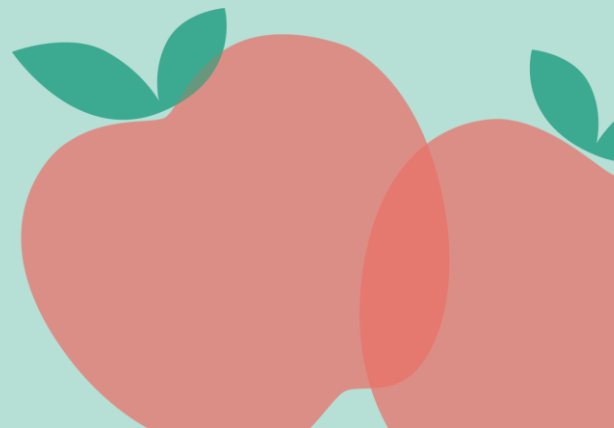




# strategic and Operational Plan 2023-2026



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# **TOGETHER TOWARDS A FAIR FOOD SYSTEM**

## **Acknowledgement**

Food Fairness Illawarra acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respect to Past, Present and Emerging Elders. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first agriculturalists and continue to inspire us through their ecological land management.

Food Fairness Illawarra would also like to acknowledge all involved individuals for their hard work on behalf of Food Fairness Illawarra and contributions to the development of this Strategic Plan, with special recognition to Healthy Cities Illawarra for their continuous governance and coordination.

**Did you know that 1 in 5 households (21%) in Australia experienced food insecurity in 2021 and 2022<sup>1</sup>?**

In the Illawarra, this translates to over 65,000 households that are unable to access sufficient food to live an active, culturally appropriate and healthy lifestyle<sup>1</sup>.

Food insecurity affects all aspects of daily life, as food is a basic human right and a building block for our lives, health, family connections and social interactions. Not having access to enough food can lead to significant short and long-term health impacts, including developmental delays in children, poor physical and mental health and social isolation<sup>2</sup>. For the prosperity of our community, people must have access to affordable, nutritious and safe food that meets their dietary needs and cultural and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle. See Figure 1 for the full spectrum of food insecurity.



Figure 1. Food insecurity on a continuum<sup>2</sup>.

## Who We Are

Food Fairness Illawarra (FFI) is a community coalition established in 2005 to work towards **food security for all in the Illawarra region**. Our collaborative efforts involve working closely with our local councils, Health District, University of Wollongong, community groups, charities, businesses, and dedicated individuals. As a community coalition, FFI takes pride in spearheading collective action to create equitable and sustainable solutions for our local food system. We recognise that working together can achieve greater outcomes and create positive change towards achieving a fairer, more sustainable and local food system for the Illawarra.

## Guiding partnerships:

- Wollongong City Council
- Shellharbour City Council
- Kiama Municipal Council
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District
- University of Wollongong

This plan considers and aligns with the below strategies:

- [NSW Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy 2022-2032](#)
- [Wollongong Community Strategic Plan](#)
- [Shellharbour Community Strategic Plan](#)
- [Kiama Community Strategic Plan](#)
- [UOW 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan](#)

# What is Food security?

Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and cultural and food preferences for an active and healthy life<sup>3</sup>. See Figure 2.



Figure 2: Identifying the six dimensions of food security<sup>3</sup>.

## Six dimensions of food security:

FFI recognises the following six dimensions of food security<sup>3</sup>:

- **Availability:** Enough nutritious food of sufficient quality to satisfy dietary needs must be available to people for their consumption. Availability can be affected by production, distribution, and exchange.
- **Access:** Individuals and households must be able to acquire sufficient food to be able to eat a healthy, nutritious diet. Or, they must have access to adequate resources to grow their food (e.g., land). Access can be affected by affordability, allocation, and preference.
- **Utilisation:** People must have access to and be able to properly metabolise a sufficient quantity of diverse foods to meet their nutritional needs. Utilisation can be affected by nutritional value, health status, food safety, preparation, and consumption.
- **Stability:** The ability to ensure a food system, household, and individual remain food secure in the event of unexpected shocks, including economic, public health, or environmental crisis, and recurrent events, such as season-based food insecurity.
- **Agency:** The capacity for individuals and groups to decide what foods they eat in addition to choose over how their food is grown, harvested, distributed, and prepared. Access to accurate information is necessary to achieve agency.
- **Sustainability:** The ability of food systems to achieve and provide all dimensions of food security without compromising the food security of future generations due to environmental, economic, or social disruption.

## Our Action Areas:

Guided by the six dimensions of food security, FFI incorporates the following four key action areas to affect change in the Illawarra region:

- **Connect and Collaborate** – Bring our community together to connect and share information and resources.
- **Advocate** – Highlight local issues and lobby for policy and planning developments contributing to a fairer food system.
- **Empower** – Strengthen community action and develop personal skills by providing tools, highlighting opportunities, and enabling knowledge sharing to drive the fair food conversation across all levels of society.
- **Govern** – Maintain a coordinated, well-structured coalition to enable collective action.

## FFI's Theory of Change:

FFI believes that through our four action areas, across the six dimensions of food security, we actively contribute to the nine identified United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the Illawarra. See Figure 3.

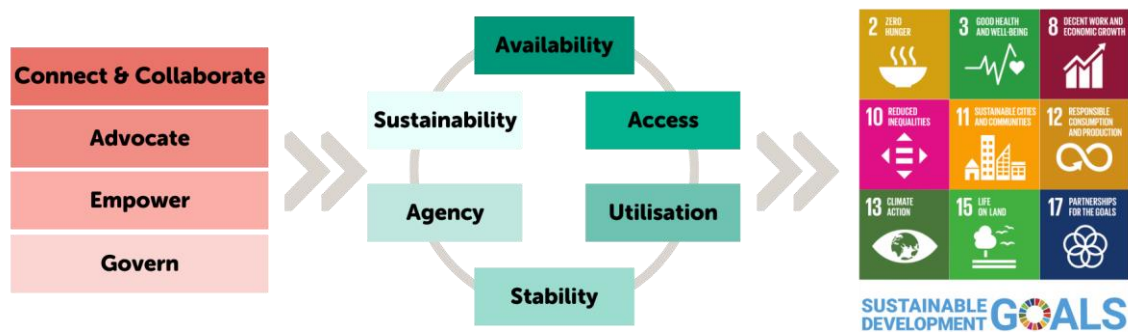


Figure 3: Food Fairness Illawarra's Theory of Change

## How do we measure our success?

Within each action area, FFI has highlighted several supporting strategies with corresponding actions needed to achieve them. Throughout the implementation of these strategies, data will be collected from a variety of sources that will allow each strategy to be ranked on a simple scale showing its impact:

Score	-1	0	+1	+2
Impact	Negative impact	No changes	Some impact	Strong impact

The outcomes of this process will feed into a final report that will show our progress and guide the next Implementation Plan.

# Food Insecurity

## ...Is on the rise.

Over 2 million households (21%) in Australia experienced food insecurity in 2022<sup>1</sup>. In the Illawarra, this translates to over 65,000 households that are unable to access sufficient food to live an active, culturally appropriate, and healthy life. The rising prevalence of food insecurity in Australia is due to several factors, including the increasing cost of living, insufficient government benefits, limited access to food due to travel restrictions, and the impact of natural disasters<sup>1</sup>. Sadly, the ongoing cost of living crisis will continue to worsen food insecurity in our community. Local food relief organisations confirm that there has already been surging demand for their services. Certain communities, such as Indigenous people, unemployed individuals, and single-parent households, are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity<sup>4</sup>. It is crucial to prioritise support for these groups and implement comprehensive policies addressing food insecurity's root causes.

## ...Impacts the health and well-being of our community.

Inadequate access to nutritious food can severely impact health and well-being<sup>3</sup>. A nutrient-poor diet can lead to anxiety, depression, behavioural issues, hypertension, weight gain or loss, and micronutrient deficiencies, among other health problems<sup>3</sup>. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of food insecurity, as it can impede their growth and development<sup>2,3,5</sup>. Moreover, food insecurity can negatively affect school attendance, concentration, and behaviour in school-aged children<sup>5</sup>. Nutritional deficiencies are additionally higher in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions (2.8 per 100,000 population) than the state rates (1.8 per 100,000 population)<sup>8</sup>.

## ...Is a cause and consequence of social isolation.

Food insecurity is both a cause and a consequence of social isolation, with socially isolated individuals experiencing higher levels of food insecurity, regardless of financial means<sup>9,10</sup>. The World Health Organisation has compared the negative impact of social isolation on human health to that of smoking and obesity, highlighting the need to address this issue urgently<sup>11</sup>. Increasing social connectivity can be an effective strategy to mitigate food insecurity<sup>9</sup>. In the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions, there is a higher (10.5%) proportion of adults living alone and at risk of social isolation than at the state level (9.6%)<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the percentage of people aged 65 and above living alone and at risk of social isolation is greater in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions (25.3%) than in NSW (24.6%)<sup>12</sup>. Efforts to increase social connectivity, especially among vulnerable populations, can help to create a more supportive and connected community. Community gardens can be a powerful tool in achieving this, as they not only provide access to healthy and nutritious food but also serve as a platform for community building and engagement<sup>12</sup>.

## ...Is worsened by increasingly unhealthy food options.

Ultra-processed foods are cheaper and often more readily accessible than nutrient-dense foods<sup>3,13</sup>. In Australia, the food environment is becoming progressively healthier with an increased prevalence of ultra-processed foods, lack of nutrition education, and loss of traditional and cultural food knowledge<sup>3</sup>. The negative effects of unhealthy food consumption are well-documented. The World Cancer Research Fund International has concluded that fast foods and sugar-sweetened beverages are independently associated with an increased risk of overweight or obesity<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, the prevalence of people overweight or obese is increasing in Australia<sup>6</sup>. In the Illawarra, two-thirds of adults and one-quarter of children are overweight or obese<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the rising cost of living has made healthy food choices unaffordable for many households, with 64% of food-insecure households citing increased food prices as a contributing factor in 2022<sup>1</sup>. This problem is compounded by the unhealthy food environment, which limits people's ability to make healthy choices<sup>15</sup>. To address this problem, there is a need to improve access to healthy food options and educate individuals on nutrition and healthy eating habits.

## ...Is exacerbated by climate change.

Climate change is having a significant impact on the stability and sustainability of our food systems. The increasing frequency, severity, and unpredictability of natural disasters, as well as supply chain disruptions, are affecting the seasonal availability of crops and leading to increased food prices<sup>16</sup>. This trend will continue in the future. In 2022, a 12.7% year-on-year increase in the cost of vegetables was observed due to global factors, such as the Ukraine war and COVID-19, and local factors, including extensive flood damage<sup>17</sup>. These instabilities exacerbate food insecurity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognises local, small-scale, and sustainable farming methods as agricultural strategies to reduce reliance on vulnerable larger food systems and bolster resilience<sup>18</sup>. In addition, developing food networks, embedding Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, and reducing food waste are recommended to ensure the ability to feed the Australian population during climate-driven events<sup>19</sup>. It is essential to prioritise actions that build more sustainable and equitable food systems that can withstand the impacts of climate change.

## ...Exists while we waste tons of edible food.

In 2021, 5.3 million tonnes of edible food were wasted, costing the Australian economy \$36.6 billion<sup>20</sup>. Food wastage has significant environmental impacts, consuming resources such as agricultural land, water, energy, and fuel. When disposed of in landfills, food waste increases the production of greenhouse gas emissions. Food rescue is a strategy to divert food away from landfills and provide meals to those in need, addressing food waste and food insecurity<sup>21</sup>. Currently, only two in five food-insecure households receive food relief<sup>1</sup>. Inter-agency collaboration amongst food rescue and relief organisations can increase food availability, address food insecurity, and reduce the amount of edible food wasted.

# Operational Plan 2023-25

**Purpose:** Food security for all in the Illawarra

**Mission Statement:** Working together can achieve greater outcomes and create positive change towards achieving a fairer, more sustainable and local food system for the Illawarra.

- Audience:**
- Individuals - Consumers, Home growers, Food insecure community members, Indigenous communities, Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
  - Professionals & Organisations - Food educators, Food relief organisations, Food rescue organisations, Community garden(er)s, School garden(er)s, Local producers, Local food retailers, Councillors, Academics, Indigenous community organisations, Culturally and linguistically diverse community organisations

## connect & collaborate

<b>Objective:</b> Foster a strong network by facilitating connections, knowledge and information sharing and pooling resources.	
Strategies	Actions
1. Host the annual regional community building event 'Connecting over Fair Food'	1.1 Host an event in one of the partnering LGAs. 1.2 Reengage all partner organisations and local initiatives.
2. Facilitate and support networking opportunities that bring together individuals, professionals and organisations that are interested and/or working towards a better food system for the Illawarra.	2.1 Consider hosting a community garden connecting event. 2.2 Support the Illawarra Edible Garden Trail.
3. Host quarterly Food Rescue and Relief Working Group and facilitate open communication and collaboration.	3.1 Each council to ensure a representative is involved. 3.2 Include FFI Coordination in minutes.



## Empower

<p><b>Objective:</b> Strengthen community action and develop personal skills by providing tools and highlighting opportunities for participation.</p>	
Strategies	Actions
1. Maintain the FFI website as the 'go to' resource to inform and empower the community	1.1 Align website with strategy 1.2 Update the event calendar with FFI event
2. Maintain and develop Low Cost & Free Meals Directory (understand its reach)	2.1 Update the FFI directory 2.2 FFI to maintain an update LCFMD (web based) every 6 months. Print runs to be reviewed every 12 months. 2.3 Share LCFMD for partner to include on website, newsletter and socials
3. Utilise social media and newsletters to engage the broader community with fair food educational resources, the latest fair food research, events and opportunities to participate	3.1 Partners to highlight and action specific days, weeks and months e.g., Agriculture month – Nov, World Food Day – Oct, Global Climate Change Week
4. Leverage, utilise and promote FFI resources (internal and external) where possible	4.1 Partners to action, including LCFMD, Seasonal Eating guide, Healthy & Sustainable Events guide, FFI calendar, FFI directory guide to food rescue, and relief guide to food donations
5. Investigate opportunities to include food-focused activities in existing programs or initiatives (including the FFI logo)	5.1 Partners to provide content for this activity based on their internal plans

## Advocate

<p><b>Objective:</b> Highlight local issues and lobby for policy and planning developments, empower and support key decision-making</p>	
Strategies	Actions
1. Share relevant food-focused resources (including evidence) to support the planning and policy process.	1.1 Include in the coordination team meeting agenda (incl. nation & state)
2. Build a compelling case for food security to be recognised and embedded into organisational policy and plans.	2.1 Councils to scope which surveys they run and highlight opportunities for the inclusion of Household Food Security Survey Module.
3. Identify and highlight opportunities to lobby for food security.	3.1 Include FFI Coordination in minutes.

4. Prepare submissions in relation to local/state/national food planning policy.	4.1 Collectively develop a FFI general submission
5. Liaise with other food-based organisations and alliances to leverage advocacy work	5.1 Including Sustain, Right to Food
6. Represent FFI at relevant community forums, seminars and events to expand our reach	6.1 All partners to share FFI work and resources where possible

## Govern

<b>Objective:</b> Drive for sustainable and durable organisational outcomes	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1. Develop FFI Strategic and Operational Plan	1.1 Complete SP 2023/26 + Operational Plan 2023/24
2. Host quarterly FFI Coordination Team (governance) meetings	2.1 Schedule and invite coordination team to meeting
3. Manage volunteer base to support FFI functions	3.1 Managing and recruiting communication support volunteers
4. Record, monitor and evaluate the FFI activities	4.1 Taking minutes, evaluate operational plan at the end of the year
5. Investigate funding, resource enhancement and sustainability opportunities	5.1 Monthly check on the grant database 5.2 Respond to ad hoc opportunities and include on the agenda for potential partner grant opportunities, e.g. council
6. Develop strategic research partnerships to inform and expand our work	6.1 Including: Karen Charlton's PHD project

# Roles

## Coordination Team:

Oversees and provides strategic direction to the FFI coordinator to achieve a coordinated, well-structured, coalition that enables collective action.

## Active Working groups:

- **Food Aid & Recovery Working Group** - Representatives from Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, Healthy Cities Illawarra, University of Wollongong, and several food rescue and relief organisations.
- **Connecting Over Fair Food Event Working Group** - Representatives from Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, Wollongong City Council, Kiama Municipal Council, Shellharbour City Council, University of Wollongong, and Healthy Cities Illawarra.
- **Communications Working Group** - Representatives from Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and Healthy Cities Illawarra, supported by two to three Communications Support Interns.
- **Funding & Future Projects Working Group** - Representatives from Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, University of Wollongong, and Healthy Cities Illawarra.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION GUIDE:

Theme	Goals	Actions:
<b>Connect &amp; Collaborate</b>	A strong network of individuals, professionals, and organisations that work together to make a meaningful impact in addressing food insecurity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participate in the FFI quarterly catchup to share knowledge and resources with other participants.</li> <li>2. Use the:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Fair food events calendar</a> to participate in additional fair food-focused events within the Illawarra.</li> <li>b. <a href="#">Fair Food directory</a> to connect with other fair food organisations within the Illawarra.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Attend “Connecting over Fair Food” to foster, grow and promote our thriving local food community.</li> <li>4. Join one of our Working groups (see above).</li> </ol>
<b>Empower</b>	An informed, equipped, and active community of individuals, professionals, and organisations that work to support a food secure Illawarra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lead by example by supporting a fairer food system (see our practical <a href="#">Fair food field guide</a> for inspiration) and encourage your friends, colleagues, and peers.</li> <li>2. Implement healthy and sustainable food initiatives within your organisation, university and school to enable your colleagues and peers to participate e.g., setting up a composting station or food swap box</li> <li>3. Promote the FFI website and resources on your organisation’s website, your professional profile (e.g., LinkedIn) and amongst your networks e.g., within newsletters or social media channels.</li> <li>4. Host events that align with the FFI mission, acknowledge the collective approach and include the event on the <a href="#">Fair food events calendar</a></li> </ol>
<b>Advocate</b>	Food security embedded into policy and regulatory frameworks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support and spread the word on present participatory advocacy campaigns e.g. We’re not lovin’ it.</li> <li>2. Advocate within your organisation, university, or school to adopt policies that support a healthy and sustainable food system, including sustainable procurement, catering, waste reduction and resource recovery policies.</li> <li>3. Participate in and share research surveys and focus group opportunities for fair food-related research.</li> <li>4. Consider potential research projects that are expanding on FFI’s work e.g., honours or PHD projects.</li> </ol>

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## Appendix 1

An overview of food insecurity factors in the Illawarra region and beyond.

	Wollongong	Shellharbour	Kiama	Illawarra	NSW	Australia
Overweight & Obesity	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	23.2% obese 34.6% overweight	N/A
Nutritional deficiencies (per 100,000 population) <sup>1</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.8	N/A
Food insecurity prevalence <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	21%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	6,845 (3.2%) <sup>3</sup>	3,809 (5.0%) <sup>4</sup>	534 (2.3%) <sup>5</sup>	11,287 (3.6%) <sup>6</sup>	278,043 (3.4%) <sup>3-6</sup>	812,728 (3.2%) <sup>3-6</sup>
Single-parent households	9,627 (16.8%) <sup>3</sup>	4,4045 (18.7%) <sup>4</sup>	703 (10.6%) <sup>5</sup>	14,369 (16.8%) <sup>6</sup>	337,729 (15.8%) <sup>3-6</sup>	1,068,268 (15.9%) <sup>3-6</sup>
CALD <sup>1</sup>	30,440 (14.2%)	7,091 (9.3%)	1,277 (5.5%)	N/A	1,855,032 (23.0%)	5,016,327 (19.7%)
Social isolation <sup>1</sup>	21,263 (10.5%)	5,943 (8.2%)	1,960 (9.2%)	N/A	723,718 (9.6%)	2,370,740 (10.1%)
Unemployment	5,023 (4.9%) <sup>3</sup>	1,565 (4.3%) <sup>4</sup>	361 (3.4%) <sup>5</sup>	6,950 (4.6%) <sup>6</sup>	189,852 (4.9%) <sup>3-6</sup>	646,442 (5.1%) <sup>3-6</sup>
People living with disabilities <sup>1</sup>	14,458 (6.7%)	5,392 (7.1%)	1,221 (5.3%)	N/A	261,417 (18.4%)	793,263 (18.1%)
People experiencing with homelessness (per 1,000 resident population) <sup>1</sup>	4.0	2.6	0.9	N/A	5.0	5.0

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## Appendix 2

Data collection will occur throughout the implementation of the Plan, with the following data collection methods being utilised.

	<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>
1	Update on progress against strategies	Annual – July	Action Owner	Provide data to Coordinator
2	Annual Report	Annual – August	Coordinator	Prepared from data received in 1
3	Observations and feedback from relevant staff and partners	Ongoing Annual	Coordinator, Co-ordination team, Working Groups, Healthy Cities Illawarra.	Included in response to 1. E.g. Conversations, discussion at meetings, annual survey, relevant emails.
4	Feedback forms	End of each initiative	Project lead / working group	Feedback form administered at the end of each initiative/ activity.  Data reported in the email to Co-ordinator and tabled at relevant meeting/s within one month of the activity.
5	Audit	Annual	Co-ordinator & Co-ordination team	Review any related plans or policies
6	Feedback from community	Ongoing	Strategy Owner Partners organisations	Emails, letters, phone calls, social media comments, vox pop at events, media
7	Minutes	Each meeting	Coordinator, Coordination team, FR&R WG, Events WG, Community Support WG	Standing agenda item
8	Website visitation	Quarterly	Coordinator, Partners organisations	Website analytics
9	Partnership tool	Baseline, annually	Coordination team	Victorian Partnership Tool (modified as needed)