

Good Food Purchasing Australia

Briefing Paper

Climate and Nature

April 2026



The Opportunity for Climate and Nature – Using government funded food purchasing to reduce food systems emissions and restore biodiversity

This briefing paper draws on the evidence and recommendations captured in *Transforming the Public Plate – A Menu of Options for Public Food Procurement That Nourishes People, Place and Planet*. Its purpose is to provide background for allies to advocate for delivery of the recommendations of the report – primarily for government and other funders to invest in policies and practices for adopting sustainable public food procurement in Australia.

Public institutions purchase enormous volumes of food every year. These purchasing decisions shape farming systems, supply chains, land use, and environmental outcomes. When governments and institutions embed sustainability into food procurement, they can reduce emissions, protect biodiversity, and support the transition to regenerative agriculture while still delivering nutritious meals.

Public food procurement represents a significant and largely unrealised climate and nature policy lever in Australia. Beyond its function as a purchasing mechanism, it offers a strategic pathway to strengthen resilience against climate change and support nature regeneration at scale.

The opportunity – what can leaders do now ?

Consistent with the report's recommendations you can provide leadership that improves climate and biodiversity outcomes, through practical steps such as advocating to governments and funders for policies and demonstrations projects that:



- **Embed sustainability targets in procurement contracts and strategies** – Include climate, biodiversity, plant-forward and waste reduction criteria in contracts and food policies.
- **Support farmers transitioning to regenerative production** – Long-term purchasing commitments reduce risk for producers adopting new practices, coupled with market pathways through procurement.

- **Strengthen local supply chains** – Create procurement practices and coordination for regional producers, Indigenous businesses, and SMEs to participate in the opportunity, such as aggregation and distribution coordination.
- **Reduce food losses and waste** – Through menu planning and working with farmers and processors, capture on-farm losses, and supply chain ‘waste’ for use in food service kitchens, such as surpluses and imperfect vegetables.
- **Track environmental outcomes** – Establish baselines and monitor emissions, sourcing, and waste to show climate and biodiversity impact.

Why a new approach to public food procurement matters.

Australia’s current food system delivers abundance — but CSIRO research, in 2025, has demonstrated this is at a high environmental cost.

- \$274 billion is the estimated hidden costs of Australia’s food system each year.
- \$225 billion in environmental costs alone (including pollution, land degradation, and biodiversity loss).
- 30–40% of Australia’s climate emissions are linked to the food system.
- 7.6 million tonnes of food waste generated across the food supply chain each year.

These hidden costs are not reflected in the price of food, but they are borne by ecosystems, communities, and future generations.

Current food production is driving biodiversity loss

Food production systems influence how land and ecosystems are managed. Strategic procurement policies can help shift demand toward farming systems that restore soil health, biodiversity, and carbon storage.

Current pressures include:

- habitat destruction from agriculture and aquaculture and increasing numbers of threatened species
- nitrogen pollution and soil degradation
- declining ecosystem resilience
- increasing numbers of threatened species

Australia’s food system has very low circularity, with only 2.8% of biological materials reused in the circular economy. On-farm horticulture losses are a significant contributor to waste and emissions.

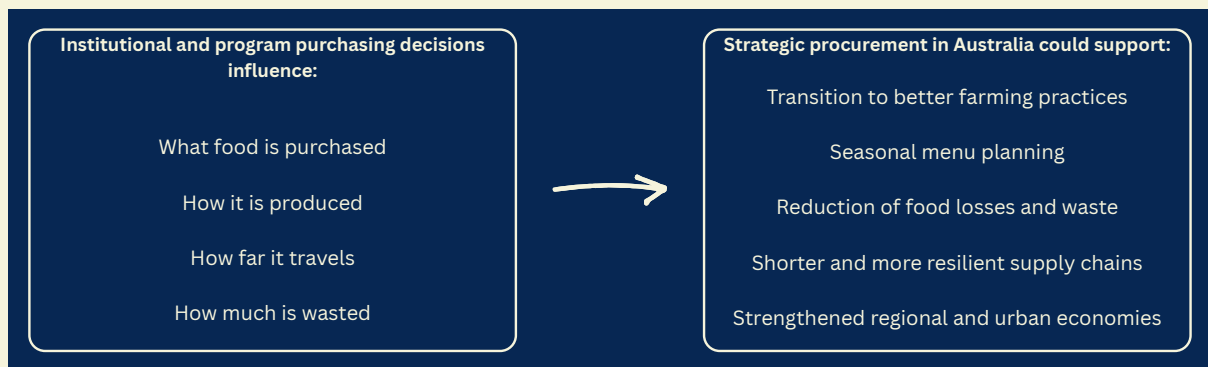
The size of public food procurement is a major market signal

For the first time our report has mapped the significant value of public food procurement, \$2.13 billion annually, \$6 million per day, across Australian institutions and programs. Annual public food procurement in Australia includes:

Setting	Estimated spend
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

This is **stable and predictable demand**, something farmers, producers and processors rarely have in other commercial markets. If sustainability criteria are embedded in procurement contracts, this demand can drive change across entire food supply chains.

Public food procurement is proven to reduce emissions and restore biodiversity



Food procurement influences both demand and supply. Because public institutions and programs purchase food every day, their procurement decisions shape the entire food system. Public food procurement is one of the most powerful tools governments have to influence food systems by aligning procurement with climate and biodiversity goals.

Even small changes such as embedding procurement criteria and targets — such as sourcing standards or menu design — can produce large impacts across supply chains and communities.

International evidence and experience shows what is possible in Australia

Our report outlines that countries across Europe, Latin America and North America have used public food procurement to drive sustainable food systems for many years. Better outcomes emerge through leadership, coordinated policy and procurement frameworks and collaboration across the food system and all levels of government. These approaches have proven that public purchasing can:

- reduce food system emissions (up to 50%) and contribute to healthier ecosystems
- support sustainable diets through increasing vegetable and plant-based food consumption
- support regional farmers and food businesses, creating food system resilience
- encourage regenerative and biodiversity-friendly production
- improve the quality and nutrition of institutional meals.



Have a question or would like to know more? Please get in touch

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