged interest holders to engage with the program, and issued an executive directive and companion motion, requiring departments purchasing above USD$10,000 of food to adopt the Good Food Purchasing Program Standard. **The program resulted in increased local sourcing of produce, redirection of purchasing to sustainable and local produce, increased jobs within the County, reduced purchasing of industrially produced meat, among others**.

Finally, the **financing of kitchen infrastructure**, such as in European local and regional governments, ensures public canteens have access to an onsite kitchen, to buy raw food ingredients from small-scale farmers, and prepare ready-to-eat meals.[17]

Minimises resource inputs and pollution

Institutions globally have requirements preventing single-use utensils (e.g. French schools[14], Italian universities).[15] Recycled packaging, and a separate waste collection service61 are additional requirements7 (e.g. Denmark). Numerous countries (e.g. Sweden; Switzerland) include plated food covered with a lid in hospitals, reducing packaging and food waste.[9] **No City of Copenhagen (Denmark) tenders request bottled water[4], and in several countries (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, France), hospitals serve water from the tap, rather than bottles.**[63] Some European Union countries even include an ecolabel for cleaning resources, follow 'eco-design' principles, and ensure efficient use of water and energy with their equipment,[62] while others (e.g. USA) have increased purchasing by 20% from suppliers who abide by higher environmental standards.[21] While a Belgian aquaponics pilot project included fish farming and vegetable cultivation in a closed-loop system within converted sea containers. Herbs were grown on the container roof in vertical gardens.[31]

Enhances or protects animal welfare

During 2012-2019, participating institutions in the Los Angeles Good Food Purchasing Program purchased 42% whole or minimally processed foods. Institutions aim to further increase this amount and decrease red and processed meat by 5% annually.[65] **The European Union's voluntary Green Public Procurement scheme recommends institutions purchase organic, fair trade, and higher-welfare animal products.**[64] In the USA, the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) has increased purchasing by 50%, from suppliers ensuring animal welfare.[65] One example of the GFPP in action includes Los Angeles (USA). An Executive Directive required city departments purchasing over USD$10,000 of food annually to adopt a **Good Food Purchasing Pledge**, following the USA GFPP, and abiding by the procurement values including animal welfare. This provides benchmarks, embeds values and ensures purchases are traceable, and reports on progress.[36] The UK's food and catering services buying standards require all food served to align with animal welfare standards. Specific requirements include that all eggs are sourced from non-conventional cages,[28] as does the European Union's Green Public **Procurement scheme[26], which also recommends proportionally awarded points for tenders that prioritise animal products that align with animal welfare standards** (e.g. low stress).[69] While in Canada, the University of Toronto initiated a food labelling scheme which highlighted farmers prioritising animal welfare[61], which reached 200 certified farmers/processors and was valued at over USD 2 million.

Countries, including France, Switzerland and Austria, require one vegetarian meal be served, either per day or per week,[14] in public institutions.[9] This is often guided by National Action Plans on public procurement. In Denmark, the Action Plan on Plant-Based Foods encourages stringent organic and plant-based food purchasing in public kitchens, in addition to cooking skill education.[11] While **Sweden preferences 'meat-light' meals that align with their climate action.**[29] The City of San Diego's Eat Well Practices required government cafeterias **prioritise plant-based protein foods and encouraged the offering of vegetarian options.**

Economic and social wellbeing outcomes

Preserves community and rural livelihoods

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act was introduced in 2022. Scotland's school **food procurement model is mixed, whereby it includes some national contracts, regional contracts for some items, and smaller local contracts, particularly fresh produce. For example, local butcher meat is used in some areas**. One of the key objectives of school meals includes **'supporting local purchasing, creating economic sustainability and community wealth building.' Scotland's Procurement Reform Act 2014** also included a 'Sustainable Procurement Duty' that ensures inclusion of smallholders through broader social, environmental, and economic procurement considerations, such as supporting involvement of small businesses. **Challenges have included inconsistent application, and the lack of core integration of sustainable procurement.**[73] In Italy, local foods are preferred to meet socio-economic goals, embedded in Legislation[15], while in Avignon (France), childcare centres and schools focused on local, fresh products in their meals, including fruit and vegetables. Given the limited production and processing of meat, eggs or dairy in the local areas, these ingredients were seldom available. **New York City (USA) includes a procurement policy that stipulates a minimum percentage of locally-grown food be included in meals.**[38] For example, through the Farm to Preschool Program, which connects childcare centres to locally grown food.[75] **The Good Food Purchasing Program further requires qualifying food ingredients be sourced from within a 400km radius of the institution.[39] The program saw institutions double their annual spend on food sourced from small and mid-sized production and processing actors.** These were often family or co-operatively owned operators.[40] Uruguay also includes targets, with 30% of the food procurement allocation reserved for family farmers, by law.[1] A Centralised Procurement Unit purchases food on government agencies' behalf, while decentralised procurement occurs through departmental governments.[78] **Brazil's Belo Horizontes Food Security Policy ensures partnership development between public institutions and community organisations through an institutional channel.** Their local government program supports small scale farmers through a funded budget8 spent on an integrated approach across the food supply chain. Within schools, Brazil embedded the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) requirement for 30 percent of National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) be allocated to produce from small, family-owned farms, into law. This was a substantial proportion (USD 0.36 billion) of their USD 1.19 billion total programme funding[15], from the long-standing initiative which commenced in 1955. **Incorporated across local, state, and federal government levels, this prioritised Indigenous farmers and organic food80 and created an integral link between schools and local/regional produce.** Between 2003 and 2013, 3 million tons of food was purchased from smallholders.[80] Several key changes were incorporated, facilitating local food procurement; **a bidding waiver was introduced into law, preventing the lowest cost being used as a main contract selection criterion**[80] and further supporting purchasing from small family-owned farms. Beyond schools, other Brazilian public institutions, including universities, hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and military facilities, were required to source food from family farmers.80 **Other countries including Paraguay, El Salvador, Panama, Peru and the Dominican Republic all have requirements to support family farms embedded into legal frameworks[80], with minimum expenditure outlined for Brazil (30%), Guatemala (50-70%), and the Dominican Republic (70%).** These are successful policy examples, with reports indicating 93% compliance with food standards.

Other ways to facilitate local and family-owned farm produce into **institutional meals includes a central kitchen that prepares and delivers meals to participating centres, schools, and private residences.**[80] In 2005, Canada's University of Toronto partnered with civil society organisation Local Food Plus to increase local, sustainable food into university meals. **A local labelling system was introduced, highlighting farmers using sustainable production methods.** An advocacy element called for the normalisation of local and sustainable food in public food procurement.[80] Several significant contracts being awarded to locally grown food were deemed as contributors to early successes.[36] The Brazilian Food Purchase Programme (PAA), **supported the building of small and lower-income agricultural businesses, ensuring predictability in purchasing.** The initiative increased rural incomes, and family farm purchasing power.[41] This has been enacted well in one of Brazil's most productive agricultural regions, which has many small-medium farms, to achieve 100% sourcing from family farms.[29] **Flexible contracts, which specify product categories, have been the facilitating mechanism which provides seasonal adaptation and accounts for unexpected product shortages.**

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38 New York City Food Policy (2019). Food Metrics Report. Retrieved from: https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/Food-Policy-Report-2019.pdf

39 Center for Good Food Purchasing (2025). The Good Food Purchasing Values. Retrieved from: https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/good-food-values/#_values

40 Hamerschlag, K,. Culver, A., Waterman, C., Bartholomew, B. (2017). Meat of the Matter: Municipal Guide to A Municipal Guide to Climate-Friendly Food Purchasing. Friends of the Earth. Retrieved from: https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MunicipalReport_ko_120117_v2-1.pdf

41 Casagrande, D., Emanuel, L., Freitas, C., Lima, A., Nishimura, F., & Oliveira, F. (2024). Public food procurement and production: Evidence of the food acquisition program in Brazil. *Food Policy,* 126, 102656.

Additional support mechanisms include Japan's national movements to deepen connections between consumers, public and private sectors, including cooperatives,[42] Argentina and Costa Rica's family farmer registries.[80] Paraguay has simplified procurement processes for family farms, considering their capacity constraints.[1] However, few countries include processes to update information or definitions of family farming in their national census, limiting further development. Some farmers are required to submit bids for tenders and are given preferential treatment. Governments (e.g. Brazil) may additionally waive the competitive bidding process for smallholder farmers.

Online buying platforms are another way to support local food procurement. For example, the Ghent en Garde strategy (Belgium)'s online platform, for public school canteens[30] connects farmers and public procurement personnel[17] and sells produce directly. Producers determine the price of goods and deliver them to centralised kitchens.[87] In 2010, Denmark's Focus on Food was created, which included the development of a database that outlines procurement specifications. This ensures transparency, high quality and ease of ordering.[4] **Slovenia's Ministry of Public Administration created a website for schools, kindergartens, and hospitals, documenting available food, and paperwork required for public tenders. This facilitates menu evaluation, compliance checking against the 'green public procurement legislation', quantifies the proportion of food that is organic, and consider additional aspects including food quality and production location.**[88] Sweden provides a dynamic purchasing system that connects small-scale farmers with public buyers, through real-time bids (e.g. number of kilograms of a food item available), while Brazil has a digital public marketplace that makes smaller producers more visible.[29] The United Kingdom Dynamic Purchasing System provided kindergarten and school meals and included selection criteria. A partnership agreement with an organisation with local produce knowledge was established.[87]

Promotes inclusion

In the European Union, **the public procurement regulatory framework reserves contracts for organisations that employ 30% or more employees with a disability or disadvantage.**[43] Organisations who can attain these contracts include social cooperatives, small-scale farmers or workers who have precarious incomes. Many European Union countries prioritise vulnerable groups in their hiring, providing training and upskilling for their food service teams.[7] **The Good Food Purchasing Program supports suppliers from priority populations, and those impacted by economic marginalisation**[40] **or negative social impacts.** The United Kingdom's Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 includes social values-based considerations beyond price, that provide economic, environmental and social benefits.[44] For example, by supporting smaller producers. Argentina has facilitated involvement of low-income farmers in public procurement, through tax exemptions and vacant land use for farming.[15]

One of Brazil's participating National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) states, Parana, introduced a requirement to prioritise women-led organisations in procurement decision-making. This has resulted in a higher number of women working in farms.[89] **The City of Portland (USA)'s Food Purchasing Guidelines supported vendors led by women and people of colour.**[41] **The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability facilitated a Sustainability at Work program, which certified a list of vendors who articulated their sustainability actions.**[41]

Advocates human rights and decent working conditions

European Union standards, guidelines or legislation promotes 'fair trade' products, and supports purchasing of products that comply with conventions on forced or child labour.[7] For example, the City of Copenhagen requires fair trade labelling on coffee and tea, beverages and fruit. **Italian**[4] **legislation outlines the requirement to have traceable supply chain conditions**[7]**, while other countries (e.g. Sweden) requires adherence to International Labour Organisation conventions, which are demonstrated by Fair-trade labels.** Finland was the only example that applied this criteria to all food products.

Several countries, or states (e.g. Scotland; Los Angeles USA) require the support for workers with a living wage. For example, Los Angeles's Good Food Purchasing Program participants purchased US$20 million from suppliers that ensured worker protection and provided wages in line with unions.[96] **Scotland's Fair Work Framework requires procurement from suppliers who pay a living wage to workers.**[45]

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42 Godo, Y. (2014). The Japanese Agricultural Cooperative System: an outline. Retrieved from: https://ap.fftc.org.tw/article/678

43 Mildred, K., Eremic, Z. (2023). Reserved contracts in public procurement: a tool for social integration. Europdioconoia. Retrieved from: https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Reserved-contracts-in-Public-procurement-2023.pdf

44 United Kingdom Legislation (2012). Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. Retrieved from: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/3#:~:text=An%20Act%20to%20require%20public,contracts%3B%20and%20for%20connected%20purposes

45 Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government. (n.d.). Public sector procurement. https://www.gov.scot/policies/public-sector-procurement/fair-work-in-procurement/

Protects local food culture and tradition

Japan's Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas highlights the use of local ingredients and preservation of WASHOKU culture[24](traditional Japanese dietary culture). An exchange between consumers and food producers is also encouraged. The Brazilian government initiated a national regulation to purchase agroecological and organic food from smallholder farmers. **Embedded in legislation, the initiative was coordinated by multiple ministries and engaged civil society through an advisory council and workshops.** The initiative strengthened regional food culture through increasing the range of food ingredients available, for over 20 million residents.[18] Further, **the initiative resulted in a 13.1% increase in production value among participating family farmers.**[42] The regional body representing universities in the Italian region of Cagliari, created public tenders integrating green food procurement strategies including promoting traditional foods.[15] In Colombia, school meals comprise culturally, socially and biologically valued foods, which reinforces traditional eating patterns.[104] Many European Union countries, such as Spain and Germany,[97] provide special considerations in their public food procurement for people with dietary needs due to cultural or religious reasons. For example, including vegetarian meals. Four countries include a vegetarian option daily/weekly.[7] However, these inclusions are often voluntary, with unclear enforcement.[105]

Contributes to social safety nets

French secondary schools in the Île-de-France region are required to increase regional aid provided per student, to ensure that all students receive organic food in their school meals.[14] In 2024, the "EquiTables", for fair pricing of high school canteens" project introduced a single price list, covering up to 86% of the meal prices for low-income households. Leaders within a French hospital had recognised their important contribution to the health of the local community, many residents of whom were disadvantaged. As such, the hospital prioritised varied, nutritious meals.[9] **The European Child Guarantee ensures that all children have access to at least one healthy meal every school day.**[46] Another example of universal food access is Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (PNAE). The initiative guarantees children in almost all Brazilian municipalities a minimum daily intake of 3,360 kilojoules.[15] **This initiative is a clear example that governments can create and strengthen markets for locally grown food for their populations.**[109] Other countries, including the Republic of Korea, and Italy, have universal school meals, with Italy's school meal program structured to include parental and municipal government contributions.[109]

Nutrition, health and food security outcomes

Promotes healthy population dietary intake

Reduced salt, fat, and free sugars were some of the most incorporated actions across 14 European Union countries.[109] Scottish public schools cannot provide salt for adding to food after the cooking process, while condiments – such as sauces, mayonnaise, and dressings–can only be dispensed in 10 ml portions.[47] Condiments that contain higher amounts of salt, such as soy sauce, are recommended to be replaced with alternative flavours such as lemon juice. **In the UK, vegetables, rice, pasta and potatoes, are not permitted to include salt in the cooking process.**[28] Ingredients, such as stock, must be low-salt varieties, and 75% of meat products, breakfast cereals and ready-to-eat meals must meet salt targets. **Saudi Arabia, hospitals, the military, universities or social programs cannot provide bread with salt greater than 0.5% dry matter.**[4] In Israel, schools are not permitted to sell or provide any sweetened beverages.[112] Philippine schools preference cooking methods such as steaming, boiling, and baking, to reduce the use of fat or oil4 and only serve salty sauces (e.g. soy sauce) upon request. The USA's Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act revised nutrition guidelines in 2010, requiring schools to limit sodium, saturated fat and kilojoules in school meals, while increasing whole foods such as vegetables.[113] In Philadelphia (USA), only snacks with less than 230mg sodium can be served in public agencies.[113] Childcare centres in Georgia cannot provide food containing trans fats.[113]

Across the European Union, 14 countries included fruits and vegetables in their nutrition criteria for public food procurement. The European Union School Scheme[113] facilitates the distribution of an approved list of products, such as fruit, vegetables and milk, to European school children.[48] **The approved product list is influenced by seasonality, variety, availability, health and environmental considerations.** Whole grains replace low-fibre options across 10 European

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46 COACH (2023). Local and Regional Governments have a Key Role to Play in the Transition to Territorial Food Systems. Retrieved from: https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/local-and-regional-governments-have-a-key-role-to-play-in-the-transition-to-territorial-food-systems/

47 Scottish Government. (2021). Healthy Eating in Schools: Guidance 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthy-eating-schools-guidance-2020/

48 European Commission (n.d). EU School scheme explained. Retrieved from: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-scheme-explained_en

Union countries, the inclusion of legumes as an alternative to animal protein occurs across 10 countries. **Optional additional considerations include produce sourced from local or short food supply chains, or organic products.**[114] SchoolFood4Change is a European Union-based project delivered by a consortium of 43 European partners, and facilitates vegetables, lentils, nuts and diverse food ingredients in schools[30] underpinned by sustainability guidelines. The project prioritises contracts with small farmers and local food suppliers and includes two levels: core criteria for healthy and sustainable food sets a minimum standard of health and sustainability, while the advanced criteria advocates for higher standards of sustainability. **Across the European Union, 14 countries have nutrition criteria in their public food procurement[7], with Latvia and Sweden leading the way with the highest number of criteria.** Twelve EU countries include nutrition criteria in their school meal programs, while five focus on kindergartens, three across any public catering settings (e.g. health, administrative), two focus on aged care, and one each in higher education, workplaces, clinics, and leisure centres.[116] **Eight countries embed nutrition criteria into legislation** (e.g. Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement; Decree; Health Protection Requirement; National Guidelines for School Catering), whereas four countries provide guidelines (e.g. Quality Standards; National Nutritional Council; Recommendations), and one country has a combination. This demonstrates how progressive many EU countries are in institutional food procurement. **When considering the greatest potential influencers, Swedish food supply actors indicated that local government level procurement involvement facilitated most food variety.** Regarding specific food products, in the UK, half of the desserts available must comprise 50% fruit by weight.[28] While the Singaporean government requires all caterers to offer wholegrains as a staple food option at every government events,[113] and the City of San Francisco (USA) required all government events or meetings to use Healthy Meetings Guidelines.[40] **All city food purchases needed to align with a Local and Sustainable Food Procurement Ordinance.**

Red and processed meat provision has decreased through Scotland's 'Healthy Eating Schools Guidance', which outlines that no more than 175 grams of red and red processed meat (cooked weight) can be produced through school lunches, weekly.[50] No meat can be provided in other times, such as through breakfast clubs. **Fourteen European Union countries include reducing processed meat in their nutrition criteria for food procurement.**[7] Many countries require institutional meals align with national dietary guidance (e.g. Scotland[4], Brazil[36], including 13 European Union countries aligning with red meat guidance) and 14 European countries align with processed meat recommendations. Thailand implemented a school milk program in 1992, to increase children's diet quality, and provide markets for dairy farmers. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and processors, sign Memoranda of Understanding, with processors purchasing quantities of milk from farmers to supply it to all primary and pre-primary schools throughout Thailand.**[1]

The provision of high-sugar foods has been reduced in USA schools, where they can only serve cookies, cakes, ice cream and other desserts that contain equal or less than 840 kilojoules and equal or less than 18 grams of sugar per serve.[121] **Scotland's public-school meals restrict inclusion of sweetened baked products or desserts and deep fried/ fried foods each to <3 times per week, and only where they meet certain criteria.** Pastry and pastry products can only be served twice per week, while no confectionary can be provided. **New York City (USA)'s food procurement policies supported an Executive Order which created food standards for numerous institutions including hospitals and correctional facilities, which limited access to unhealthy food.**[122]

Ensures dietary adequacy and sufficiency

Scotland's public school meals are required to align with food and drink standards to meet nutrient standards.[119] **An executive order in the USA required schools, hospitals, aged care facilities, refuges supporting people experiencing homelessness, and prisons, to comply with food procurement standards that had daily nutrient thresholds.** Guidelines and support are available to facilitate adherence.[121] Lunch and dinner-only city agencies must serve meals with a minimum of two fruit and vegetable servings per meal. This requirement increases to five servings of fruit and vegetables daily where institutions serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner.[120] Educational institutions in Uruguay provide vegetables daily and fruit three times weekly.[120] **Thirteen European Union countries require fish be provided 1-3 times per week, with wild predatory fish limits for children <3 years of age.**[120]

Lifts demand for, and exposure to, healthy food

In Chile, a food labelling and advertising law requires the use of front-of-pack labels on products exceeding sugar, salt, kilojoule and fat thresholds.[120] Fruits and vegetables are made available wherever food is provided, within Scottish public schools.[119] Collaborations have also increased demand for healthy food. For example, in Sweden, local governments were invited to express interest in school meal prototypes, which involved 10 government agencies collaborating to change curricula, menus, procurement, and influence policy,[29] such as the 2025 National Guidelines for School Meals.

Formalised mechanisms across countries have included cross-government department collaboration, reports that informed policy, national standards, policy, or guidelines, with de-centralised delivery models to foster greater control and innovation locally. **In the USA, relationship building activities included a "supplier mixer" where food producers and public agencies joined online events to establish expectations around food supply, and an urban agriculture forum to inform producers aspiring to scale up to service institutional markets.**[49] The visibility and menu listing of plant-based meals have been required.[41] Other ways to increase demand for healthy food has included the UK Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services requiring fruit be sold for a lower price than other desserts.[28]

Many food consumers are engaged through food education or provision, to increase their understanding of food. For example, the Danish government encouraged schools to incorporate organic food education through school gardens, organic farm visits or composting initiatives.[11] French school students in the Il-de-France region are involved in eco-citizen projects under biodiversity, waste management and energy themes. The initiative includes financial and educational resources.[23] The 'EU School fruit, vegetable and milk scheme' couples healthy and sustainable food in schools, with educational farm visits, school gardens, cooking and tasting programs. These strategies collectively strengthen understanding of and access to local food systems.[49] The more than 2.5 million Guatemalan school students who receive school meals, are also engaged in gardening programs that promote biodiversity, and education programs, to reinforce the provision of local food in their meals.[15] **In the USA, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center has provided garden education**[125] **alongside menu changes, while some hospitals (e.g. Italy, Spain) have vegetable gardens that are used as a therapeutic activity for patients**[9]

Many countries incorporate menu recipient involvement, and while the extent to which they are involved varies, more than half of school meal programs include student taste testing and feedback on menu items, with some (e.g. USA) requiring high approval rating (e.g. 75%) prior to being listed on a menu.[124] Others (e.g. Sweden) involve students in menu development or cafeteria design. This 'consumer involvement' resulted in additional benefits, such as increased school meal uptake (e.g. Scotland).[29] Some countries have taken this further, to involve the wider community in meal programs[29] (e.g. Brazil, Bolivia, Italy). **In Spain, hospital food services include patient surveys, to understand meal satisfaction, feedback on the meal schedule, and preferences for menu inclusions. This activity has improved meal acceptance and reduced food waste.**[9]

Through the international policy review process several policy implementation challenges have been identified and are worth noting as we contemplate shifting policy settings in Australia:

- Local coordination and capacity constraints to manage compliance with standards.[29]
- Decentralised management of procurement programs can result in inconsistent delivery quality and uptake.
- Some federal governments have not invested in capacity building.
- Uncertainty regarding local level implementation of national directives.
- Where local and state budgets boost federal procurement initiative funding, locations with lower budgets have less capacity and investment.
- Budget constraints often lead to outsourcing meals, resulting in lower quality and environmental considerations.
- Informal procurement, such as emergency school meals, results in uncertain funding.
- Some small-scale farmers face difficulty navigating complex procurement requirements.
- Cross-governmental coordination has proven difficult to manage and relied in relational work subject to change resulting from staff turnover.
- A lack of awareness[29] about institutional meal provision (e.g. in schools).
- Ingredient outsourced to imported foods, with local sourcing through voluntary accreditation schemes.

[49] Chicago Food Policy Action Group (2022). Metro Chicago Good Food Purchasing Initiative. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/65c52c90345dc63c9bc955c2/t/65e10a1d0883fd5b006d64cd/1709247062583/GFPI%2B2022%2BAnnual%2BReport%2BFINAL%2B062823.pdf

Stephanie Godrich's three take-home points

1. **The art is in the storytelling!** Crafting a compelling story about the potential benefits of healthy food procurement, such as through incorporating stories of those potentially impacted by the policy, can be a valuable way to progress healthy, sustainable, local food procurement. Share the story far and wide through social and traditional media.

2. **There is no one 'right way' to do healthy and sustainable food procurement.** Highlighting how other countries have successfully introduced healthy public food procurement, using many different strategies, can show governments the possibilities.

3. **Make it multi-pronged to maximise success.** Include a range of mechanisms, such as legislation with mandatory targets, an action plan, aligning public food procurement with other diet and/or food data and policies, workforce training, digital platforms, and involving recipients of the food procurement, give it the best chance of success. These don't have to all be implemented at once – start simple and build on gradually.