



EDITION:

VI.1

**HUON VALLEY
FOOD HUB PROJECT**

**Community Perspectives
& Opportunities**

PACKED BY:

**Food Connect
Foundation**

ABOUT FOOD CONNECT FOUNDATION

About Food Connect Foundation

Food Connect Foundation (FCF) is a not-for-profit registered charity committed to creating a new regenerative food system.

With a vision of a world where everyone has access to fresh, healthy food that's fair to growers, eaters and the planet, we establish and nurture initiatives that make it possible. We pilot social enterprises, support growers and promote conscious food choices through advisory, education and advocacy.

To find out more, visit: www.foodconnectfoundation.org.au

Acknowledgements

The findings presented in this report were collated through a series of consultation activities undertaken by the Food Connect Foundation between October 2022 and April 2023. The consultation team included: Robert Pekin (FCF), Uncle Kel O'Neill (FCF), Emma-Kate Rose (FCF), Michelle Gledhill (Huon Valley Council), Emily Samuels-Ballantyne (Huon Valley Council), and Heather Mac (Huon Valley Local Food Cultivator).

We would also like to acknowledge the Melukerdee people of the Huon River and the Lyluequonny people of the Far South of the Huon Valley region, who are an integral part of the regional food and agriculture system, and have been for thousands of generations.

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PROJECT SCOPE & PURPOSE



As part of Huon Valley Council's ongoing commitment to its community to transform its regional food system, the Food Connect Foundation was contracted to undertake a series of workshops and webinars to:

- Understand the needs, circumstances and aspirations of eaters, growers, businesses, government agencies and the wider community in relation to transforming the regional food system;
- Gather ideas and insights from community members to inform Council's Food Resilience Strategy;
- Facilitate a plan of action to establish the Huon Valley Food Hub; and
- Serve as an opportunity for the community to learn more about the opportunities associated with the regional food system and encourage them to consider their possible economic transition pathways and the necessary enablers.

PROJECT PURPOSE

This project provides an understanding of the type, scale and impact of food systems change across Huon Valley. The work included a mixture of public presentations, meetings, workshops and online peer to peer webinars. A key aspect of this project has been to encourage as much public participation in community forums as possible, however, it was identified that a number of missing voices were not able to access these opportunities. In response to this, a group of community leaders released a survey and a series of public engagement activities to ensure these voices were heard.

ENGAGEMENT

Food Connect Foundation applies a Regenerative Living Systems methodology to its work with communities, acknowledging that communities are best placed to apply their lived experience to complex issues, and to grow by learning together. Processes are designed to bring participants into a state of being that focuses on strengths, common agreement, and building trust with and between each other so as to activate personal and collective agency to own their solutions. This builds capability as a community, which in turn builds resilience.

The following engagement activities have taken place to ensure Council's needs were being met, while ensuring authentic community participation.

DINNER PRESENTATION

On 7 November 2022, the Food Connect Foundation was invited to Home Hill Winery to present to approximately 70 dinner guests, as an introduction to the project. Robert Pekin presented the story of Food Connect Shed, the importance of regional food hubs and what

to look forward to on the project. An event highlight was the engagement of key Traditional Owners to provide an official welcome to country, smoking ceremony and symbolic gesture acknowledging the story of the region and launch of the project.

COUNCIL AND FOOD HUB REFERENCE GROUP MEETINGS

On 7 November 2022 we met once with Huon Valley Council representatives, Michelle Gledhill and Emily Samuels-Ballantyne, Heather Mac and later with the Food Hub Reference Group, a mixture of state and local food system representatives at the Huonville Community Hub. These meetings provided some context for the role of the reference group and the history of the project, and for us to provide some insight into our framework and processes used as part of our engagement activities.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1

On 8 and 9 November, the Food Connect Foundation hosted two half-day community workshops in Cygnet and Kermandie to facilitate a discovery phase using a strengths-based approach and our six capitals framework. The workshop explored the barriers and opportunities presented to the Huon Valley in creating a food hub, workshoped current activities, and identified community aspirations for food system transformation. It also set up the process for the following months' engagement activities by providing a safe space for different viewpoints to be considered, and consensus and trust to be built within the community.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The workshop process revealed a number of local and state opportunities for the Huon Valley Food Hub to explore, such as food tourism, under-utilised infrastructure, a wide diversity of voices (many of which are yet to be heard), and the valuable connections and generosity displayed through interconnected relationships in the community. Additionally, the Huon Valley Food Hub's mission is very much aligned with the strategic goals of EatWell Tasmania, Sprout producers network, and the State Government's Health Department.

It should be acknowledged that a number of key stakeholders were not part of this workshop, including institutional buyers, multi-generational growers, Traditional Owners, and marginalised groups with lived experience of disadvantage, and actions were set to address this. Notes relating to this workshop are available on the Huon Valley Food Circle facebook page.

WEBINAR 1

On 24 January 2023, the Food Connect Foundation joined Huon Valley Council and Mountain Ash Consultancy to host an evening webinar to explore the vision for the Huon Valley Food Hub. Participants were asked to discuss the following four questions:

- What does it look like if we are producing good food sustainably that supports healthy soils and waterways?
- What does it look like if people are able to access this food locally and affordably?
- What does it look like when people working in the food and ag sector are looked after?
- What would it look like if we could add value locally through processing and manufacturing?
- What's happening now that will help get us to this vision of the Huon Valley Food System



It should be noted due to the timing of the workshop and many experiencing the busiest time of the year, that the number of attendees of the webinar was quite low (approximately 12 people), and it was felt that in order for Council to legitimately canvas a wider range of voices, a public face to face workshop in February would assist with confirming the vision of the food hub and exploring options, as well as a survey of the 'missing voices' led by a volunteer group and coordinated by Council. A summary of the webinar and workshop 2 is provided below under "Engagement Outcomes".



FOOD RESILIENCE STRATEGY MEETING

On Monday, 20 February 2023 FCF attended a meeting at River Run Lodge with consultants Mountain Ash Insights and Free State Studio, who were contracted to run Huon Valley Council's Food Resilience Strategy. The key points of discussion included a briefing of the food hub project and how it intersects with the Food Resilience Strategy. The meeting determined where the two activities aligned, and how the Food Resilience Strategy could incorporate the bottom-up community food hub process into their analysis and findings.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 2

On Tuesday, 21 February 2023, FCF were invited to host a six hour workshop at Fat Pig Farm to continue the process of food hub activation with the community. Over 45 people attended the day, commencing with a welcome to country and meditation. Participants were led through a process to cover the following outcomes:

- Summarise feedback from previous workshops and engagement activities;
- Identify whose voices haven't been heard? Clarify the vision, and think through changes required;
- Present options for going forward, taking note the good work that is already happening and has occurred to transform the food system and bring people together for systems change;
- Reflection activity at tables to prioritise options, followed by a whole of group reflection;
- Participants were then asked to test the waters by selecting preferred options to see where the interest of the community lies;
- Participants were then tasked with analysing the implications of their preferred options in group work and to identify resources / needs, followed by a group report back.

The workshop focused on confirming the vision, and exploring and prioritising options for taking action, with a view to setting up a group of community leaders who would be willing to assist Council with establishing the preferred business model at the third workshop.

WEBINAR 2

On Thursday, 13 April 2023, FCF hosted a two hour webinar to prepare the community for the third and final workshop the week after. Ten people attended the webinar, and featured guest speakers from Open Food Network, Bendigo Food Hub, and Food Connect Shed to provide case studies relevant to the options prioritised at the previous workshop, followed by an extensive Q&A session.

[A recording of the webinar can be viewed here.](#)

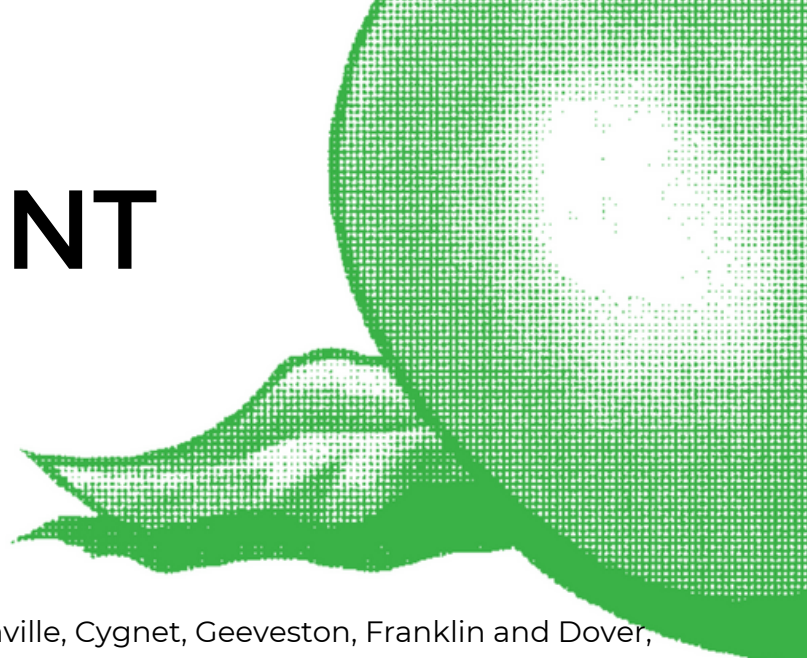
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 3

On Friday, 21 April 2023, FCF were invited to host a five hour workshop at Huonville Town Hall to agree on the business model and set of actions for developing the business plan for the Huon Valley Food Hub. Sixteen people attended the workshop, including the Mayor of Huon Valley, Sally Doyle.

The group was presented with a recap on activities to date, and provided a summary of the missing voices survey. This was then followed by a whole group session to plan actions for establishing a food hub model that was fit-for-purpose for the Huon Valley.



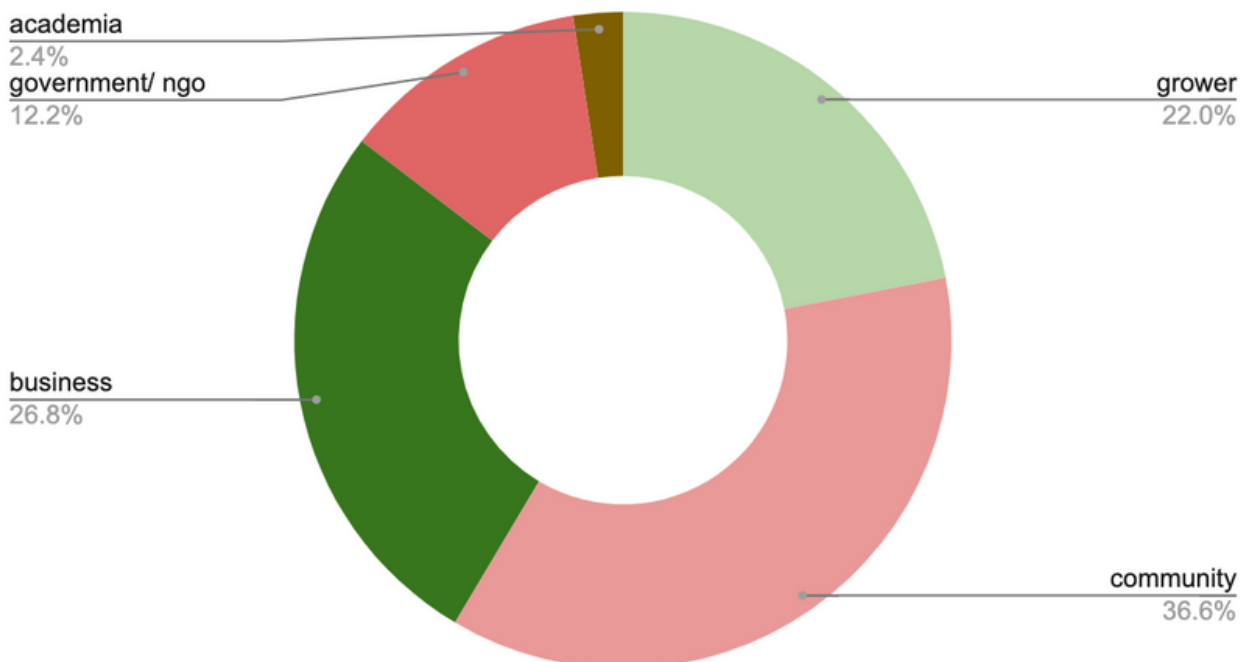
ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES



The Huon Valley includes towns such as Huonville, Cygnet, Geeveston, Franklin and Dover, but also encompasses smaller villages along the Huon River to the far south. This report provides a summary of the input received from stakeholders during our engagement activities. It also identifies patterns, differences and economic opportunities identified by the stakeholders, to inform Council's priorities for establishing a food hub for Huon Valley.

Participants across all engagement activities are represented by the following groups:

Attendees



FOOD HUB VISIONING ACTIVITY

Participants were invited to create a vision for the Huon Valley Food Hub to establish their 'why' in the context of macro-social, political, economic and environmental issues, as well as local influences. A number of themes were identified as being important to this vision:

Energy and resources - a healthy food and land use system uses renewable energy, is socially responsible and builds soil health to be resilient in the face of climate shocks. Waste is re-purposed and value added to provide an alternative revenue stream. Use the Huon Valley's good rainfall to its full potential while valuing it appropriately

Biodiversity - increase on-farm diversity to reduce run-off, protect water catchments and build biodiversity. People take pride in their land and the way they manage it, especially Traditional Owners' cultural burning and caring for country. The influence of multinational companies on agriculture and aquaculture practice is reduced.

Processing - economical on a small scale through shared resources such as processing equipment and technologies. eg honey spinner - used once a year and it costs \$800 to buy. Shared facilities at different scales that community members and larger farms can access. Collective community processing days, e.g. CWA processed plums.

People and workforce - build a deeper connection to the land through a change in mindset and relationships within industry, traditional owners and local communities. Growers form peer groups to help each other transform their mindset and practice change. Mental health is prioritised through connection and collaboration - more 'beyond the fence' activities and crop swaps being integrated into the network. Work is rewarded fairly for each person's contribution, and seasonal workers are supported through cross-sectoral collaboration.

Access - Huon Valley's geography is divided by the river, so access is facilitated by 'nodes' or smaller hubs to allow isolated communities equitable access to local food. Additionally, the river was acknowledged as a key transport corridor to reduce isolation between smaller communities. Knowledge sharing is enabled and food literacy skills developed by aligning with food security initiatives, and starting from the spaces that need access to food, rather than where it's fashionable/ corporate. Create diverse ways of paying it forward and maintain a realistic approach, e.g. some people just want to use a microwave.

Markets - authentic farmers markets, ethical value chain coordination, localised sourcing, marketing and distribution to allow access to good food for all. The influence of multinational food companies is reduced, and a regional brand / identity is developed and promoted, and creates a drawcard to tourism operators. Money is circulated in the local economy to build economic resilience, and much of this is facilitated through regional institutional procurement policies.

Participants at the February workshop distilled these themes into the following vision:

“Huon Valley’s food and farming system is resilient, regenerative, equitable and inclusive, where our unique food culture is celebrated and shared.”

Prior to the third workshop, Council officers distilled these findings using the six capitals framework and felt the above vision statement was better suited to describe the mission of the food hub.

This led to the creation of a vision statement that would pass the 'pub test' in order to ensure broader public understanding and appreciation of the work:

“Huon Valley Food Hub’s vision is to provide Huon Valley food for Huon Valley people.”

LOCAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE HUON VALLEY FOOD HUB

Working in small groups, participants were asked to identify challenges and/or concerns they had about achieving this vision:

CHALLENGES

- Economic barriers such as cost of living pressures, the widening wealth gap, and the housing crisis create a risk of designing a food hub that isn't inclusive of marginalised groups and caters for particular niche of consumers;
- Food safety regulations need to be reviewed so they don't cause unnecessary roadblocks to innovation;
- Skills shortages, particularly regarding seasonality and the precarious nature of farm work, and limited acknowledgement of small growers;
- The local food sector is seen as a niche, and often dismissed as doing the “cute stuff”. Issues such as cost of local food is perceived as a barrier, as well as a lack of convenient location or distance from public transport;
- Long term landholders and new farmers aren't supported to connect effectively, limiting opportunities to share knowledge and practices;
- There was a perception that there have been many reports written and committees to work on the food hub, but nothing has materialised yet.

LOCAL BENEFITS IN RESPONSE TO HUON VALLEY FOOD HUB

During the engagement activities, participants were also asked to identify key opportunities emerging from the prospect of a regional food hub in the Huon Valley.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Huon River and the ocean are assets to be treasured ecologically, socially and economically. These natural features of the Huon Valley also play an important role in Indigenous history and stewardship practices;
- Food literacy could be a key driver, eg. the Bush Telegraph in Dover can create stories about how to grow and cook, cheap cooking classes are available at GeCo, and cooking demonstrations at SeaFest;
- Connections with established support systems/ organisations for those in lower socio economic cohort to find ways to support them with appropriate education and growing opportunities;
- Alignment with other food system organisations catalysing change such as Sprout, EatWell Tasmania and health policies;
- Align activities with Indigenous knowledge and sharing networks such as SETAC;
- The Food Resilience Strategy will be doing some work to map existing projects as well as stakeholder engagement with Huon Valley's agricultural industry representatives;
- Council has a focus on better waste management;
- In addition to a centralised facility, nodes of food hub activities could be set up in satellite locations to ensure accessibility.

Click to view





PRIORITIES & ACTIONS

The following priorities and actions were identified by participants to catalyse the Huon Valley Food Hub. Three options were selected to drive action, and participants were invited to vote for their preferred priority which all address unique leverage points in the system.

It's important to note that any intervention in an existing system does not replicate effort and activity that is already occurring. To that end, participants were asked to identify as many initiatives, infrastructure, resources and assets already existing in Huon Valley. A list of these is detailed in Appendix 1. Following this exercise, participants were then given the opportunity to work in small groups on developing the 'how' to take action under the option of their choice, as detailed below:

OPTION 1

Coordinate food hub activities

Total number of votes: 26

Fund the soft infrastructure required to effectively coordinate key relationships in a values-based supply chain, including:

- Producers and makers
- Information and awareness
- Business advice and mentoring
- Lobbying and policy advocacy

OPTION 2

Create physical food hub infrastructure

Total number of votes: 32

Create a place where the infrastructure for aggregation, marketing and distribution of regional produce and products can be based, including:

- Commercial kitchens
- Processing/ manufacturing equipment/ facilities eg. freeze dryers, dehydration,
- Storage and packing systems
- Cold rooms and freezers
- Trucks and bicycle delivery
- Offices
- Gathering spaces for markets and events
- Visitor parking
- Consider setting up smaller physical nodes with partner organisations.

OPTION 3

Create a regenerative food culture

Total number of votes: 16

Huon Valley can showcase and share its rich and diverse food culture by initiating:

- Harvest food trails
- Food festivals
- Education and awareness campaigns
- School programs
- Activations, pilots and demonstrations
- Regional branding to attract domestic and international tourists

HUON VALLEY COUNCIL FOOD HUB BUSINESS & STRATEGIC PLAN

After the second workshop, where participants voted overwhelmingly for Option 1 and Option 2, the objective of the remaining engagement activities focused on introducing case studies from other regions and business planning. It should be noted that this project ran concurrently with Council's Food Resilience Strategy, as well as a program of incredibly engaging activation events with local food system actors and the broader community.

CASE STUDIES

FOOD CONNECT SHED



Food Connect Shed exists to help create a more equitable, regenerative and healthy food system by providing a platform for ideas to take hold, a home for ethical food entrepreneurs to be able to collaborate, and a place where our community can belong.

Founded in 2018 through an equity crowdfunding campaign, it's the first community-owned local food hub in Australia, with over 530 'careholders' owning a stake in the future of their local food system.

[Click here for more](#)

OPEN ROAD PROJECT



The Open Road was a pilot collaborative logistics service operated by the Open Food Network in partnership with the Victorian State Government running from July 2021 to June 2022.

Over 121 farmers, producers, food hubs and retail stores signed up for the service, which delivered over 1600 orders of fresh local produce along three routes in Victoria.

[Click here for more](#)

BENDIGO FOOD HUB



In 2015, the City of Greater Bendigo undertook a feasibility study to establish a regional food hub in Bendigo. The study found Bendigo and central Victoria would benefit from a food hub and identified potential models of operation to provide food to people in need.

Through the success of the Mission Possible funding campaign, Bendigo Foodshare has raised funds to build a new warehouse.

[Click here for more](#)

The webinar provided insights into various models for food hubs, and noted that planning should take into consideration learnings from other regions to reduce risk and enhance viability. For example, coordination activities need to ensure adequate resources are targeted to effective collaboration among growers, while at the same time, creating consumer demand for local produce. When considering aggregation activities, encourage actors in the value chain to solve last-mile logistics problems, as well as farm to cold room/storage depots across the region. Be innovative in your funding model by looking at blended capital raising methods to increase community ownership. Additionally, expand the scope of coordination to partner with community development agencies and non-profits that provide food security and food literacy programs to redistribute surplus produce.

The third workshop considered questions of governance and business planning, revealing strong support for creating a Food Coalition as an independent advisory body that advises Council on food hub activities and broader food system interventions.

This workshop analysed the broader context of Council's parallel activities engaged in reviewing its regional food and agriculture system, to ensure they were integrated into the business planning process. A report on the missing voices survey and further discussions signalled a strong desire for community participation in future food hub implementation activities. There was widespread agreement that a Food Coalition could provide the right governance structure, through which a food hub action group could apply for funding for local food initiatives and advocate for structural reform.

It was noted that time was short for submitting a plan to the Council's budget process by mid-May. Given this information, milestones were created using a backcasting process with a view to hosting a launch event at the local agriculture show in November 2023.

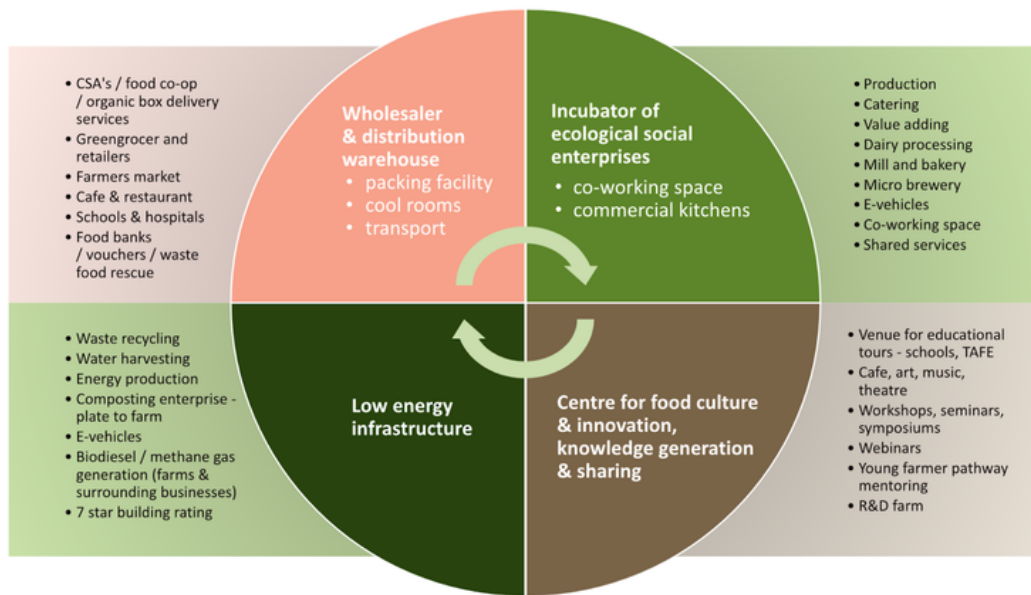


CONCLUSION

Food Connect Foundation’s engagement with the Huon Valley Food Hub project has augmented Huon Valley Council's investigation of its food and agriculture sector over the last few years to create strong community participation and a groundswell of support for the project. In addition to building this social capital, the mapping exercise revealed a number of unique physical assets to leverage storage and distribution of local produce, which confirms the findings of the Huon Valley Logistics Project.

The project also identified a large number of agencies, professionals and community networks enabled to provide their experience and expertise to support the Council in their goals for setting up a food hub model that's fit for purpose in its efforts to transform the region's food and farming systems. In going forward, a business model that incorporates some or many of the elements in the figure below, will address long term viability, while providing opportunities for communities to participate in their food system meaningfully.

The Food Connect Shed model



Finally, the strong case for a regenerative food hub model in the Huon Valley will serve to broaden the movement for local food system transformation across the nation. FCF is currently leading a national food hub replication strategy in partnership with WWF. One outcome of this work will be to initiate a national food hub community of practice, and we strongly encourage the Huon Valley Food Hub to participate in this network, to access open knowledge sharing and build stronger collaborations across the system.

APPENDIX 1

FOOD HUB MAPPING EXERCISE - Existing Assets, Activities, Support

Assets	Assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway both sides of the river • Huon River connects us all • Topography / natural beauty • Unique microclimate / rainfall • Water production abundant - seasonal gaps / variety - foraging, eg. pepperberries • Tradition of caring for each other • Lateral connections because of the small size of the community - structures are more visible • Major industries - apples, blueberries, cherries, salmon, • Small scale olives, market gardens, gourmet mushrooms, saffron 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cygnet cannery • Emergency food relief - state government, churches, community networks • Cattle studs - world class beef • Grove Research Station - heritage apples • Associations - Sprout, Tasmanian Women in Ag, Tasmania Producers Co, CWA, RANT, BDTAS, EatWell Tasmania • Education - Milkwood Permaculture, School Food Matters, 24 Carrot, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden (Geeveston), School Farm Tours • Multi-species fertility clinic - Huonville • 2 x logistics companies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold storage in abundance • Waste - compost in households and hatcheries • Cool burning - James and Jason - SETAC • Bulk nutrients - Judbury • Roadside / Farmgate stalls • Green Shed Huonville • Local produce pop up shop Geeveston • Cygnet Garden Larder • Tasmania Produce Collective - online farmers co-operative (Geeveston pick up) • Supermarkets (Coles, Woollies, IGA) • Cellar doors - cideries / wineries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery - Dave's Seeds • Local producers - goats, pigs, beef, eggs, dairy • Commercial Kitchens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ CWA Cygnet ◦ Glen Huon Hall ◦ Geeveston Community Centre ◦ Polish, Cygnet ◦ Carmel Hall ◦ TAFE - Hospitality training ◦ Woodfired oven at St James School next to community garden • Huon Grain Shed - grow, store, process
What's happening?	What's missing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crop swaps - Kate & Deb • Seed library - Cygnet, Dover, Primary schools • Farmers markets - Cygnet, Southport, Dover, Willie Smiths, Franklin • Market Gardens - Scrubby Hill, Fat Pig Farm, Old Orchard, Gardeners Bay, Ashcraig, Sparrow Food • Biochar - Ranelagh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small scale, community owned renewable energy • Up to date land management - especially fire management • Under development - industrial scale worm composter • Large animal vet • Processing in general • Packaging for transport • Coordination! • Insurance - hard to get cover for WWOOFERS • Affordable land / housing • Appropriate food regulations

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE AND FEEDBACK

As part of each workshop, the Food Connect Foundation distributed a survey link to ensure quality control and to note where things could be improved for future events. Participants were asked to rate the statement that best indicated their views. It should be noted that some participants chose not to complete the survey, so the results are not a complete representation of attendees' views. Additionally, participants were invited to make comments, but this was optional so not all of those who completed forms made comments.

How relevant and helpful was this for your region?	very much neutral not very	94.99% 5% 0.1%
The participatory processes we used were....	useful & relevant neutral inappropriate &/or irrelevant	90% 10% 0%
My understanding of the food and agriculture sector in our region has...	remained the same improved greatly improved	7% 77% 16%
The presenters were...	knowledgeable neutral didn't understand the topic	99.9% 0% 0.1%
The presenters were...	respectful neutral disrespectful	99.9% 0% 0.1%
The length of the workshop was...	appropriate too long too short	95% 0% 5%
I would recommend this event to people in other regions:	yes maybe no	100% 0% 0%
Overall, how satisfied with the workshop were you?	very much neutral not very	99.6% 0.4% 0%

As a group we have more chance of making positive change. That persistent, patient and thoughtful action is the way to create results. That we can all be an inspiration for one another.

Networks, collaboration and targeted publicity are important

I walked away with a strong optimism and a sense that the desire for truly collaborative design was real!

I really enjoyed the 'journey' that Rob took us on through his facilitation of the event. It was clear and helped set up our thinking to include 'relevant factors' and approach the issues with a sense of what is achievable using our local assets.

It was exciting to feel the vibe in the room - to know that this is important to such a range of people and most of all that this connects strongly to the aboriginal community. It was great to listen to a range of ideas, knowledge and understandings. I'm looking forward to what comes next. Oh, and the food - oh the food was A-mazing! Thank you so much!

Passion and commitment from those involved. There's a huge amount of knowledge & experience- the key is how do we unlock some of that knowledge, experience & passion to create a legacy.

The workshop was great but I'm still worried about who is actually going to keep the process on track between workshops so that the next workshop doesn't rehash this one and has sufficient info to make good decisions about what to pursue. It's great that a team is trying to fill this gap but they are busy people who already wear multiple hats in our community.

The mapping showed there were so many things going on that I did not know about