

Food Hub Scoping Methodology

Prepared by: [Eaterprises Australia Pty Ltd](#) and Food Connect ThinkFood
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1. Understanding of the Task

Scope, design and explore critical factors to inform feasibility of a regional food initiative / demonstration project (loosely described as a 'food hub').

Based on this understanding, our proposed scope for this project is summarised in Figure 1. Each of these Sections then provides a starting point for discussions and design of what is actually wanted and viable in a particular region.

Potential interventions are being broadly described as 'Food Hubs' – recognising that it will be an activity focus point centred around a specific piece of physical (or virtual) infrastructure, but the actual functions will be determined in detailed consultation with all the relevant local stakeholders.

This project recognises that while there is widespread and increasing activity around local food in Victoria and Australia, many current interventions are small, remaining niche and very vulnerable (i.e. often reliant on the efforts of one key person). The project will focus on the type of interventions that are required to change the scale of activity and viability of local / regional food systems, by carefully considering infrastructure and systemic needs. It will apply rapidly developing thinking and knowledge around 'food hubs' to develop a proposal that is specific to context, as well as providing a strong platform for replicable processes and interventions more broadly (in other regions across Australia).

Figure 1: Scope of Proposal



1.1 Outcomes Sought

The proposed initiative will be a strategic intervention in the local food distribution system, designed with a view to five critical objectives:

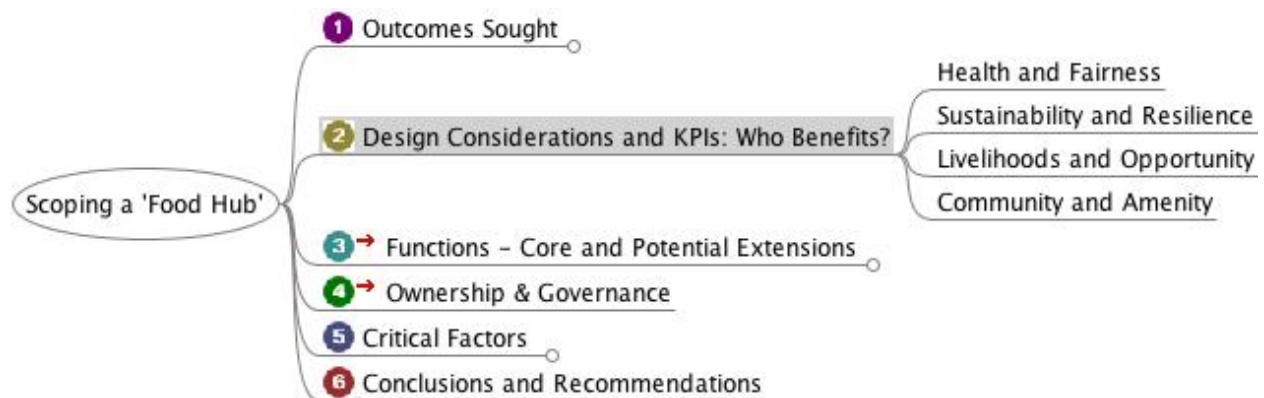
- Increased fruit and vegetable consumption / healthy eating for residents;
- Better marketing outlet and fair prices for producers;
- Increased maintenance of food dollar in local economy;
- Opportunities for skill development, community interaction and job creation through creation of local socio-ecological enterprises;

- Reduced oil / emissions in residents' food supply chain (increased resilience and reduced vulnerability to the anticipated impacts of peak oil); and
- Strengthen cultural connections and valuing of farming – including cultural heritage and pride.

The broader strategic objective is to create a virtuous cycle of increasing demand for regional food which in turn supports the producers of food, enabling nutrients and waste to be recycled to the nearby producers (farms and market gardens) and progressively build soil fertility. This objective in turn depends on creating and nurturing a *culture of local food*, so that over time more and more residents regard the practice of 'eating local and seasonal' as simply the norm.

1.2 Design Considerations

Figure 2: Considerations for Holistic Design



To encourage holistic or 'eco-logical' design, this project will use the four domains of the FSPUD¹ matrix to map, and check, whether the proposal is delivering an appropriate breadth of outcomes.

Table 1 maps these four FSPUD domains against opportunities to deliver them through a Food Hub, and considers associated design features that would need to be considered. While all these may not be achieved within the initial project, an agreed map of possibilities can be used to guide the design and prioritise potential functions.

Table 1: Breadth of Objectives and Design Considerations

	Objective	Design Considerations
Health & Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to healthy and sustainable foods for all communities • Support education and increasing culture of healthy eating and living, in curriculum and with hands-on learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping overheads and transaction costs down so food is affordable (while farmers get fair price – see below) • Provisions of affordable and high-quality food to low SES areas • Educational facilities and access • How to manage food safety and quality • Evaluation – how will we actually know if we are achieving improved food consumption and health outcomes? Possible research design
Livelihoods & Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased viability / benefits of providing to local market for producers – better returns • Support maintenance or increase of diverse local production activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership models – see Section 4. • Financial viability – interaction with existing food distribution channels, support local processors, retailers and infrastructure. What sources of

¹ The Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (FSPUD) matrix was articulated and used in *Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design: A conceptual framework for achieving a sustainable and just food system*, available from <http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/research/food-sensitive-planning-and-urban-design>

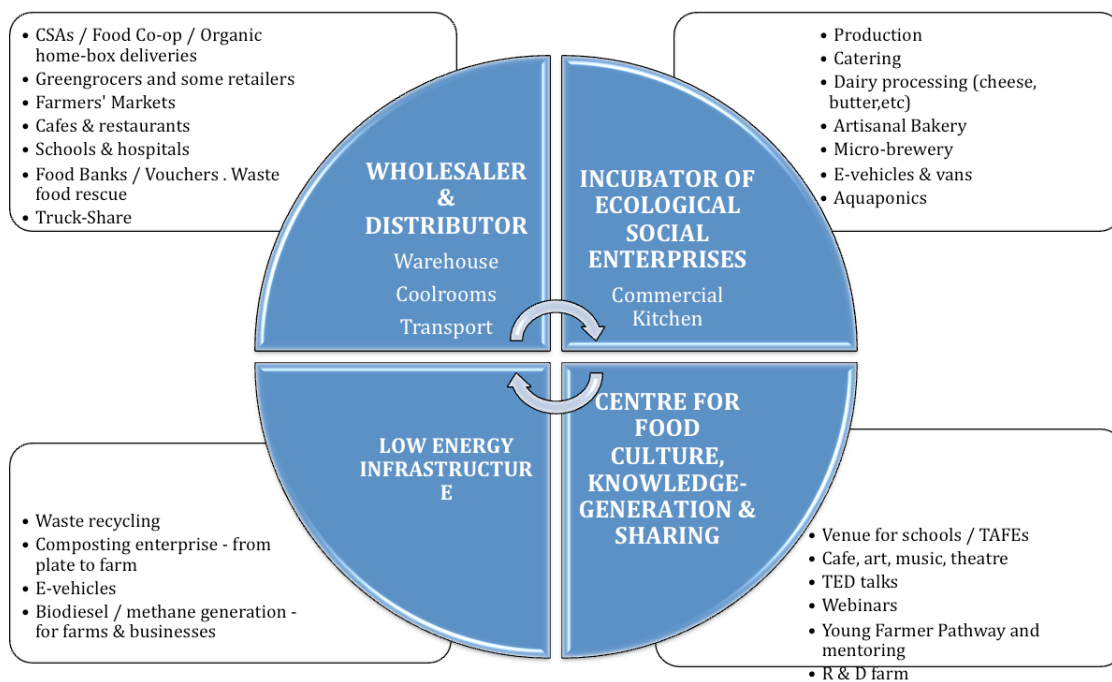
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide skill development, volunteer and paid employment at and around 'hub' • Infrastructure sharing for new food enterprises 	<p>investment could be considered – see Section 5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to do business with both small and large producers and customers – the scale of the operation • Institutional procurement to support economies of scale (hospitals, schools, aged-care homes etc) • Hub for surrounding enterprises; education – schools, training and jobs; mentoring for food entrepreneurs; peer-based farmer-to-farmer learning.
Sustainability & Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce energy use in the distribution of food (reducing both grower and eater exposure to increasing energy costs) – real opportunity for e-vehicles, truck-sharing etc • Increase market information and access to sustainably produced foods • Increase 'thickness' of local production and distribution system, for improved emergency response • Reduce waste • Recycle nutrients back to farms via composting enterprises • Facilitate local biodiesel / methane generation for energy & transport purposes, both on and off-farm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and enabling platforms for transparent and efficient distribution system and logistics • Fair, simple and transparent ratings for diverse production practices (rewarding continuous improvement) • Networks and information access, goodwill and community buy-in • Enable local / regional branding to raise community awareness and support • Produce and distribute a local food directory / map with a guide to seasonal eating and planting • Incorporate existing best practice regarding local biofuel & methane generation
Amenity & Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness, visibility and 'pull factor' for retaining food production in the region • Provide opportunities for community interaction through food • Enable members of diverse cultural communities to produce, consume and sell food from their own cultural heritages • Create a thriving local food culture • Create a space for artists, musicians, poetry, theatre and related artistic and cultural pursuits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer opportunities • Beautiful public spaces (e.g. market facilities) • Integration with existing community hubs e.g. schools, primary care centres, aged care facilities, community gardens, edible streetscapes, urban orchards • Shared facilities for community activities and involvement (e.g. commercial kitchens)

Discussion of these objectives could also inform benchmarking and indicators that could be used to track the effectiveness of any intervention, and to guide adaptive implementation and management. The development of evaluation, indicators etc would be outside this scoping study but should be considered if the project progresses to full feasibility assessment / business case development.

1.3 Functions – Core and Potential Extensions

Eaterprises and ThinkFood have an extensive knowledge of food system interventions and food distribution models as well as practical operational knowledge about running them and what the challenges to viability are.

Figure 3: Potential Food Hub Functions



Based on this knowledge, Figure 3 frames a range of possibilities for example functions that could be included in a regional 'Food Hub'.

A critical part of the Food Hub design process will be working with partners and stakeholders to identify what are the core or priority functions that must be viable for the initial intervention to succeed, and what would be desired 'add-ons' that may be enabled or supported by the core structure. It is important to identify these at the outset so that the design facilitates flexibility, and the potential for extension at the appropriate time.

Figure 4: Prioritisation - Core and Extensions



Figure 4 suggests an initial prioritisation of core functions based on our current understanding of the immediate key objectives (i.e. improved healthy food access and improved regional marketing and distribution opportunities for local producers), identified by green ticks. The flags identify possibilities that could be enabled or integrated but are unlikely to be priorities in this project. The blue question marks identify possible expansion pathways that could add value and / or increase the viability of the proposal, or be included as core, depending

on interests and commitment of stakeholders. It should be noted that these are indicative functions only, and it will be very much up to local stakeholders and community members to determine the priority and full range of functions they would wish a Food Hub to undertake, as well as related questions such as ownership, governance and financing.

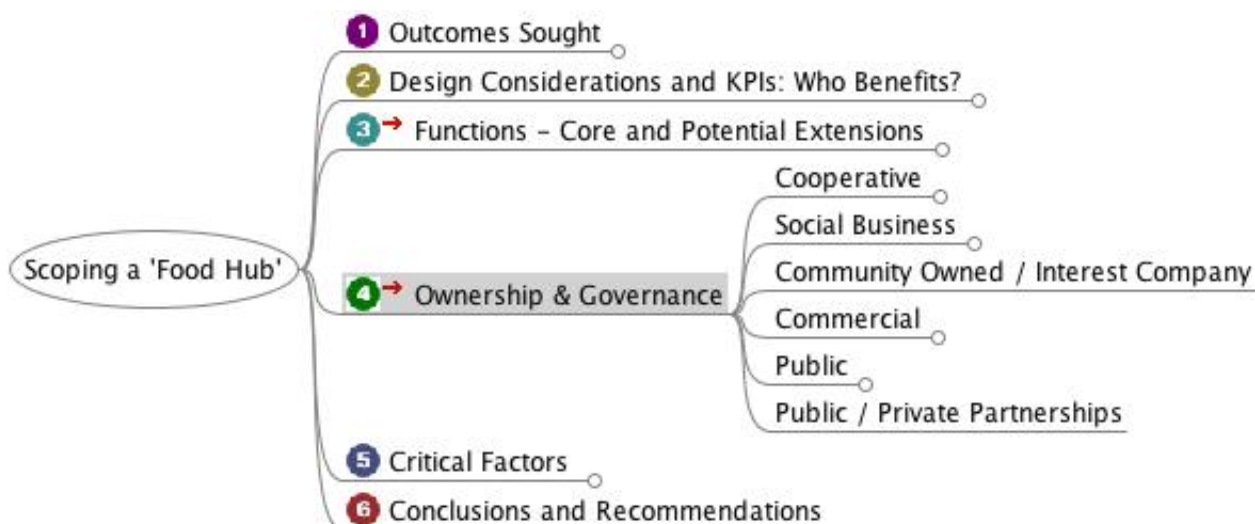
Figures 3 and 4 are very high-level summaries of potential activities and functions, more detail is provided in Appendix 1.

1.4 Ownership and Governance

A critical determinant of the project design will be consideration of how the Food Hub is owned, governed and managed. This will also become important in terms of how the project would be funded and become financially viable. Discussions and analysis of examples, and pros and cons, of a range of governance and ownership models will be included in the project.

Figure 5 shows a high level summary of possible ownership and governance models. Appendix 2 contains more detail, including indicative case studies that would be used to explain the models.

Figure 5: Ownership and Governance Models



1.5 Consideration of Critical Factors

Once a suitable design has been developed and a proposed model agreed, we will explore and consider the critical factors which would affect further project development. A full feasibility study / business case could not be developed in this initial project, but this examination of the critical factors will lead to solid recommendations for next steps and a suggested approach i.e. it will frame and identify the available and required information for a full feasibility study (see sample at Appendix 4). It will include consideration of how the next stages could be implemented, funded and operated so that it is financially viable.

Figure 6 shows the key areas that would be considered in this stage and would inform recommended next steps for progressing the project.

Figure 6: Critical Factors



There are a number of areas in the critical factor review, where we will undertake some basic assessments if information is not already available, e.g. rapid market assessment at a farmers' market or other retail points in the area to test out consumer or business interest and demand.

The other critical factor that we would undertake a basic survey on (if information has not already been discovered) is around perceived barriers for producers operating, value-adding and/or marketing in the area. This information is critical in understanding the viability and design of interventions.

For the rest of the critical factors, we will examine and consider whether information is available or what, whether and how it would need to be gathered to undergo the next steps of feasibility assessment.

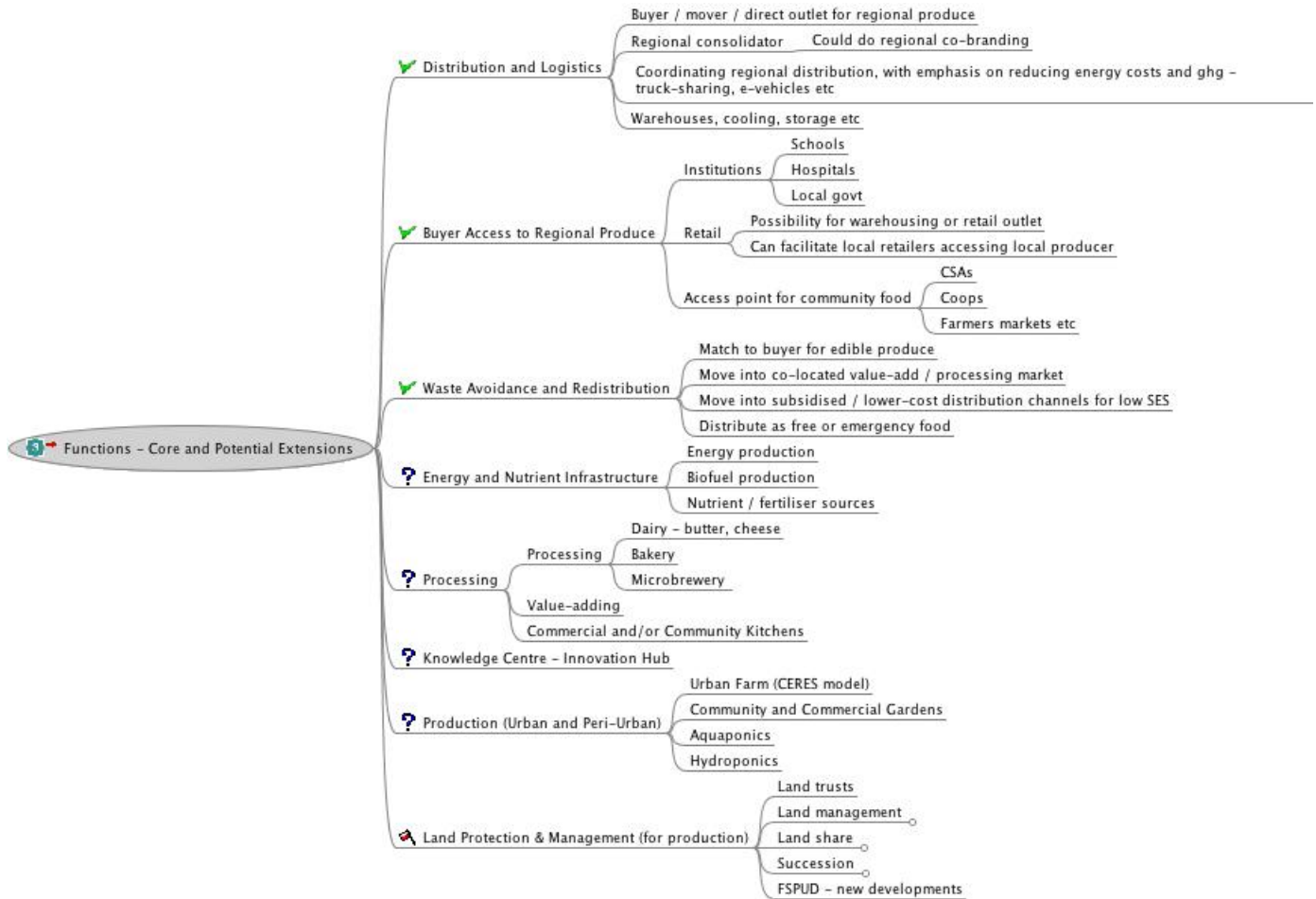
NB. While the focus of the project is understood to be initially on a physical intervention, this stage will enable a basic understanding of the viability of further development. There are a whole range of options for 'social' infrastructure that could be considered for development if required (e.g. local buying cards; virtual B2B interfaces; loyalty schemes etc), and these would be included as recommendations for further consideration if they are considered to be important for viability.

2. Scoping Project Deliverables

Project deliverables will include:

- Stakeholder engagement and communications – including the establishment of a preliminary / provisional stakeholder network to drive the development of the Food Hub.
- A report outlining a suggested food system demonstration project. The report will include:
 - Summary of the stakeholder engagement;
 - Suggested design and justification for proposed approach, including governance and ownership model;
 - Examination of critical factors affecting feasibility and proposed approach to further proposal development, including suggested financing model; and
 - Recommended next steps

Appendix 1: Expanded Food Hub Functions



Appendix 2: Expanded Governance and Ownership

NB. These are just examples of the range of projects that could be considered. Case study models will be selected following the initiation meetings and scoping stages of the project.

