

ARTISAN AGRICULTURE PROJECT

Unlocking the Gate



Hepburn
SHIRE COUNCIL

Acknowledgement of Country

Hepburn Shire Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work. On these lands, Djaara have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We recognise their resilience through dispossession and it is a testament to their continuing culture and tradition, which is strong and thriving.

We also acknowledge the neighbouring Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri to our south east and the Wadawurrung to our south west and pay our respect to all Aboriginal peoples, their culture and lore. We acknowledge their living culture and the unique role they play in the life of this region.

Funder

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Project partners

We would like to thank key participants in the project, including:

- Agriculture Victoria
- Regional Development Victoria
- Central Highlands Regional Partnership
- Project Advisory Group members
- Hepburn Shire Council Councillors, Executive and project team.

Enquiries

For enquiries about this report, contact:
business@hepburn.vic.gov.au.

Disclaimer

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Executive summary

The pilot Artisan Agriculture Project has been successful in delivering a more capable, connected and collaborative artisan agriculture sector across the Central Highlands region of Victoria.

The concept for this project originated during the Central Highlands Regional Assemblies held by Central Highlands Regional Partnership (CHRP). The project was developed by Hepburn Shire Council in collaboration with Agriculture Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, CHRP and local producers.

Activities and pathways that were developed to overcome or reduce these barriers were heavily influenced by the region's producers through a Project Advisory Group that operated for the life of the project and made a significant contribution to its success.

Key achievements during the project were:

- delivering 15 events to 432 participants
- making webinars available online after the initial event, attracting 1452 online views
- awarding \$34,000 in grants to 18 artisan agriculturalists
- providing individual professional mentoring support to 29 artisan producers and growers
- establishing an online food hub for the region (Central Highlands Growers Collective)

Executive summary

- producing a roadmap to a physical hub business plan
- connecting regulators with producers to share understanding of the sector's unique challenges
- collating a database of 370+ artisan producers and related stakeholders in the region
- producing 40 social media posts to increase project/issue awareness
- developing a repository of marketing materials, including imagery, to use in future promotions/initiatives for the sector
- conducting and disseminating 6 'Meet the Maker' interviews with local artisan producers
- meeting project goals despite major disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the significant challenges faced in establishing and implementing the project during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project goals were met. The team demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness – adjusting programs, moving key activities online where necessary, and continuing to maintain and grow contacts by other means.

A range of events and programs sought to address the barriers facing producers and growers and attracted a high number of participants. Ongoing advocacy raised the sector's profile within local and state governments and related authorities, as did a presentation at the Australian Regional Tourism Conference 2022. Also, a database of producers and stakeholders provides the foundations for ongoing activities and advocacy for the sector.

The success of the project highlights the importance of an integrated approach, which was underpinned by a broad level of engagement – from producers, growers, small-scale farmers, regulators, local councils and state government – experienced throughout the program. This resulted in a higher profile for the sector and greater understanding of the challenges it faces.

The barriers highlighted in this report inspire a call to action at both state and local government levels to invest in small-scale farmers and producers, and assist them to better navigate governance systems. The goal is to ensure that artisan agriculture continues to grow into a thriving, sustainable and capable sector, contributing to Victoria's food security and regional economies.





1

About artisan agriculture



Artisan agriculture encompasses the production of high value produce or premium food on a small scale or by specialised techniques, and with a clearly identified provenance. It creates a connection between the consumer and producer that allows customers to experience the authenticity and story of the product, in a way that provides direct value to both the producer and the consumer.

Recent events such as the impacts of severe weather systems and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed vulnerabilities in food supply Australia-wide. During the pandemic, community members turned to their local producers to fill the disruptions experienced by national food chains, underpinning the importance of artisan agriculture to communities.



2

Background to the project

Central Highlands is one of Victoria's important food bowls. It has an increasing number of food producers and processors operating at a small scale, using low impact farming methods or processing food using artisan techniques.

These artisan producers make an important contribution to the regional economy, with Agriculture Victoria estimating that premium producers account for at least 16 per cent (\$156 million) of agricultural production in the Central Highlands and up to 25 per cent (\$251 million), depending on farming practices.¹ The real value is likely to be higher, as smaller businesses are often not captured in Census data.

Despite this significant impact, there are a range of barriers that are preventing the sector from meeting its full potential. Competing land use pressures, complex regulatory frameworks and challenges accessing finance, value-adding infrastructure and appropriate business services are limiting opportunities for artisan producers to expand as a sector.

The pilot Artisan Agriculture Project originated from the Central Highlands Regional Assemblies. It was developed by Hepburn Shire Council in collaboration with Agriculture Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, Central Highlands Regional Partnership and local artisan producers as the outcome of a comprehensive business case that identified a range of barriers preventing the sector from meeting its full potential.

In October 2019, Hepburn Shire successfully applied for and received \$570,000 funding through Agriculture Victoria for a three-year project. Hepburn Shire Council committed further cash and in-kind support to the value of \$90,000.

The project focused on the six local government areas that make up Central Highlands: Ararat Rural City Council, City of Ballarat, Golden Plains Shire Council, Hepburn Shire Council, Moorabool Shire Council and Pyrenees Shire Council.

The project was announced by Mary-Anne Thomas MP, Cabinet Secretary and state Member for Macedon, in October 2019. It commenced in February 2020, with the appointment of an Artisan Agriculture Facilitation Specialist (Sharon Hebbard, Hepburn Shire Council) to lead activity.

The Artisan Agriculture Project was conducted by Hepburn Shire Council over a three-year period from February 2020 until February 2023.

¹ Agriculture Victoria, 2018. *Growing Victoria's artisanal agriculture and food sector*





3

Aims and objectives



The goal for the pilot Artisan Agriculture Project was to find ways to support a more independent, less constrained and more collaborative artisan agriculture sector in the Central Highlands region, with an invigorated level of production and profitability.

The Victorian Government's Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions set the following aims and objectives for the project:

Aims: To build the capability and capacity of the sector to overcome residual and emerging barriers, and to take advantage of new opportunities that present themselves after the project conclusion.

Objective 1: Design interventions and pathways that build the capability and capacity of the artisan producers and their service providers that are needed to mitigate the barriers identified in the business case.

Objective 2: Implement agreed interventions and pathways with artisan producers and their service providers that are needed to mitigate the barriers identified in the business case.

Objective 3: Draft recommendations for growing the artisan agriculture sector in other regions based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions applied in Central Highlands.

Objective 4: Manage the project to deliver on time and within budget to an acceptable standard and with appropriate governance.

The pilot Artisan Agriculture Project links to the Hepburn Shire Council Plan 2021–2025 across the following pillars:

A resilient, sustainable and protected environment

1.3 Transition to ecologically sustainable and accountable tourism.

Diverse economy and opportunities

4.3 Support and facilitate a diverse and innovative local economy that encourages an increase of local businesses with a diverse offering.

4.4 Develop and promote the circular economy to diversify our local economy and support our sustainability goals.

A dynamic and responsive Council

5.2 Actively communicate, inform, and engage with our community about events and decision-making.



4

Six barriers

Detailed analysis of the sector, outlined in the business case conducted prior to the project commencing, identified six main barriers to growth for artisan producers and growers:

1. Inappropriate business services
2. Limited access to shared markets (distribution channels)
3. Limited access to shared infrastructure (processing plant and other equipment)
4. Scale inappropriate food regulations
5. Limited access to grants and finance to scale up
6. Competing land use pressures, cost of land including planning regulations are a barrier to entry.



Janae Paquin-Bowden **Fleurs de Lyonville** Project Advisory Group member

Fleurs de Lyonville is a micro flower farm that grows a large variety of flowers, from natives through to cottage styled seasonal flowers, all chemical-free.

We identified a significant gap in the market for local fresh cut flowers and so, in 2016, Fleurs de Lyonville was born. Our range of seasonal flowers includes dahlias, lupins, snapdragons, billy buttons, waratahs and sunflowers. We sell wholesale to florists and local grocers, but it's mostly retail, including farmers markets.

We also hold a variety of workshops and tours throughout the year. These include monthly farm tours during our growing season from November to March, where guests make an arrangement to take home, and in winter we offer wreath making and dahlia workshops.

Joining the PAG allowed me to learn from other farmers and network, and to provide a voice of the flower industry to government.





5

Project Advisory Group

A Project Advisory Group (PAG) was established to provide advice on industry trends, issues faced and specialist knowledge that would increase the project team's awareness of the artisan agriculture sector.

In March 2020, the Project Terms of Reference were published and Expressions of Interest were invited.

Experienced representatives from the region's livestock, nursery, horticulture and food manufacturing sectors, along with representatives from Regional Development Victoria and Agriculture Victoria, were appointed to the PAG.

PAG meetings, chaired by Hepburn Shire Council, were a valuable source of information. Fifteen meetings took place over the course of the project, with some meetings held online due to COVID restrictions.

Project Advisory Group

PAG members were responsible for:

- supporting and assisting with researching, consultations and validations of the agreed barriers
- helping promote a shared knowledge, understanding and awareness of the sector
- providing advice on the issues and concerns of industry and recommending ways forward
- assisting with testing the proposed activities with key stakeholders and industry
- assisting with evaluating the impact of the strategies.

Interventions and pathways were consistently workshopped with the PAG, exploring a range of options for building knowledge, awareness, skill and engagement in the sector.

The PAG members were:

- Natalie Hardy: Brookland Free Range Farms, Blampied
- Danny Kinnear: Danny's Farm, Blampied
- Sophia Christoe: Open Food Network (formerly at Holy Goat Cheese/VFMA)
- Tammi Jonas: Jonai Farm, Eganstown (until March 2021)
- Carmel Masterson: Springmount Fine Foods, Blampied

- Darren Rose: Two Good Acres, Newlyn North
- Peter Monea: Morningswood Farm, Eganstown (from September 2021)
- Janae Paquin-Bowden: Fleurs de Lyonville, Lyonville (from September 2021)
- Ben Wills: Forest Hill Farm, Newlyn (from September 2021)
- Richard Bales: Investment and Trade Specialist – Food and Fibre, Grampians Region, Regional Development Victoria

- Angela Clough: Regional Leader Grampians, Agriculture Victoria
- Andrew Burgess, former Manager Economic Development and Recreation; Kendall Sinclair, Manager Economic Development and Recreation; Sharon Hebbard, Artisan Agriculture Facilitation Specialist; Rebecca Pedretti, former Coordinator Economic Development; Hugh Fitzpatrick, Coordinator Economic Development and Visitor Economy: Hepburn Shire Council.



Peter Monea Morningswood Farm Project Advisory Group member

Morningswood Farm is an organic berry farm, providing a genuine paddock to punnet experience. Open for strawberry picking, the property also has an onsite shop.

Sustainability is at the core of our business and how we farm. We strive to implement organic, regenerative practices through the majority of our processes. We don't use any fungi, herbi or pesticides at our farm and we don't plan to start.

Our focus is on our 'U Pick' organic berries, particularly strawberries. We have blackberries, raspberries, tayberries, boysenberries and youngberries that we pre-pick and supply to local restaurants. We also offer a range of jams and preserves, as well as honey and various handmade items.

Being a PAG member enabled me to gain insights into the wider agriculture sector and provide feedback to the project to better support our local producers.



6

Surveys and information gathering

In December 2020, the project team undertook an initial pulse survey of producers and farmers to help gather baseline data and change information. Results offered a deeper understanding of what the sector does, including sales platforms used, demographics, farming practices and factors affecting growth.

The survey revealed that:

- farmers markets and selling to local retailers provide the largest revenue for farmers, with some expanding to online sales
- 27 per cent of producers farm on land less than five hectares
- the region has an increasing number of younger farmers
- just over 80 per cent of respondents are in the new entrant, transition or growth phase, with 20 per cent of new entrants indicating a growing appetite for smaller business structure
- 38 per cent of farms employ between one and three people, with no farm having more than 15 employees
- 50 per cent of farmers and producers value add on their land (for example, turn milk into cheese).



Carmel Masterson
Springmount Fine Foods
 Project Advisory Group member

Springmount Fine Foods creates a range of gourmet products that use the freshest garlic grown on their property, along with premium ingredients sourced from local farmers.

We always dreamed of making a living from our land in Daylesford. A TV cooking show piqued my interest in black garlic, and we started out in 2015. Today black garlic and black garlic drizzle make up 30% of our sales, and we also have a range of garlic vinaigrettes, sauces and fruit pastes. Customers like to connect with the story of the product and the makers. They want to know if a product is grown sustainably and ethically.

Becoming part of the PAG was a huge opportunity for us to learn from others and contribute to the wider artisan agriculture community. We love to share our knowledge with people who are just starting out. It's very rewarding.

The majority of farmers and producers said they would be investing and value-adding in the near future, indicating the strength of the sector at the time. However, they identified a number of barriers that exist for small-scale farmers and producers, which provided a basis for activities during this project.

This survey provided an excellent overview of the local artisan agriculture sector and its characteristics in the region.

Targeted surveys were also conducted:

- to inform development of a physical hub, PAG members (November 2021)
- to inform development of a physical hub, stakeholders and workshop attendees (March 2022)
- to update pulse survey information and inform Agriculture Victoria planning workshop, growers and producers (June 2022).

Information was also gathered through:

- connection to attendees at online and in-person events
- regular PAG meetings
- regular (and ongoing) engagement with producers and growers across the Central Highlands region.



Natalie Hardy
Brookland Free Range Farms
 Project Advisory Group member

Brookland Free Range Farms is an award-winning regenerative farming enterprise that focuses on rare breeds – British White Cattle, Berkshire Pigs and Finnsheep.

In 2007 we purchased a 20-acre property in Springmount and we're now farming 146 acres in Blampied. We provide regeneratively farmed beef and pork products that are healthy for soils, animals and eaters. We have a heavy focus on animal welfare and building our soils naturally. We use the whole animal, so there's minimal wastage. When we go to farmers markets and share our story, people really want to know how we farm and why we do what we do.

Through being part of the PAG, we communicated our learnings, struggles and achievements to help others, and helped make governments more aware of the importance of small-scale farming. Our sector is pivotal to a more reliable and sustainable food chain supply.

Pulse survey results 2021 summary

6

Surveys and information gathering

Aim of survey

Provide a voice of growers and producers and understand the current conditions of the sector.

79 respondents

Results were collected between November 2020 and January 2021

ARTISAN PRODUCERS ARE DIVERSE

- Flower growers
- Fruit, vegetables
- Wine, beer, cider
- Bees
- Dairy
- Poultry, eggs
- Pigs
- Sheep, lambs, wool
- Beef
- Value adders (cheese)

LARGER FARMS PRODUCE

- Potatoes
- Grain, cropping
- Hay, silage
- Eggs
- Poultry
- Sheep
- Lambs
- Wool
- Beef
- Dairy

Top 5 distribution channels

- Local retailers
- Online sales
- Direct to local restaurants
- Farm gate
- Family and friends

Average age of farmers
46-55 (34.4%)

- 26-35 (17%)
- 36-45 (12.5%)
- 56-65 (28%)
- >65 (8%)

Production practices

44%

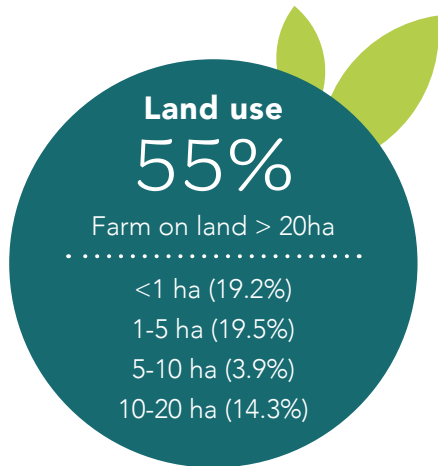
- Regenerative farming
- 33% Agroecology
- 32% Intensive
- 24% Pastured

Surveys and information gathering

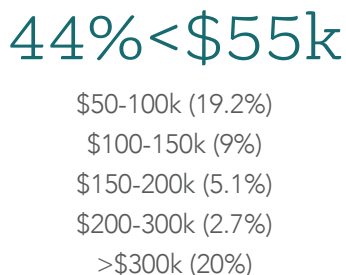


Investing in...

- More land new/leased
- Increase stock
- Shelter belts (trees)
- Shedding
- Compost equipment
- Tractors
- Wages
- Equipment
- Irrigation
- Regenerative equipment
- Solar panels



Annual turnover
(2019-20)



Main farm activities

- 50% Food/beverage retail sales**
- 42% Food/beverage production**
- Contracting services (24%)
- Education (23%)
- Consulting (15%)
- Agritourism (21%)
- Transport/logistics (15%)
- Accommodation (20%)

Challenges to growth

Costs and planning restrictions (48%)

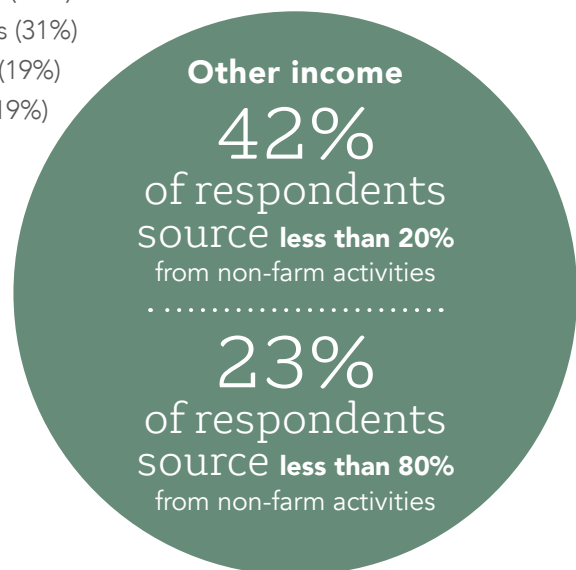
- Limited finance/government assistance (31%)
- Scale inappropriate for food regulations (31%)
- Competing land use with neighbours (19%)
- Access to food processing facilities (19%)



Networks

43% belong to local Landcare groups

- Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (27%)
- Victorian Farmers' Markets Association (23%)
- Daylesford Macedon Tourism (14%)





7

Project activities

The project delivered a broad range of activities to address the barriers faced by artisan agriculture growers and producers. The goal was to build their networks, skills and knowledge and to influence stakeholders who impact on artisan businesses.

7.1 Addressing Barrier 1: Inappropriate business services

EVENTS

Webinar: Social Media Tips and Tricks

6 November 2020 / Attendees: 24

How to improve marketing by growing and elevating the social media presence of a business.

Webinar: Smart Phone Food and Farm Photography

6 November 2020 / Attendees: 23

Ways to significantly improve the look and feel of Facebook and Instagram photography.

Webinar: Farmers and Foodies Together: how communities are working together to build strong regional food distribution

9 November 2020 / Attendees: 15

How farmers and communities can work together to create new food distribution models.

Project activities

Webinar: Regenerative Farming

16 November 2020 / Attendees: 28

Regenerative approaches in farming on large scale and small lifestyle/artisan agricultural properties.

Webinar: Co-Operatives 101

25 November 2020 / Attendees: 10

Opportunities available in forming co-operatives for the small farm sector.

Webinar: Collaborative logistics

30 November 2020 / Attendees: 22

How farmers and local food enterprises can work together to share the cost of logistics and infrastructure.

New Aspiring Farmers' Forum & Farm Walk (Trentham)

24 April 2021

In-person attendees: 20

Online views: 131

Implementing key elements of financial management for business, and sharing producer insights.

"It was wonderful to hear from inspirational new farmers in the community who provided perspective, advice and opportunities for collaboration. A well-conducted event all round. I look forward to the next one!"

Aspiring goat farmer

Regenerative Farming Chat & Farm Walk (Blampied)

17 May 2021

In-person attendees: 39

Online views: 109

Regenerative agriculture, approaches that are agreed to be 'regenerative' and an update on industry trends.

Webinar: Opportunities and realities of agritourism for the small-scale artisan agriculture sector

3 November 2021 / Attendees: 29

Page views: 110

Opportunities agritourism presents to small-scale farmers and producers; realities of working in the visitor economy.

Artisan Agriculture Project End of Year Celebration 2021 (Musk)

2 December 2021

In-person attendees: 30

Page views: 246

A morning of local food, cider tasting and networking, with industry guest speakers and a project update.



Danny Kinnear

Danny's Farm

Project Advisory Group member

Danny's Farm is a small-scale regenerative farm that produces sustainably grown food using organic and permaculture techniques.

After gaining a degree in English and Psychology, I travelled through Europe WWOOFing on organic properties and discovered that farming and working with food was my passion.*

At 24, I leased five acres and started farming. Today I own 23 acres at Blampied. As well as seasonal heritage vegetables, we have a diverse fruit and nut orchard. Our farm is also home to a small herd of cattle, a small flock of chickens, ducks and alpacas, and two dogs. We sell our farm-baked produce at local farmers markets.

I jumped at the chance to join the PAG so that I could advocate for young farmers and work with a really inspirational group of local producers.

* World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms

Project activities

Webinar: Contemporary marketing in a changing environment

9 May 2022 / Attendees: 9

Page views: 117

How marketing affects businesses, products and customers; client profiles and new sales channels.

End of Project Event

23 February 2023 / Attendees: 50

Guest speakers and producers came together to network and celebrate the project's achievements.

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Farmers and producers were in regular contact with the project manager through webinars, one on one meetings and phone calls. Requests range from simple business advice to more complex questions on planning and food regulation, with the project continuing to provide a conduit for the small-scale sector to access crucial information to support their businesses.

"The support, guidance and knowledge provided was instrumental to the success of our first 'pick your own' season. Sharon advised and connected us with experts on things like water management, plant health, grants, regulations and everything in between."

Morningswood Farm (Eganstown)

"It's been enormously helpful having specialised knowledge and understanding of the challenges of farming here. Sharon facilitated a range of supports, including marketing, financial management, connections with DELWP, links to other farmers and to funding."

Dreaming Goat Dairy (Drummond)

"The mentoring sessions were timely for where our business is at in its development stage. The one-on-one time was extremely valuable. My business partner and I immediately began using the techniques we learned and found it to be very beneficial."

Tumpinyeri Growers (Eganstown)

MENTORING

In 2021, one-on-one mentorship sessions were provided to 29 artisan producers to help them build business skills in their chosen area. Facilitated by Council's Small Business Mentoring Service, participants received one free facilitated mentoring session of up to 90 minutes. The sessions were designed to work with producers and growers to increase their knowledge and provide mentoring on relevant subjects. Support resources were also provided.

Mentors were available to assist businesses with:

- increasing marketing and business planning skills
- helping business owners set objectives and direction
- improving motivation and confidence
- increasing sales and profits
- bringing fresh thinking and identification of new opportunities
- helping resolve time management issues.

7.2 Addressing Barrier 2: Limited access to shared markets (distribution channels) and Barrier 3: Limited access to shared markets (processing plant and other equipment)

EVENT

Hepburn Food and Produce Hub Community Workshop

30 March 2022 / Attendees: 25

Page views: 58

Bringing producers, customers, funders and partners together to explore further opportunity for a physical food hub and what this may look like.

Recommendations resulting from the workshop were:

- the community could lead and deliver a physical food hub
- set up governance structures to enable progress
- focus on the defined minimum viable product
- confirm existing and leverage new funding
- scope sites in Daylesford
- establish a Central Highlands food hub network.

Project activities

A consultant was appointed to develop a roadmap for a business plan to develop a physical food hub.

To move the food hub concept forward, further work and government funding is required beyond the Artisan Agriculture Project.

ONLINE FOOD HUB

In late 2022, the project established the Central Highlands Growers Collective, an online hub that will:

- give customers the ability to connect with farmers and producers, and buy online
- allow wholesalers, restaurants and other distributors to find products they need
- connect farmers with jobseekers to create a casual/contracting pool of seasonal employees
- provide opportunities for sharing information, knowledge and expertise
- facilitate sharing of equipment and tools.

The hub is in its early stages with 15 growers and producers and 9 farmers markets listed (March 2023). Business development activity is being carried out and a communications plan is being implemented. An engagement strategy with Councils across the region and other stakeholders is underway. In early 2023 an expansion phase will commence, providing a platform for growers to showcase their products to customers.

7.3 Addressing Barrier 4: Scale inappropriate food regulations and Barrier 5: Limited access to grants and finance to scale up

EVENTS

Webinar: Grants 101

10 November 2022 / Attendees: 22
Page views: 65

Where to find grant opportunities, best practice grant writing and top tips for winning grants.

"Big thanks for the grants webinar. It was useful in honing our strategy in this area. It's inspiring to have a council so proactive in supporting artisan agriculture."

Dreaming Goat Dairy (Drummond)

Reducing the Regulatory Burden Forum

7 September 2022 / Attendees: 27
Page views: 296

Speakers from Agriculture Victoria, PrimeSafe, Department of Health and Dairy Food Safety Victoria gave updates on food regulations.

One of the barriers this project worked on is finding ways to improve access for a more scale-appropriate food regulatory framework. This event provided a valuable platform for candid conversations between local producers, Council environmental health staff and key regulators.



Darren Rose Two Good Acres, Newlyn North Project Advisory Group member

Two Good Acres is a bio-regenerative farm that grows varietal garlic, carrots, beets, parsnips, radishes, chard and rhubarb, selling through a range of local farmers markets.

Garlic is an amazing product. I've been growing garlic for more than 35 years and have a passion for it. Currently, I grow 12 different varieties as well as vegetables and seasonal fruits and nuts. In the future, we're planning to also provide seasonal flowers to the local market.

Small-scale farmers face quite a few challenges. This project has been great at highlighting those challenges and offering practical workshops to help overcome them. I joined the PAG to open conversations on how planning can be better aligned to support small-scale agriculture and help newcomers to enter the market. Government recognition of this sector sends a message that we're important, and that's a very positive outcome.

Project activities

SMALL-SCALE ARTISAN AGRICULTURE GRANTS PROGRAM

In November 2022, 18 grants were provided to small-scale producers/growers to assist with:

- business development activities
- professional development and training
- strengthening the online presence of the business
- increasing market distribution channels
- equipment upgrades or purchases that contribute to product growth or efficiency.

Grant payments funded up to 80 per cent of a total project, with a maximum contribution of \$2000 (excluding GST).

The following Central Highlands businesses were successful in their grant applications:

- Pennyweight Farm
- The Cottage Herbalist
- Fleurs de Lyonville
- Capell Farm
- Passing Clouds
- The Happy Winemaker
- Black and Ginger Winery
- Two Good Acres
- Truffle Treasures

- Essential Alignment
- Morningswood Farm
- Mafic Winery
- Springmount Fine Foods
- Forest Hill Farm
- Guildford Vineyard & Cellar
- Audrey's Flowers
- Tumpinyeri Growers
- Mt Franklin Organics.

Addressing Barrier 6: Competing land use pressures, cost of land including planning regulations are a barrier to entry

EVENT

Land Use Planning Forum for Agriculture: Farmer and producer session

8 June 2022 / 2 sessions

Session 1:
Attendees: 37 / Page views: 203

Session 2:
Attendees 22 / Page views: 117

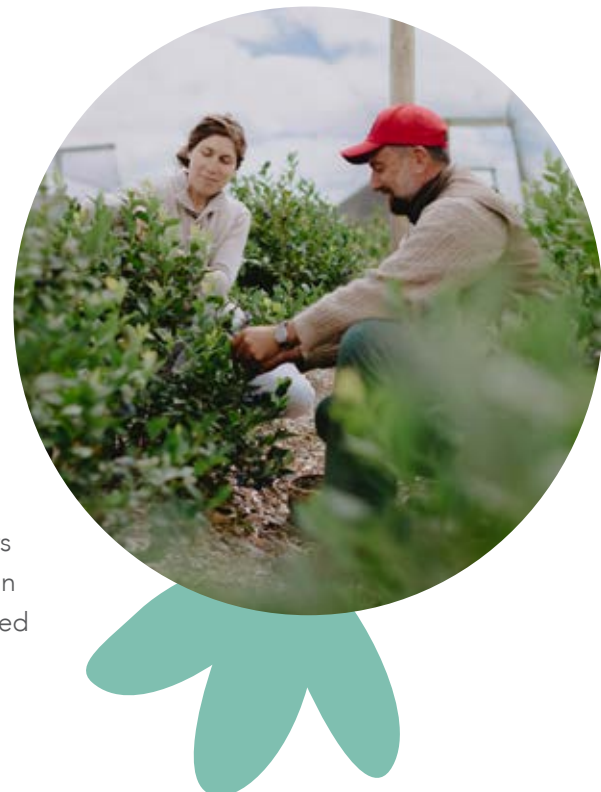
Opportunity for small scale producers to raise concerns about regulatory approvals for their businesses.

The goal was to capture their areas of concern to help inform and drive reform to overcome the identified barriers. Presenters discussed land use planning in an agricultural setting and introduced

the Agriculture Victoria Planning and Advisory Service and available resources. Post-forum, Agriculture Victoria's Planning and Advisory Service received a significant increase in referrals.

POST-PROJECT COUNCIL ACTION

Hepburn Shire Council has committed to undertake an Agriculture and Land Management Use Strategy in 2023 that will involve extensive community consultation. Council is committed to agriculture and this project provided a valuable voice for the artisan sector to aid development of the Agriculture and Land Management Use Strategy. The Artisan Agriculture project team and economic development staff continue to work collaboratively with the planning team on the issues arising from the project.





8

Consultation and communication

Despite restrictions resulting from the pandemic, the project encompassed broad and continuous consultation with a diverse range of farmers and producers across the region (online and in person when possible).

The project also involved consultation and communication with the broader community, education sector, utilities providers, financial services and with government representatives including Agriculture Victoria’s Planning and Advisory Service,

Small Scale Program Team and Export Ready Team; Central Highlands Councils’ economic development team members; and agribusiness officers from Councils across the region who met regularly for updates and opportunities to share insights.

All project events were widely publicised through the project/ Hepburn Shire Council website project page, EDMs, media releases, newspaper advertising, Council e-newsletters and social media. A series of informative Meet the Maker interviews with local farmers and producers were posted to social media and available on the Hepburn Shire Council website.

In addition, Council Briefings were provided twice yearly to report on progress, and quarterly and milestone reports were submitted to Agriculture Victoria.

Ben Wills
Forest Hill Farm
Project Advisory Group member



Forest Hill Farm produces blueberries, blackberries and garlic for sale at local farmers markets. Using regenerative farming practices, they work to improve the health and biodiversity of the land.

In 2016 my partner and I bought five acres of farming land in the Central Highlands. We were drawn to the region due to its cool climate, volcanic soils and access to water. Currently we produce garlic and berries, but we’re also developing capacity in mixed veg and flowers. Sustainability is important to us. We focus on mostly organic practices and our long-term aim is to be no or minimal till.

The role of small-scale farms in supporting sustainable food systems is an area I’ve worked in for many years. I feel that Australia has lagged in terms of government support for localised food systems. This project provided a terrific opportunity to shine a light on our sector.



Consultation and communication

Professional stakeholders

Throughout the project, advice and input was provided by the following:

Artisan agriculturalists

259 producers, growers and aspiring farmers

Industry/professional advisors

Baw Baw Food Hub

Cardinia Food Circles

Healthy Futures Australia – SHIFT

NAB Agribusiness

Open Food Network

Prom Coast Food Collective

Rural Bank

Sustain: The Australian Food Network

The Loddon Food Shed

Victorian Government and regulators

Agriculture Victoria

(including Agriculture Victoria Planning and Advisory Service, Small Scale Program Team and Export Ready Team)

Dairy Food Safety Victoria

Department of Health

Goulburn Murray Water

North Central Catchment Management

PrimeSafe

Local government

Ararat Rural City Council

Buloke Shire Council

City of Ballarat

City of Darebin

City of Greater Bendigo

City of Whittlesea

Golden Plains Shire Council

Hepburn Shire Council

Loddon Shire Council

Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Mildura Rural City Council

Moorabool Shire Council

Mornington Peninsula Shire

Mount Alexander Shire Council

Nillumbik Shire Council

Pyrenees Shire Council

Hepburn businesses

- Restaurants
- Cafes
- Food stores
- Tourism operators
- Markets



Sophia Christoe Open Food Network (formerly Holy Goat Cheese/VFMA) Project Advisory Group member

At university, I explored how short supply chains – where farmers, growers and eaters are more connected – have greater resilience and more ecological benefits than longer supply chains. That really informed my career path. I've organised and been a stall holder at farmers markets and was Secretary of the Victorian Farmers' Markets Association from 2017-2021.

I now work at the Open Food Network as a food systems project manager, working with communities that want to increase the resilience of their regional food economy through shorter, values-based supply chains.

Today, people are looking for greater transparency and meaning in their food choices. Building a food relationship based on trust results in a longer term and resilient social bond when compared with one that's mainly influenced by price or convenience.

One of my goals in joining the PAG was to make sure young people with limited pathways into farming are factored into government decision making. It's all about enabling our next generation of farmers.



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Governance

Throughout the project, governance was monitored to ensure compliance with agreed objectives. The PAG was overseen by Council, with regular reporting to the Executive team and Councillors.

Hepburn Shire Council uses a proven methodology to guide design and implementation of all services, projects and programs. Strong project management capabilities were supported by established Council policies and procedures, including conflict of interest management, risk management, grant management and Council's Community Engagement Strategy.





10

Key achievements

The project delivered a range of achievements that will benefit the sector and the Central Highlands region as a whole.

Delivering 15 events to 432 participants

These events attracted significant interest and a high level of engagement, despite restrictions due to the pandemic. In-person events also allowed for networking and interactions with the project team, government representatives and other farmers and producers, increasing the likelihood of sharing best practice.

Offering a majority of these webinars post-event, attracting 1452 online views

Retaining and offering selected webinars online meant that people who were unable to attend could view the event at a time and place to suit them. Again, engagement was high, as evidenced by the number of post-event views that each attracted.

Awarding \$34,000 in grants to 18 artisan agriculturalists

These small-scale grants were provided to producers and growers to assist with business development activities, professional development and training, strengthening an online presence, increasing market distribution channels, and for equipment upgrades or purchases.

Providing individual mentoring support to 29 artisan producers and growers

One-on-one sessions with experienced business mentors gave local producers and growers the opportunity to obtain targeted advice on issues of concern that were particular to their business. This advice gave them a springboard for future action in developing business and marketing strategies.

Establishing an online food hub for the region (Central Highlands Growers Collective)

This new online presence gives customers the ability to connect with Central Highlands farmers and producers, and to buy their products online. It allows wholesalers, restaurants and other distributors to find the products they need, provides opportunities for sharing information, knowledge and expertise, and facilitates sharing of equipment and tools.

Producing a Roadmap to a to a Physical Hub Business Plan

Development of a roadmap for a business plan to establish a physical food hub will provide additional support for groups looking to progress the work or explore funding opportunities. A consultant has been appointed to undertake the work.

Connecting regulators with producers to share understanding of the challenges this sector faces

These forums allowed for honest interactions between the parties and increased awareness on both sides. Regulators undertook to review their processes where possible to take into consideration the sector's needs.

Collating a database of 370+ artisan producers and related stakeholders in the region

Prior to this project, the region had limited contact with the sector. Development of a strong database allows for ongoing contact with growers and producers, which means that Council can inform them of activities and projects that will benefit their businesses.

Producing 40 social media posts to increase project/issue awareness

Broad awareness of the project was critical to engagement with a wide range of local producers and growers. Engaging social media posts were a key strategy that successfully attracted participants to project activities.

Conducting and disseminating 6 Meet the Maker interviews with local artisan producers

These interviews, actively promoted through the project and on the Hepburn Shire Council website, introduced successful local businesses and highlighted local best practice operations.

Ongoing advocacy and education to stakeholders about the sector

This project gave a voice to the sector and promoted its interests to stakeholders, including all levels of government. An unexpected benefit of the timing of this project was that producer members of the PAG and other artisan participants were well connected to local and state governments throughout the pandemic and were able to convey how the pandemic was impacting the sector.

Growing awareness of Agriculture Victoria's Planning and Advisory Service

The service provides advice to agricultural landholders on planning rules and requirements for the establishment of a new agricultural development or expansion of an existing agricultural business. After the targeted workshop was held, the service received a significant increase in referrals and this has continued.

Meeting project goals despite major disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic limited opportunities for consultation as communications moved online and stakeholders faced varying degrees of difficulty operating in a time of disruption and restrictions. Despite this, the team was able to pivot – adjusting the programs, moving key activities online where necessary, and continuing to maintain and grow contacts by other means.





11

Future opportunities for the sector

Artisan agriculturalists are important contributors to the local and regional economy, and this has been particularly important during and since the COVID-19 pandemic as supply chains continue to face disruption.

This project has shown that there is a strong appetite for engagement and collaboration as a sector, with more than 430 participants attending forums, workshops, webinars and networking events. Interest in project activities has grown and many new and younger farmers are entering the market, aiming to work with more established growers to meet and overcome small business challenges.

Leveraging the achievements of this pilot project, small-scale farmers can embrace the following opportunities:

- continue to work together collectively and examine innovative approaches to overcome challenges faced by the sector
- provide a consistent voice to all levels of government, including regulators
- support the Central Highlands Growers Collective, an online food hub with the potential to take local businesses to the next level
- seek funding to provide additional assistance to the sector
- liaise with governments (local and state) to tap in to events and business services that will assist them to survive and thrive.



Hepburn

SHIRE COUNCIL

Hepburn Shire Council

PO Box 21 Daylesford Victoria 3460

T: (03) 5348 2306

Shire@hepburn.vic.gov.au

www.hepburn.vic.gov.au

 www.facebook.com/hepburncouncil



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Council offices

Daylesford

Crn Duke & Albert Streets,
Daylesford

Creswick

68 Albert Street,
Creswick

Clunes

The Warehouse - Clunes
36 Fraser Street, Clunes

Trentham

13 Albert Street,
Trentham