Growing food and density together:

Summary report:
Enabling sustainable urban transformation
through local food production

NOVEMBER 2023

LANDCOM | Creating more affordable
and sustainable communities

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Acknowledgement

Foodscapes in urban areas

Despite urban food production being internationally recognised as a powerful contributor to the wellbeing of residents and urban biodiversity, it is not adequately incorporated into most new urban development in Australia.. Sydney boasts an active local foodscape that can be strengthened and enhanced through strategic engagement food.

Foodscapes connect people, places and environments by the way food is grown, made and consumed.

Grassroots activities can generate a vibrant, inclusive and accessible urban foodscapes, fostering strong attachments to community, place and the local economy. Increasing the amount of productive food spaces in urban areas could enhance environmental sustainability, provide cool spaces to mitigate urban heat, provide accessible seasonal fresh food to the local community, and promote pollinator and plant biodiversity.

The challenge

Green spaces in urban areas are called on to simultaneously deliver many objectives, such as providing outdoor space for activities and play, areas to meet, the provision of public amenities, and of course offering space for urban food opportunities.

To deliver on these often competing priorities a coordinated and strategic approach is required that makes urban foodscapes a core component of urban planning, greening and redevelopment.

Currently NSW does not have a multi-level urban food policy. This has resulted in innovative but ad hoc local government, private and community led initiatives that face barriers in terms of efficiencies, knowledge exchange and upscaling best practice international case studies may help guide NSW to incorporate foodscapes in future urban development.

What we considered

- Comprehensive literature reviews of urban agriculture and urban food policy in Australian and international contexts;
- An observational case study in urban Sydney – which typifies a dense urban environment undergoing renewal;
- 11 key-informant interviews with stakeholders involved in local food production and local food businesses;
- A small pilot survey involving visitors to local markets; and
- Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of existing urban food typologies and the identification of new urban food spaces to inform place-making in the area.

What we learned

Foodscapes connect social wellbeing with sustainable urbanism by bringing people, places and environment together through the food grown, made and consumed.

Local foodscapes encompass a range of activities and spaces such as urban farms, community gardens, roof-top and verge gardens, beekeeping and honey production, local food maker spaces, food based social enterprises, community kitchens, food co-operatives, local food businesses and restaurants, food sharing and food waste initiatives and food-based education and training programs.

Ideally, foodscapes are incorporated into urban development strategies, and include participatory food planning that connects cultural, socio-economic and environmental issues and supports resilient and inclusive local food economies.

Inner-city foodscapes can actively contribute to four key elements of liveable cities: enhancing social wellbeing; creating resilient places; cultivating civic participation and enabling local economies. The research revealed five core values that inform successful urban foodscapes: partnerships, inclusive governance, empowerment, repair and placemaking.

1. Partnerships: Relationships built on reciprocity

Good food partnerships based on reciprocity are essential to thriving urban foodscapes. Many alternative food networks address environmental and social needs by connecting urban consumers with rural farmers to distribute fresh, seasonal and affordable produce that provides a good price for the farmers.

The range of individuals, organisations and agencies connected in food-related activities in this area as well as surrounding communities is vast. Many have strong relationships built on years of working together. Respecting, valuing and strengthening these partnerships and alliances will retain social capital and enhance synergies within the food supply chain and the wider community. Examples include Harvest Hub Sydney and Alfalfa House.

2. Inclusive governance

Participatory planning for urban food systems considers the activity already happening in a community as a starting point. Identifying, engaging with, and supporting established networks includes listening to long-standing local residents and organisations to understand the history of a place. Re-telling these true stories can in turn stimulate the public imagination of how an urban area may be revitalized in terms of its food and environmental traditions, and its place in the larger natural ecology of the city. Citizen-led local projects are intrinsically appealing when people can share common denominator activities like cooking, learning, making and

co-producing tangible products and services as peers. This approach leads residents to think of themselves not only as consumers but contributors or producers. Encouraging active participation requires public infrastructure including spaces for activities accessible to everyone, and enabling institutions such as food policy councils, food business incubators and food 'hubs'. Examples include Harvest Hub Sydney and FoodLab Sydney.

3. Empowerment

Empowering people to create thriving food communities should be a central aim of food policy, planning and development. Food empowerment strategies require planning and support. Spaces, technologies and skills for food production, making, distribution and composting are necessary. Productive food spaces can vary from small verge gardens or shipping containers for mushroom production to larger shared kitchens and urban farms. Food technologies range from the simple provision of seeds and gardening tools, to vertical gardens, hydroponics, community food trucks and community composting schemes. Skills development can be encouraged through peer-to-peer learning, gardening and cooking demonstrations, or more formal vocational training. Examples include Pocket City Farm and Two Good.

4. Repairing

Foodscapes can be reparative by addressing some of the common challenges associated with urban living. Vibrant food spaces boost community relations, health and wellbeing, and contribute to greener and more liveable urban environments. Targeted programs that recognise social diversity and disadvantage are most likely to overcome class and ethnicity barriers and encourage just and diverse community engagement in urban food initiatives incorporating Indigenous

values, especially a sense of responsibility to the land, can underpin successful foodscapes and contribute to a connection with Country. Examples include Yerrabingin South Eveleigh Native Rooftop Farm.

5. Placemaking

Placemaking strengthens connections between people and places through a collaborative process of sharing and can provide immense benefits to people. Drawing on local heritage and community diversity can infuse foodscapes with distinctive character and vitality. Putting food at the centre of placemaking activity requires creativity, vision, resources, knowledge and multi-stakeholder engagement. The generative functions and ecologies of foodscapes can transform abandoned sites, shrinking neighbourhoods and dense urban environments into vibrant places with socially networked communities.

Relevant plans include:

- Sydney Green Grid and Greener Places *https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/projects/sydney-green-grid*
- Resilient Sydney (2018) *https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/governance-decision-making/resilient-sydney*
- Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan (2017) *https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/strategies-action-plans/urban-ecology-strategic-action-plan*

We strongly recommend the development of a cohesive urban food strategy that incorporates the five principles above to provide guidance for developers, communities and local governments interested in building upon and expanding existing initiatives to generate more dynamic and liveable urban foodscapes in diverse urban contexts.

Key opportunities

1. Make better and more direct connections between urban food and placemaking as a key contributor to urban greening, wellbeing and resilience in urban transformation.

2. Build upon the networks and activities of existing food producers, makers, sellers and educators to create a local food council to support urban renewal, placemaking and the development of an inclusive food policy.

3. Seek opportunities to engage with Aboriginal people, values and places in ways that can connect with and care for Country through food.

4. Recognise and support the diversity of local food projects and initiatives and the capacity of these to encourage civic participation in urban greening and sustainability.

5. Map and support the local 'food learningscape', the places where residents receive formal and informal knowledge and/or training with respect to the food system as a key engagement strategy.

6. Recognise and nurture the importance of food in strengthening the identities and economies of local communities through sharing responsive and innovative places of food production, distribution and processing.

7. Develop multifunctional urban forms that promote community building, liveable environments, resilient green infrastructure and urban biodiversity.

8. Enable context-specific urban agriculture typologies and a local food production network connecting food activities, access and public open spaces along potential green corridors and extending beyond the local area to city and regional scales.

9. Design street verges and footpaths as socially interactive and food productive places.

10. Articulate food production on building facades as vertical walls and balconies in designing active and living frontages.

11. Create a movement framework that supports linkages to local food growing gardens and food distribution places within a walkable catchment area.

12. Establish a self-sufficient and closed loop complete food system connecting the precincts and surrounding areas.

Local case studies

Redfern to Eveleigh

Density and land use: high density and mixed use

Design considerations: Organic and Specialised Farmers Market integrating Carriageworks Market and North Eveleigh and Redfern Station surroundings.

Redfern Station and its surroundings enables important connectivity through a rooftop productive food boulevard.

South Eveleigh provides rooftop and ground level food growing options.

Food production typologies: rooftop community garden, edible streetscapes, small vegetable and fruit garden and balcony and container gardening in high density apartments.

Food distribution and processing: community kitchens; farmers markets, food-oriented social enterprises, specialised and fresh food retail outlets and eating out places.

Waterloo Estate

Design considerations and food typologies: Food oriented high density neighbourhood with community and balcony gardens, edible landscapes, vertical gardens and productive streets and connect to facilities at Redfern to Eveleigh and Central Station and surrounding areas.

Central Station & surroundings

Density and land use: High density and mixed use

Design considerations: Urban Agricultural Village designed with hi-tech options, social networking opportunities, multifunctional and pedestrian friendly spaces and as a food heritage and tourist destination.

Food production typologies: rooftop community garden, small roof top urban farm, edible streetscapes, vertical gardens, small vegetable and fruit garden and balcony and container gardening in high density apartments.

Food distribution and processing: community kitchens; farmers markets and groceries, organic and fresh food retail outlets, experiential dining choices, new social enterprises, farming organisations and organic and heirloom seed banks.

Education and training: horticulture training, farming workshops, cooking classes, food festivals and food history and urban agricultural village tours.

Leading through convening in FoodLab, Sydney

The City of Sydney's support of a university-led food business incubator provides an innovative example of institutional and community cooperation to promote the social, cultural and economic participation of local residents in their communities. In 2018 the City of Sydney launched FoodLab Sydney in partnership with University of Sydney, TAFE NSW and FoodLab Detroit. Combining formal hospitality training with business and entrepreneurship training, and connecting program participants with a supportive network of over 300 food enterprises and mentors, FoodLab Sydney is a unique example of local governmentcommunity-university partnership. By "combining the agenda-setting of city policy with attention to the need for an associated 'food security' from below approach" (Elkharouf et al., 2021, p.10-11), this initiative demonstrates how to effectively support the capabilities of local residents to participate in food systems change, on their own terms.

International case studies

San Francisco and New York

San Francisco's mayor issued an executive directive committing all relevant municipal departments to improve urban food systems in 2009. Highlights since then include the expansion of food production spaces; establishment of resources for residents to access garden supplies, training, and support networks; and improvements in city ordinances to allow, regulate and support urban foodscapes. In New York, food metrics are recorded annually to measure progress of the city's food system goals. These include – percentage of school food procured from local, regional and sustainable source; farmers markets; fresh produce retail outlets; and the number of mobile fresh-produce carts serving low income neighbourhoods. Also noteworthy is their long-term monitoring of average fruit/vegetable and sugary drink consumption to assess the evolution of food habits over time; and a commitment to zero food waste going to landfills by 2030.

Singapore

Authorities in Singapore have come up with creative means of addressing high density living, land scarcity and food security. Its 'Landscaping for Urban Spaces and HighRises' policy (LUSH) requires developers to replace green spaces lost through development by incorporating green spaces into their buildings. This can include roof gardens, green walls, sky terraces, and communal planter boxes, creating community spaces while adding 60 hectares of high-rise greenery to the city. The 'Community in Bloom' program has engaged 20,000 residents with urban food production and inspired over 1,000 community gardens. Authorities have also invested in high-tech food innovations, such as Sky Greens, which uses hydroponic techniques and vertical gardening to bolster commercial food producing businesses in dense urban spaces.

Ghent and Rotterdam

Ghent, Belgium was one of the first European cities to have a Food Policy Council in which the city convened stakeholders involving government, civil society organisations and the private sector. The Council identified multiple targets for food system interventions include climate change mitigation and adaptation, health, poverty, employment, health and food waste. The Rotterdam Food Cluster in the Netherlands is comprised of companies, education institutions, local governments and residents. It provides a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, investments, and innovation for food entrepreneurs across the food value chain.

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