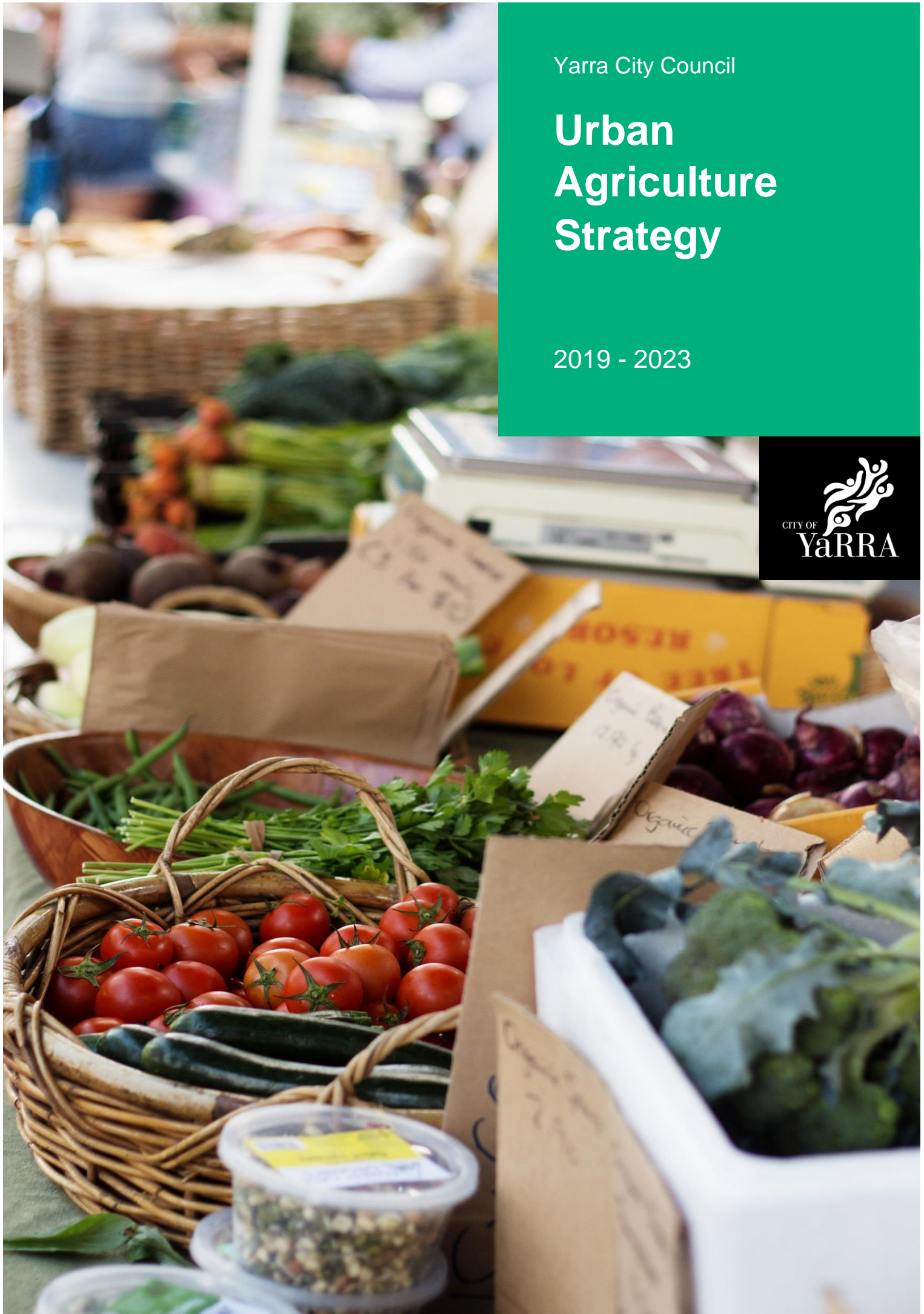


Yarra City Council

# Urban Agriculture Strategy

2019 - 2023



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# Message from the Wurundjeri Corporation

This statement from the Wurundjeri Corporation acknowledges the Wurundjeri in their role as the original cultivators of the land now known as the City of Yarra.

Caring for Country has been part of the cultural lore of the Wurundjeri people since the Dreamtime, and as such they have a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding and connection to the Victorian environment that should be valued and respected.

Over the long history of occupation Australian Aboriginal people developed many different strategies across the multiple groups and variable environmental conditions. These systems present a much more complicated and sophisticated set of land use practices than the primitive hunter-gatherer lifestyle we have been led to believe. Many of these communities employed a range of agricultural methods in order to support large populations and sustain the health of their communities, as well as that of the natural environment.

The area which now makes up the modern Yarra City Council was rich in natural food, fibre and medicine resources. The Wurundjeri people lived in this region for over 40,000 years, sustainably and in harmony with the environment. Their understanding and connection to nature, and their innate responsibility to manage the land for the betterment of all, and for future generations continues. Today the Wurundjeri Community maintain a strong presence in the Yarra City Council area. Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Corporation are keen to work with the City of Yarra in building an Urban Agriculture Strategy which supports health, wellbeing, connection to Country and the re-introduction of the traditional food species.

# Introduction

## What is urban agriculture?

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Urban agriculture is the process of growing, producing and recycling food scraps in the urban environment. This might include backyard vegetable gardens, laneway gardens, planter boxes or larger scale urban community food growing. It can also include local processing and preserving of food and the composting of food waste.

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## Why is it important?

Urban agriculture is important because it helps promote sustainable local food systems and build community resilience. Sustainable local food systems improve the management of the food cycle from production through processing, distribution, access, consumption and resource and waste recovery.

Whether it be growing a few herbs on a balcony, a roof top farm, developing a market garden or contributing to a thriving community growing space, urban agriculture is becoming increasingly popular.

On a systems level, urban agriculture adds to the multifunctionality of the urban fabric, by facilitating a wide range of benefits to urban communities, including recreational social and cultural benefits as well as environmental (urban greening, climate regulation, biodiversity, nutrient recycling).

## What does it mean in Yarra?

Sustainable food systems and urban agriculture are key to maintaining and improving sustainability. The work of the previous four years has proven that genuine food production, food waste recycling and sustainable local food systems are possible and desirable in Yarra.

The City of Yarra is, and will continue to, experience high levels of population growth and more residents living in apartments. More than ever our community is at risk of being disconnected from the social reality and ecology of our food system, therefore urban agriculture and its ability to reconnect people with food sources will play an increasingly significant role in creating a sustainable city.

The population density of Yarra makes broad acre farming impractical but does provide other opportunities such as growing food in public places, growing on private land, roof tops, local food swaps, food waste collections, and municipal composting. These can all help to build the profile of urban food growing; reduce food waste and increase community skills and experience. Small actions, undertaken by a large population, can have cumulative benefits such as growing your own herbs rather than buying them wrapped in plastic.

# Where are we now

## What does urban agriculture in Yarra look like now?

Urban agriculture in Yarra today is largely made up of a mixture of home growers, community gardens, composting hubs, farmers markets, laneway gardens, nature strip plantings and over 170 planter boxes along Yarra streets. There are many institutions who have and continue to be instrumental to bringing urban agriculture to the community in Yarra, particularly Cultivating Community, our many wonderful Neighbourhood Houses, schools and colleges, and the Collingwood Children's Farm.

Increasingly there is a need for, and a community appetite to integrate urban greening and food growing opportunities into the urban regeneration projects. Recent industry innovation has also meant that urban farming systems are becoming more widely available and as markets continue to evolve, the commercial viability of these systems will continue to improve.

### Where does urban agriculture fit within Council's work?

Every four years all councils are required to produce a Council Plan and Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. In 2017, Yarra City Council combined these plans and outlined seven key objectives, each with a number of strategies identified. Urban agriculture initiatives and programs relate to, and can help deliver, a number of the strategies outlined in the Council Plan, including:

- Promote and facilitate urban agriculture with a focus on increasing scale and uptake in the community.
- Build resilience by providing opportunities and places for people to meet, be involved in and connect with their community.
- Support and empower a more sustainable Council and Community.
- Encourage and promote environmentally sustainable building, urban design, place-making and public realm outcomes.
- Reduce the amount of waste-to-landfill with a focus on improved recycling and organic waste disposal.
- Maintain and enhance Yarra's open space network to meet the diverse range of community uses. Promote a community that is inclusive, resilient, connected and enjoys strong mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Provide health promoting environments that encourage healthy eating and active living.
- Provide opportunities for people to be involved in and connect with their community.
- Investigate strategies and initiatives to better manage the long-term effects of climate change.

Urban agriculture has a cross organisation focus and therefore has close relationships with a broad range of other council policies and strategies. The most closely related strategies and policies are outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Key Council Policies Plan and Strategies related to urban agriculture**

Related strategy/policy	Relationship	Connection to Yarra Urban Agriculture Strategy (YUAS)
Council Plan	Overarching	Community resilience, community health and wellbeing, social cohesion, open space networks
Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan	Overarching	Food systems, access to healthy food, food security, community resilience
Yarra Environment Strategy (YES)	Overarching	Urban greening, climate adaptation, climate mitigation, biodiversity
Yarra Open Space Strategy	Overarching	Land use, open space planning and design, open space management
Municipal Strategic Statement	Overarching	Land use, built environment, urban regeneration, place making, infrastructure planning
Yarra Waste Minimisation and Resource Recovery Strategy 2018-2022	Peer	Resource management, nutrient cycles, food systems
Urban Design Strategy	Peer	Urban design, landscape design, urban regeneration, place making

### What does Yarra do to support urban agriculture?

Yarra is an Australian leader in urban agriculture. The previous Urban Agriculture Strategy 2014-2018 provided a framework to recognise and build on work that was already occurring in the community. This work has included:

- A dedicated urban agriculture facilitator who provides advice to residents on how to start and maintain community growing space/gardens.
- Establishing the Community Growing Spaces program to help residents set up public planter boxes, laneway and nature strip gardens. As part of the program, Council provides step-by-step advice, planter boxes, land and public liability insurance.
- Establishing the Yarra Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee, which provides support to the community and advice to Council about local urban agriculture issues.
- Running a variety of workshops throughout the year to give residents skills in topics such as small space gardening, organic gardening, beekeeping, composting and keeping chickens.
- Supporting schools, neighbourhood houses and non-profit community organisations to start or manage communal food gardens with grants, resources and community connections.
- Providing worm farms and compost bins for purchase.

# What do we want to do

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The previous strategy was developed at a time when urban agriculture was a new concept to many and as a result had a strong focus on building the profile of urban agriculture and removing barriers. This strategy builds on the work of the previous strategy by moving towards a food systems approach as part of a regenerative system.

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## What is a food system?

A food system comprises how our food is grown, processed, distributed consumed and recycled. In practice, this means where we get our food from, how we use it and what we do with any waste. A sustainable local food system helps reduce waste and the environmental impacts of consuming food. Urban agriculture is one element in a sustainable local food system. It has the potential to reduce the impacts of distribution, increase access to local food, help people avoid wasting food and encourage them to recycle their food leftovers.

## Urban agriculture and the circular economy

It is predicted that by 2050, globally at least 80% of food will be consumed in cities, and for every dollar spent on food, society pays two dollars in health, environmental and economic costs (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2019). Our existing food systems in cities are extractive and wasteful. In order to shift to more efficient and sustainable food system, it's important that we start to think and create a regenerative food system, that improves rather than degrades both us and our environment.

The Ellen Macarthur Foundation have identified three ambitions for cities to create a circular economy for food:

- 1. Source food grown regeneratively and locally where possible**  
Food comes from natural systems which are regenerative by design. Replicating these practices will improve the overall health of local ecosystems, diversity in the food supply to increase resilience, reduce packaging needs and shorten supply chains. Local, regenerative food systems will see connections between consumers and urban and peri urban farmers strengthened.
- 2. Make the most of food**  
Cities can play a crucial role in keeping food at its highest level and eliminating waste. There is huge potential for cities to act as hubs for redistribution of surplus foods and create a thriving bioeconomy where food by-products are transformed into organic fertilisers, biomaterials, medicines and bioenergy.
- 3. Design and market healthier food products**  
There are no healthy food choices in an unhealthy food system. We can change food design and marketing to reshape our preferences and habits. This will ensure that healthy products become easily accessible, while valuable nutrients circulate back into the soil safely.

## Yarra's role in the sustainable local food system

Yarra's key roles in supporting a local food system are:

1. To assist our community in growing food through facilitating access to public and private spaces.
2. To reduce the loss of nutrients from the food system by exploring and facilitating local and municipal composting solutions.
3. To work with local, municipal and regional networks to promote and develop sustainable food systems.

4. Work with our partners and community to explore opportunities and create innovative solutions to help stimulate a circular local food system.
5. To reduce food wastage by providing education and information to residents through programs such as Food Know How and Grow Your Own.

### What are the limitations of this strategy?

This strategy is designed to be focused and realistic with clear aims and objectives. Urban agriculture is still a relatively new area for many councils, and it is necessary to establish where energy and resources are best focused.

This strategy has a strong focus on building the knowledge base, networks and processes required to develop genuinely sustainable local food systems in Yarra and its municipal neighbours.

This strategy is a stepping stone, it aims to further build the foundations of urban agriculture and sustainable local food systems in Yarra while maintaining sufficient flexibility to be responsive to opportunities that may arise.

### The benefits and challenges for urban agriculture

The proposed urban agriculture activities will have a number of community benefits that will steadily accumulate over the period of this strategy. The following is a brief description of those benefits which the local community of Yarra consider critical, as well as a number of the challenges which will impact how the strategy is developed and implemented.

#### The benefits

- **Education and community building**  
Urban agriculture helps the community build connections through growing and sharing food. It helps people understand and appreciate the importance of locally grown, nutritious healthy food and build a culture of appreciating food.
- **Improving food security and equality**  
Urban agriculture increases access to local, affordable food and increases community access to food through growing and sharing food.
- **Regenerating Natural Systems**  
Urban agriculture helps reduce food miles by promoting the local growing and production of food. It also helps develop sustainable local food systems by capturing nutrients that might otherwise be lost to landfill, usually via composting processes. In a regenerative system, food production improves rather than degrades the environment.
- **Supporting biodiversity and ecosystems services**  
Urban agriculture systems offer an extensive, varied, and undervalued resource for enhancing urban biodiversity and improving connectivity across a larger landscape. The varied vegetative structure, increased native plant diversity, and increased permeability of surfaces are key features of urban agriculture systems that contribute to urban biodiversity. They also provide important ecosystem services such as pollination, pest control, and climate resilience.
- **Enhancing connection to place**  
Urban agriculture literally offers people the opportunity to grow the place around them. Whether it be community members growing in public spaces such as footpaths, laneways and pocket parks, reclaiming unused land, or private property opened to food production and neighbourhood sharing, urban agriculture offers locals a means by which to connect to place, and to shape it.



- **Building the local economy**

Local food production can support the local food economy and link producers, providers and consumers and build employment opportunities.

## **The challenges**

- **Urban density**

Yarra is an inner urban area with a high percentage of medium (48.1%) and high density (37.1%) housing. As a result, many residents have limited or no outdoor space for growing food or composting, so making space available for local food systems will be a critical challenge that cities will face.

- **Housing tenure**

The Yarra community has a high percentage of renters (approximately 50% of the total population) who are likely to have less control over how they can use gardens and space around their homes.

- **Competing pressures**

With high levels of population growth predicted, and limited land availability, land use competition for space in the urban environment will continue to intensify. Competing demands on our open space network in particular will continue to present a challenge for council.

The previous Urban Agriculture Strategy 2014 – 2018 developed a range of initiatives such as planter boxes, vertical gardens and the use of other public and private land to help ameliorate these challenges and to demonstrate that it is possible to grow food in the urban environment. These activities have helped build the profile and legitimacy of urban agriculture.

# Where we want to be

## Vision

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Yarra contributes to a sustainable city where our community grows, produces and shares food as part of a healthy and resilient food system.

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## Objectives

The following objectives have been developed to support the vision and direction

1. **Facilitate access to space for people to grow food**

We will:

- Provide access to growing space for residents through the Community Growing Spaces Program.
- Facilitate landshare within our community for the purpose of food growing.
- Work with developers to facilitate the provision of land for growing food in new developments.
- Support community groups in negotiations with landowners to facilitate long and short-term urban agriculture opportunities.

2. **Increase food skills and knowledge through education and training**

We will:

- Develop an annual program of events and activities to promote urban agriculture.
- Undertake a comprehensive program of community, business and stakeholder engagement to understand community expectations of urban agriculture.
- Promote urban agriculture in publications and on the Council website.
- Partner with local educational institutions to promote urban agriculture.

3. **Build partnerships with other organisations and groups**

We will:

- Work with community organisations to optimise funding opportunities to deliver urban agriculture.
- Work with other local governments to support and promote urban agriculture.
- Facilitate opportunities for organisations working in urban agriculture to work together.

4. **Advocate – within and beyond council to work towards a food systems approach**

We will:

- Gather available evidence to better understand urban agriculture and how it fits into the broader food system.
- Develop methods to embed urban agriculture into projects and developments within council and the City of Yarra.
- Create and protect opportunities for food growing, sharing and recycling in Yarra.
- Build and promote an understanding of food systems and their application in local government.

# Evaluation

Many of the strategic objectives and actions outlined in this Strategy will be measurable and form the groundwork from which the community can grow, produce and share its own food. The delivery of the Action Plan will be evaluated on an annual basis.

It is important to understand that much of the social value and other benefits of urban agriculture work are intangible or are difficult to measure. We therefore know that the sum of the work of this strategy will be greater than that which we can practically measure.

## What will success look like?

It will be possible to understand some of the success of this strategy by reflecting on the stories our community and visitors share. These are the questions we will ask to understand what success will look like:

- Do residents have access to space to grow their own produce?
- Has urban agriculture enhanced community connection to local spaces?
- How widely available is affordable high-quality fresh produce grown in a sustainable manner?
- Does our community value locally produced food?
- Have we increased opportunities for food waste recycling in Yarra?
- Do our children have a strong understanding of where our food comes from and an appreciation for what makes a healthy diet?

# Urban Agriculture Action Plan 2019-2023

## Objective 1

Facilitate access to space for people to grow and recycle food

We will:

- Provide access to growing space for residents through the Community Growing Spaces Program.
- Facilitate landshare within our community for the purpose of food growing and recycling.
- Work with developers to facilitate the provision of land for growing food and recycling in new developments.
- Support community groups in negotiations with landowners to facilitate long and short-term urban agriculture opportunities.

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
1.1.1 Continue to deliver and manage the Community Growing Spaces program	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	City Works Business Support Team	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Program available to residents	Number of residents participating in the program
1.1.2 Provide support to existing Community Gardens and Community Growing Spaces (in line with agreements)	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Streetscapes and Natural Values Team	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Support as outlined in agreement	Satisfaction with support
1.1.3 Develop Urban Agriculture Agreements for historic community growing spaces lacking agreements	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Streetscapes and Natural Values Team	Low	Year 1,2	Urban Agricultural Agreements completed	Completion of Urban Agriculture Agreements

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
1.2.1 Review and update Council's Urban Agriculture guidelines including community composting	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Open Space Design Team Streetscapes and Natural Values Team	High	Year 2	Urban Agriculture Guidelines to be redrafted and adopted by Council	Adoption of new guidelines by council
1.2.2 Provide support to new projects proposed under the community gardens guidelines	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Streetscapes and Natural Values Team	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Provide support as required	Number of new projects supported
1.2.3 Streamline the application process for the Community Growing Spaces program including community composting	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Business support Team	Low	Year 1,2	Improved application pathways to Community Growing Spaces program	New online application pathway developed
1.3 Facilitate relationship between community groups and landowners, supporting long and short-term urban agriculture opportunities	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Property Services Team	Medium	Year 2,3,4	Provide support as required	Support provided as required
1.4 Work with planners to include urban agriculture in planning referral process and investigate mechanisms to support provision of urban agriculture opportunities through the	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Strategic and Statutory Planning	Medium	Year 1,2,3,4	Provide support as required	Number of planning applications commented on

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measurable Outcomes	Evaluation
Yarra Planning Scheme.						
1.5 Investigate feasibility of land-share programs	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	N/A	Medium	Year 3,4	Referral process established	Completion of report
1.6.1 Explore potential sites in open space, owned or managed by Yarra for food growing	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Open Space Design Team	Medium	Year 2,3	Identify potential sites for a trial	Pilots established and evaluated
1.6.2 Undertake analysis of all laneways and categorise potential for growing space	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	GIS Officer	Medium	Year 3	Provide report on options to partner with groups delivering a land share program	GIS available and incorporated into guidelines
1.7 Undertake a feasibility study of potential to host a land availability inventory for City of Yarra	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	GIS Officer	Medium	Year 3,4	Feasibility study	Study completed

## Objective 2

### Increase food skills and knowledge through engagement, education and training

We will:

- Develop an annual program of events and activities to promote urban agriculture.
- Undertake a comprehensive program of community, business and stakeholder engagement to understand community expectations of urban agriculture.
- Promote urban agriculture in publications and on the Council website.
- Partner with educational institutions to promote urban agriculture.

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
2.1 Develop an annual communications plan to increase the visibility of urban agriculture work in Yarra e.g. food swaps, farmers markets, community composting	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Communications Team	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Support as outlined in agreement	Satisfaction with support
2.2 Develop an annual program of workshops catering to a range of ages, demographics and groups within the community	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Sustainability Engagement Officer	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Annual program developed and delivered	Attendance at workshops
2.3.1 Investigate the feasibility of developing a partnership with post-secondary education institutions	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Waste Minimisation Officer and Communications Team	Medium	Year 2,3	Feasibility report	Report completed

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measurable Outcomes	Evaluation
2.3.2 Promote available school gardening education material to local schools.	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Communications Team	Low	Year 3	Review available material and effectiveness Analyse any gaps in available material Produce material to fill gaps	Analysis completed
2.4 Review the links between Food Know How and Grow Your Own programs	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	N/A	Medium	Year 2	Report on potential links and opportunities	Report and business case completed
2.5 Review and update UA related content on website and investigate spatial map for urban agriculture sites in Yarra	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Sustainability Engagement Officer Communications Team	High	Year 2,3	Updated content on website and map of urban agriculture sites.	Map completed and publically available
2.6 Investigate the potential to provide seed starter packs for residents to encourage people to grow food locally	Sustainability Engagement Officer	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Low	Year 2,3	Report and business case	Report completed
2.7 Develop educational material with partners to enhance community understanding of traditional foods and agricultural practices	Urban Agriculture Facilitator Streetscapes and Natural Values Team	Local Indigenous Groups Aboriginal Partnerships Team	High	Year 1,2	Integration of educational material into workshops, website and council projects	Educational material available



# Objective 3

## Build partnerships with other organisations

We will:

- Work with community organisations to optimise funding opportunities to deliver urban agriculture.
- Work with other local governments to support and promote urban agriculture.
- Facilitate opportunities for organisations working in urban agriculture to work together.

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
3.1 Partner with public land owners to develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for sites within Yarra to be used for urban agriculture	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Governance Team	Medium	Year 3	Memorandum of Understanding(MOU) with at least public land owner	Number of formal agreements developed
3.2 Assist community and other organisations to access potential funding opportunities for urban agriculture in Yarra	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Community Grants Team	Medium	Year 1,2,3,4	Urban agriculture grants applied for	Annual number of urban agriculture related grant applications assisted
3.4.1 Develop partnerships with Collingwood Children's Farm and other leading community organisations to work towards delivering the	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Economic Development Team	High	Year 2,3	Identifying opportunities Develop an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as required	Opportunities identified

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
objectives of this strategy						
3.4.2 Support community organisations to enable greater Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community involvement in urban agriculture programs	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Waste Minimisation Officer Community Partnerships Team	High	Year 2,3	Provide language support as requested	Joint projects delivered
3.4.3 Work with Indigenous groups to identify opportunities for indigenous urban agriculture projects	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Aboriginal Partnerships Team	High	Year 2,3	Local Indigenous Groups engaged	Partnership opportunities identified
3.5 Support other organisations to expand fruit squad	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Community Partnerships Team	Medium	Year 2,3	Increase in the number of trees registered to program	Increase in fruit squad capacity in Yarra

# Objective 4

## Advocate within and beyond council to work towards a food systems approach

We will:

- Gather available evidence to better understand urban agriculture and how it fits into the broader food system.
- Develop methods to embed urban agriculture into projects and developments within council and the City of Yarra.
- Create and protect opportunities for food growing and recycling in Yarra.
- Build and promote an understanding of food systems and their application in local government.

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
4.1 Identify opportunities to promote urban agriculture through events, policy reviews and other opportunities	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Waste Minimisation Team	Medium	Year 1,2,3,4	Presentations, policy submissions	As opportunities arise
4.2 Evaluation of urban agriculture programs delivered to date	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	GIS officer Communications Team  Open Space Planning and Design Team	High	Year 2,3	Survey of current urban agriculture programs  Report	Survey completed  Analysis completed and reported
4.3 Develop and promote a best practice guide to integrate urban agriculture opportunities into new development to be considered as part of the planning permit	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Strategic and Statutory Planning teams	High	Year 1,2	New guidelines developed	Guidelines implemented through planning referrals

Actions	Responsibility Lead	Responsibility Support	Priority	Timeline	Measureable Outcomes	Evaluation
process						
4.4 Input into Council's public realm improvement projects programs and strategies	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	City Strategy Teams, Transport Teams, Capital Development Team	High	Year 1,2,3,4	Urban agriculture opportunities identified	Participation in cross - departmental place making processes
4.5.1 Build an evidence base to guide action and decision-making including conducting research, collecting and interpreting data about urban agriculture opportunities and participation levels in the City of Yarra	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	N/A	Medium	Year 3,4	Report	Report completed
4.6 Investigate current right to solar access protections for gardeners	Urban Agriculture Facilitator	Statutory Planning Team	Low	Year 2,3	Report	Report completed