



The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into food security in Victoria.

Food security is dependent on a robust food system. One critical part of an effective food system is people who are equipped with the food literacy, practical skills, appreciation of seasonal produce, and a positive, confident and healthy relationship with food.

The adults of the future are the children and young people of today, and they need the knowledge, skills and experience to live healthy lives in sustainable and healthy communities.

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation was established in 2004 with the sole charitable purpose of improving the health and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people through development of our successful national food education initiative, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program where students learn to grow, harvest, prepare and share fresh, seasonal, delicious food in hands-on kitchen and garden classes delivered at schools and early childhood centres.

We have significant unmet demand from schools and early childhood services in communities of need wanting to implement the Kitchen Garden Program, but where lack of funding is a barrier to addressing preventable inequities. Properly supported, the Kitchen Garden Program stands ready to contribute towards strengthening food security for Victorian families and communities.

Now in its 20th year, there is significant evidence supporting the Kitchen Garden Program's ability to **improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food** in the following ways:

- fresh produce is grown sustainably on school grounds
- we estimate that 28,000 m² of productive gardens have been established at schools and early childhood services over the past 20 years, increasing access to hyper local produce for school/service communities
- kitchen garden produce is regularly used in kitchen classes where children and young people prepare fresh, nutritious, seasonal meals to be shared by participating students, educators and community volunteers
- in some schools, kitchen garden produce is used to prepare nutritious foods in the school canteen
- in many schools, kitchen garden produce (fresh, preserved, or prepared) is sold to the local community to support school fund raising, often to reinvest in expanding the Kitchen Garden Program at the school/service, simultaneously increasing food access
- at some schools/services, excess kitchen garden produce is given away to the community
- a large proportion of interest in the Kitchen Garden Program from schools in low socioeconomic areas is specifically to address issues of poor access to fresh produce, and the need to build capacity with students and families around food literacy and

skills for support in addressing food insecurity, mental health and academic performance

- cultural foods are grown and harvested in many school/service gardens, and prepared and shared in kitchen classes
- the program is credited with assisting migrant families to familiarise with locally grown produce, and how to prepare them
- children and young people are inspired and equipped with the knowledge and experience to start growing food at home, often transferring skills gained at school to the home environment
- children and young people are inspired and equipped with the knowledge and experience to prepare simple, cost effective, nutritious food at home, potentially bridging cooking skills gaps for families
- simple recipes shared by schools/services to families support confidence and motivation to purchase, prepare and serve nutritious meals at home
- recipes used in the Kitchen Garden Program are based on seasonal produce, and therefore assist with cost effective purchasing by guiding families to purchase in-season fruit and vegetables which generally represent better value
- families have confidence and motivation to prepare food they know their children will eat reducing fear of food waste as a barrier to preparing nutritious meals at home
- the future of Australian agriculture industry is supported through increasing appreciation of, demand for and consumption of fresh food; and inspiring young people to consider careers in horticulture and agriculture
- children and young people understand where their food comes from and the environmental impacts of food choices; they learn to grow their food locally, seasonally and sustainably, nurturing biodiversity, and soil health, and protecting the local environment
- the program embeds the passion, knowledge and curiosity to be part of local, sustainable and regenerative food production and consumption practices and systems

