

ITEM 15 NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR JESS WHITTAKER - LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Councillor Jess Whittaker has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that –

- 1 Councillors receive a Briefing on the support offered thus far by council for local food systems in the Wollongong LGA and outcomes delivered in response to the Illawarra Regional Food Strategy (2013-2019) or related documents. The Briefing should include but not be limited to:
 - a A list of all the current active community gardens operating on public land in the LGA.
 - b Staff assistance that has been given to establishing community gardens on public land.
 - c The supply of plants, insurance, promotion or collaboration on community events relating to local food.
 - d Workshops relating to local food systems.
 - e Support for crop swaps, garden tours and farmers markets; and
 - f Any grants that council has offered to groups for local food related projects.
- 2 The briefing also include staff insights into the regulatory, approval or funding barriers which may deter local food initiatives from progressing.”

Background provided by Councillor Whittaker:

Across the Illawarra there is interest and enthusiasm for building local food systems. This is evidenced by a range of projects initiated by the community such as community gardens, school gardens, crop swaps, food talks, urban agriculture, and edible garden tours.

We are also seeing growing challenges for access to fresh, healthy, affordable food including higher cost, land availability, climate change and our heavy reliance on a supermarket duopoly for the supply of food.

The Illawarra Regional Food Strategy (2013-2019) was developed with input and support from all councils in the Illawarra. The strategy reflects a shared vision for a sustainable and resilient food future. Despite this initial buy-in, the strategy was never fully enacted, resulting in missed opportunities to address pressing food system challenges. (Charlton, Kent 2024)

A recent survey¹ of residents by the UOW Resilient and Sustainable Food System Research Group identified that:

- The high cost of food is significantly impacting residents' ability to buy enough healthy food, particularly fresh produce.
- Nearly 60% of residents are concerned about the abundance of fast-food outlets in their area.
- There is strong support for local food production, but many residents face challenges accessing and affording locally produced foods.
- Only 15% of residents believe there are enough farmers' markets in their neighbourhood.
- Food insecurity is a growing concern, with only 10% of residents feeling there is adequate emergency food relief in their suburb. (Charlton, Kent 2024)

Research by UOW has also identified that community gardens provide numerous benefits such as fresh food access, social connections, and skills development; however they also face challenges such as volunteer burnout, limited access to land, and lack of grants (Charlton, Kent 2024). There are a number of people in our municipality championing local food systems and inspiring others to become small scale food producers. For example, the organizers of the Food Talks events, and the recent Edible Garden

¹ “A Call to Action for Sustainable, Healthy and Accessible Food Systems” RESILIENT & SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS RESEARCH GROUP | September 2024 | Prepared by Dr Katherine Kent and Professor Karen Charlton

Trail which involved showcasing 30 local edible gardens to hundreds of ticket holders. Currently many local grassroots local food initiatives receive little to no funding support from any level of government.

A survey recently undertaken by Wollongong City Council of 600 residents identified access to affordable fresh food was down from 80% in 2021 to 59% in 2024. In response to the community's vision for Wollongong in 10 years' time, the second most popular response was more green space or better use of our green space². Identifying vacant green space that could be used for local food production could play a part in better using vacant land in the Illawarra.

² "Life in the Gong: A happy, safe place according to community survey." Lasek 2024 <https://www.theillawarraflame.com.au/news/life-in-the-gong-a-happy-safe-place-according-to-community-survey>.