

# Fabbro's Farm

## An Urban Farm for Eltham

### The Concept



**Local Food Connect** is a not-for-profit, community group run by volunteers. Our aim is to increase appreciation of the importance of our local food system and to strengthen the community's ability to produce food locally whether at home or commercially.

**Local Food Connect** believes that an urban farm offers Nillumbik Shire Council a unique opportunity to deliver on many strategic priorities at a very low cost.

## Policy Context

- The Victorian State Government *Public Health & Wellbeing Plan* identifies **Increasing Healthy Eating** as one of its 4 focus areas. <sup>i</sup>
- Nillumbik Shire Council (NSC) recognises **Food** as a central pillar of its Health & Wellbeing Plan. <sup>ii</sup>
- NSC Recognises that "Locally grown food has the potential to slow climate change" <sup>iii</sup>

### Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 <sup>iv</sup>

#### Food Priority Area

**Objective:** More people in Nillumbik meet the recommendations for vegetable and fruit consumption, and local food growing is widely supported and promoted

#### Strategies:

- Identify opportunities to enhance the local food system
- Promote healthy food choices in community places through improved access to nutritious foods, policy, and education.
- Promote and support public and home-based food growing.

### VicHealth Local Government Partnerships

*"Future Healthy" Initiative - Launching September 2021 <sup>v</sup>*

VicHealth is investing \$45 million over 3 years and is committed to investing in locally led solutions right across the state.

**Health Promotion Core Module:** "Building Better Food Systems for Healthier Communities"

**Intended Outcome:** Build a local and thriving food systems

A strategic approach to create a sustainable and healthy local food system, ensuring community members can access healthy and secure options at any stage of life.

#### Implementation Action including Priority Focus on:

- food security
- food at all stages of life
- establish partnerships with key stakeholders in the local food system

## Why is our food system important?

Food is a basic human need. Food sits at the base of Maslow's pyramid together with water and breathing. Food is not optional. The quality of our food has a profound impact on our health, wellbeing and ultimately our survival.

But our food system is easily ignored. Many people think no further than what they see in advertisements - happy farmers working for supermarkets and happy faces consuming fast foods. While there is food in the fridge it is easy to assume that all is well with our food system.

It is critical that our community understands the impact of the food they eat. Various Council plans and strategies, cited in this document, recognise the impact of industrialised foods on the health of the community and our planet.

- The current food system contributes to climate change <sup>vi</sup>
- The current food system makes us sick <sup>vii</sup>
- The current food system leaves us vulnerable to system failures (shocks) <sup>viii</sup>
- The current food system destroys biodiversity

*Many key components of biodiversity for food and agriculture at genetic, species and ecosystem levels are in decline.....many species that contribute to vital ecosystem services, including pollinators, natural enemies of pests, soil organisms and wild food species, are in decline as a consequence of the destruction and degradation of habitats, overexploitation, pollution and other threats.. UN FAO <sup>ix</sup>*

There is a need to appreciate that our food system merits the same level of concern and urgency as climate change and carbon emissions. Council is uniquely positioned to help our community understand this and to implement changes at a local level.

*Climate Change.*

*" A healthy food system which supports locally grown food has the potential to slow climate change. As temperatures continue to rise, and the risks of extreme weather events increase, it is a critical time to ensure our local food system is sustainable and resilient." NSC <sup>x</sup>*

Our food system and climate change are inextricably linked. Food production is both a cause of and an effect of climate change.

**The cause** arises from the carbon that is generated from the making and use of the chemicals applied to our food, and the transport and distribution of produce that our modern industrialised agriculture processes rely on.

*The IPCC estimates that the food system is **responsible for 21%–37% of heat-trapping gases emitted by human activities globally**. A study published in Nature in March 2021 estimates that the food system is responsible for a third of **heat-trapping gases emitted globally**.<sup>xi</sup>*

**The effect** of climate change on food is to put production in peril through more frequent and severe weather events that can destroy crops and turn productive landscapes into desert.

*Climate change will increase pressure on land and water while reducing yield growth.....Over time, farmers, aquaculture producers and fishers will be under increasing pressure to adapt their practices and technologies to meet these challenges.....emissions from agriculture could become the dominant source of global emissions by mid-century. OECD <sup>xii</sup>*

Regenerative agriculture and carbon farming have the potential to **reverse climate change**. In 2015 The Paris Climate Conference identified the capture of carbon in soil as an important part of the global response to climate change. It is calculated that an annual 0.4% increase in soil carbon stock would be enough to offset the world's carbon emissions. The official launch of the "4/1000 Initiative: Soils for Food Security and Climate" is scheduled to take place in Paris on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The Australian Government was one of many countries globally to sign up to the initiative in 2015.

We encourage you to watch "Kiss the Ground" which is available on Netflix. View trailer here: <https://kissthegroundmovie.com/>

LFC believes that an Urban Farm in Nillumbik should be a flagship for promoting the regenerative agriculture message locally.

Changes to how we grow and eat food locally can make a positive contribution to climate change. When we grow, buy & eat more fresh, local food we reduce emissions.

A Nillumbik Urban Farm will make a small difference to the quantum of food produced locally. But it has the potential to have a big impact in terms of the inspiration it can provide the community: to be conscious of where their food comes from; how it is grown; the environmental damage it causes; and why they should modify what they choose to eat.

### *Health*

The food we eat is a major cause of today's chronic illnesses. For example, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. As a result, Nillumbik Council's draft Health & Wellbeing Plan makes Food a priority area and highlights the need for more local food production.

*Australians of all ages generally have a poor diet—that is they do not eat enough of the 5 food groups and eat too many discretionary foods high in salt, fat and sugar. Inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption in particular is a risk factor for CVD, type 2 diabetes, CKD and overweight and obesity.<sup>xiii</sup>*

- Only 7% of adults in Nillumbik meet the vegetable consumption guidelines <sup>xiv</sup>
- 7.3% of the total burden of disease in Australia in 2015 was due to poor diet <sup>xv</sup>

*"A transformation of the food system is needed to one that is healthy, fair and sustainable for human and environmental health" VicHealth. <sup>xvi</sup>*

Nillumbik's Community Farm can be part of this transformation as well as an inspiration to our community whether urban or rural dwellers.

## Wellbeing

*We know healthy food is good for our body, but it turns out it's also good for our mental health and wellbeing. VicHealth <sup>xvii</sup>*

*"This plan is one piece of the puzzle in improving health and wellbeing outcomes, reducing inequalities, reducing the burden of chronic disease and creating places and spaces that create positive health outcomes." NSC HWP <sup>xviii</sup>*

*" In response to COVID-19 impacts, Council is supporting our community to implement place-making initiatives that revitalise geographic areas and deliver local social, environmental and economic benefits. By outlining strategies that focus on healthy settings, places and spaces we will embed place-based approaches that solve local problems and build on local strengths" NSC HWP. <sup>xix</sup>*

An urban farm offers a myriad of opportunities to promote community wellbeing through engagement and connection.

## Food Security

*We will be food secure when all Australians have access to a healthy diet, when farmgate prices support farmer livelihoods, when we produce food in ways that regenerate rather than deplete natural ecosystems, and when the food system is resilient enough to withstand the shocks and stresses that we know are likely in the future, as well as those we haven't yet anticipated. NSC GWMP <sup>xx</sup>*

Today, for most of us, our food delivery system generally operates unseen and largely trouble free. Food is sourced from around the globe, processed and shipped by a few international corporations and then in most cases distributed and retailed by a few major supermarkets.

BUT - The fragility of this model is revealed from time to time.

- *"Disruption to global food supply chains during coronavirus has highlighted the vulnerabilities of import-dependencies for critical inputs to the food system, as well as the important role that regenerative low-input production systems can play in a resilient food system." VicHealth <sup>xxi</sup>*
- In August 2021 food supplies and home delivery in Shepparton were severely disrupted when large numbers of supermarket staff were forced into COVID-19 isolation.
- During 2020 COVID19 appeared at a supermarket distribution centre in Dandenong and for a period this disrupted food availability to half of Melbourne.
- In 2019 catastrophic bushfires in NSW impacted the transport of fresh produce to Victoria from Qld & NSW.
- In 2018 the nation's strawberry industry was sabotaged by a few needles inserted into Queensland fruit.
- The internationalisation of our food chain puts it at the mercy of global prices. The risk is that when the Australian dollar fails to pull its weight on world markets, we are left unable to afford to import the vegetables we rely on.
- Our health is exposed to the standards of others. For example, in 2015 there was a major scare when 12 Australians were infected with hepatitis A after eating imported frozen berries.
- What happens if the fuel we need to transport food from the other side of the globe or even interstate is no longer available?



*"A key feature of resilient food systems is likely to be diversity – diversity in the geographic locations that food is sourced from, the length of supply chains, the scale at which food is produced, who produces food and in the foods that we eat." Vic Health <sup>xxii</sup>*

For reasons like these it is vital that we encourage understanding of the importance of local food and of how food is grown.

A productive Urban Farm in Eltham can maintain and develop local food production, develop young farmers to feed future generations and increase our community's awareness of how what they eat can improve their health and the world one meal at a time.



Photo: Isabella Amouzandeh - Sugarloaf Produce - Strathewen.  
Organic farmer and Eltham Farmers' Market stallholder.

## Why an Urban Farm?

The fundamental purpose of the Urban Farm will be to INSPIRE our community to take action that leads to healthier lives and to eat in a manner that is respectful of our fragile planet.

An Urban Farm will develop greater community awareness of the importance of what we choose to eat and the relationship between food, health, and climate. It also provides a cost-effective collaboration between LFC and Council that will deliver on our shared outcomes of healthy, sustainable, locally sourced food options at any stage of life for the Nillumbik community.

There are numerous future opportunities for further collaboration with other community groups and LFC strongly supports the VicHealth action recommendation for the impact stream “Creating Thriving Local Food Systems” to establish a local food coalition. <sup>xxiii</sup>



Architects’ impression of the current farm shed with the addition of a pergola to facilitate community and educational use.

## **Our community**

- The farm will prompt the interest of all who pass or visit
- Families will have the opportunity to buy, cook and eat locally grown, pesticide free and very healthy produce.
- Produce knowledge will be shared by all who purchase the crops whether at a farmgate, in a seasonal box or at a local market.
- There will be many options for involving the community in farm activities: volunteering, sharing knowledge about vegetable growing, farm tours etc.

### *Community support.*

LFC carried out extensive community consultation to determine the level of support and interest in 2020. This included an online survey which was circulated through the Local Food Connect email network and various social media channels. The survey was completed by 326 people.

The community were also engaged in face-to-face discussions at the Eltham Farmers' Market. There was overwhelmingly positive support from the community for an urban farm in Eltham, with 85 percent either extremely or very interested in being able to purchase fresh, organic produce, grown in Eltham.

Some respondent comments:

*"I think it is a fabulous, fantastic idea that would be very well supported by the community."*

*"Brilliant initiative! I hope you receive lots of community interest. Good luck"*

*"Would love something like this in eltham!!!"*

*"I think this would be wonderful for the community."*

*"A community farm in Eltham would be a fantastic idea to all members of the community. So many opportunities to teach and learn would come from this as well as the benefit of fresh, locally grown produce."*

*"This would be incredible for the kids and adults too. Healthy, educational and good for physical and mental health."*

*"Great idea and perfect way create a greater sense of community and improve the health of our residents."*

## **Our youth**

There are multiple opportunities to embed farm activity across the school curriculum.

Eltham High School are supportive of an urban farm and identified many opportunities for curriculum links and immersion opportunities for the students throughout the school.

Access to an urban farm would greatly enhance learning opportunities across several subject areas and provide practical opportunities for VET students to tend to the crops, harvest, prepare and cook the home grown produce.

Bell Street is a perfect location for the farm in terms of accessibility for the school community.



## Our rural landowners

LFC recognises the potential of regenerative agriculture to support the goals of preserving the Green Wedge while enhancing the Green Wedge economy. A Nillumbik urban farm could play a role in educating landowners to make sustainable productive use of their land.

*"There is an opportunity to more productively utilise land in Nillumbik's green wedge to supply Melbourne's growing demand for food.....*

*Sustainable land management and enhancement of natural systems benefits agriculture. Because soil fertility is limited within the Nillumbik green wedge, soil-based agriculture will benefit from farming practices that restore and maintain organic matter and moisture in the soil" NSC GWMP <sup>xxiv</sup>*

## New farmers

More broadly we need to develop new farmers and arm them with sustainable farming skills so that we do have healthy, local food, into the future.

*There is a need to nurture a new generation of farmers by enabling access to land, resources and education. Measures are also required to encourage regenerative approaches to agriculture that build soils and natural ecosystems, increase climate-resilience and minimise dependence on inputs reliant on fossil fuels (such as conventional fertilisers). VicHealth <sup>xxv</sup>*



Photo: Mossy Willow Farm on the Mornington Peninsula.

## Our concept

Eltham's Urban farm will:

- Grow vegetables for local consumption
- Grow produce using organic principles
- Offer the local community a diverse range of educational and community building activities
- Increase the vibrancy and liveability of Nillumbik
- Provide an opportunity to recognise Nillumbik's Indigenous heritage and agricultural past
- Be self-sustaining

### Sustainability of the farm

Our aim is that the farm is of a scale that can employ a full-time farmer. A full-time presence has important benefit in terms of management and oversight. We envisage that the farmer's responsibilities would include support of educational and community programs.

We believe that a community farm needs to offer a minimum of 1 acre of growing area. An area of 1 acre has the potential to produce around \$100,000 of food annually which we believe is the level required to support a farmer and the day to day running costs of the farm.

### Income

Based on the case studies we have considered; a diverse number of income streams will reduce the amount of initial risk. Similar farms include farm gate sales and/or sell at farmers' markets, restaurants, and cafes, some operate Community Supported Agriculture programs and/or run farm tours and workshops. There are also "Food Farmacy Programs" which link into the health needs of the local community. Fresh produce boxes from the local farm are prescribed by doctors and allied health professionals to treat type 2 diabetes.

### Site

LFC has been keen to establish a community farm for many years. During this time, we have considered a number of sites.

NSC has encouraged us to consider Edendale Farm. While it has some advantages it is not viable because the available growing area is too small. There are also significant conflicting uses.

NSC has also sought other options on our behalf without result.

**We are strongly of the opinion that Fabbro's Farm in Bell Street is the ideal site.**

### Fabbro's Farm:

- Offers a level, open site that has a history of proven fertility. A level site will support an efficient layout of plant beds. The open site offers good sunlight.
- The historic use of the site as a farm gives us confidence in the suitability and uncontaminated nature of the soil (as does NSC research).
- Fabbro's location is central to Nillumbik's most populous area. With the primary aim of the farm being to educate the community the location is a key to success.
- Fabbro's location adjacent to Eltham High School offers a unique opportunity to engage the next generation of food growers and consumers.

## Requirements

### Infrastructure

Fabbro's Farm will require 3 main infrastructure items.

- A mains water supply. This requires connection to a point 80 metres away in Ely Street
- A compost toilet
- A road cross-over to Bell Street

### Permits

While there are several practical and planning issues to navigate; we understand that with appropriate NSC support the relevant authorities are likely to approve the use of the site for an urban farm.

- DELWP advised that the urban farm fits within the reservation status for the site and offered in-principal support.
- Melbourne Water provided in-principal support for the proposal.

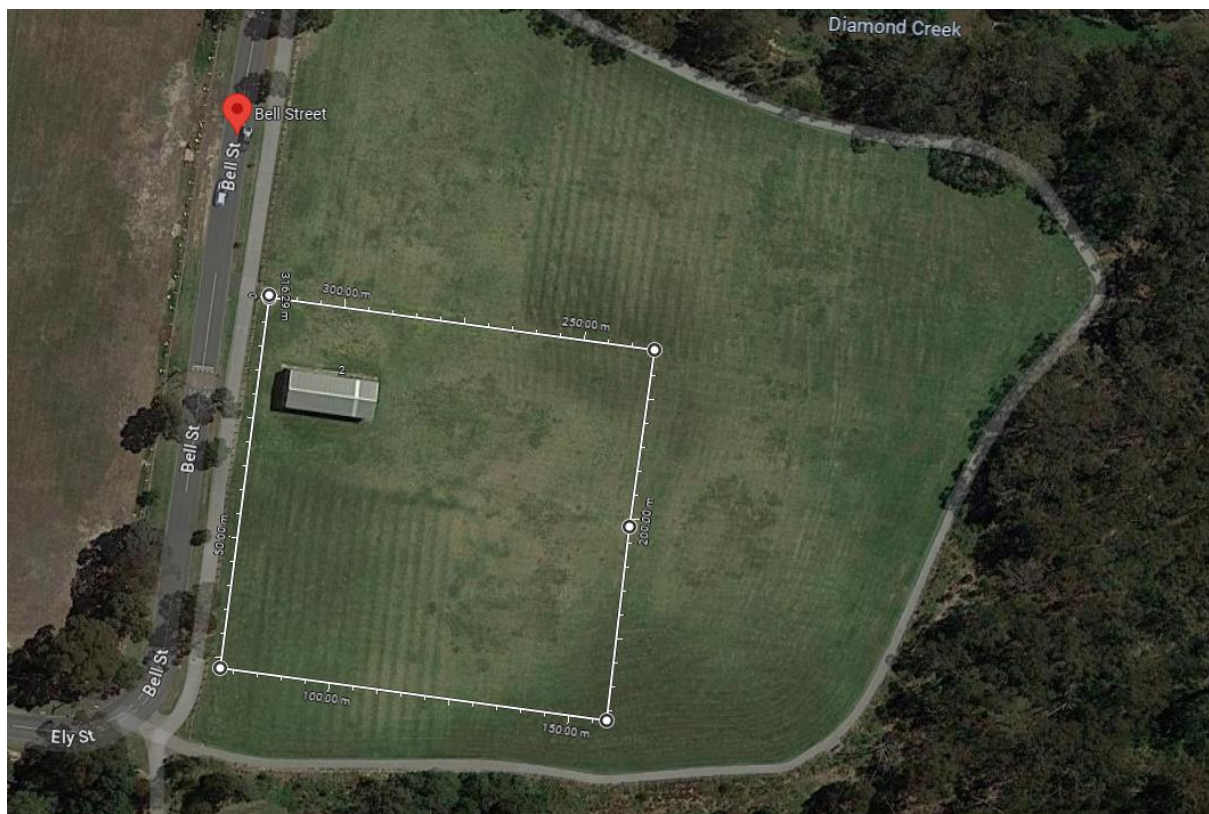
### Map

The entire Bell Street site is 4.87 hectares or 12 acres. 70% of the site is a riparian wildlife corridor of native vegetation. 30% of the site was previously cleared as farmland.

A 1.5-acre farm in the cleared section would take up approximately 12.5% of the overall site.

The location of a regenerative farm beside a wildlife corridor will enhance biodiversity in the area by revegetating land to create habitats for beneficial fauna.

The following shows the size of 1.5 acres footprint.



## Educational links to Eltham High School

Potential benefits of linking educational opportunities with the farm:

- Chefs in industry are increasingly designing menu items from foods grown locally or even within their own kitchen gardens.
- Cooks and Chefs are expected to be actively involved in the growing and care of the fruits, vegetables, and herbs in the kitchen garden as part of their work duties.
- "To replicate this on some scale for Eltham High VET students would be fabulous." The hands-on experience would increase their learning enormously, connect them to the community, inspire them to create and set them up with valuable employability skills.
- It is envisaged that Fabbro's Farm would provide VET students with "farm time" as they tend to the crops, then pick, prepare, and cook the home-grown produce.

There are opportunities for curriculum links and immersion for kids throughout the school. This includes:

- Year 8 – Farm to fork unit
- Year 9 – Food for life unit
- Year 11 – Food production and development/ bush tucker unit
- Year 12 – Healthy eating, food and nutrition/ food sustainability and sustainable farming practices unit

There could also be practical application to learning for many other subjects including (but not limited to):

- Maths
- Business
- Science
- Technology
- Photography classes

This would be via projects, assessments, and tasks, and they would all link in with the Victorian Curriculum.

In addition, the EHS environmental team could be involved with all aspects of the farm from planning preparation and maintenance.





## CONCLUSION

- **An urban farm will make a very positive contribution to many of Council's policy goals.**
- **The investment required is modest.**
- **The local community is very supportive.**
- **The local community is prepared to invest in the farm's operation.**

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<sup>i</sup> The Victorian Government Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023

<sup>ii</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25

<sup>iii</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P15

<sup>iv</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25

<sup>v</sup> [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/vichealth-future-healthy](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/vichealth-future-healthy)

<sup>vi</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P15

<sup>vii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021

<sup>viii</sup> NSC Green Wedge Management Plan - P29



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- <sup>ix</sup> The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food & Agriculture. UN - FAO 2019
- <sup>x</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P15
- <sup>xi</sup> Columbia University SIPA - Center on Global Energy Policy May 2021  
[www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/article/food-and-climate-change-infoguide](http://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/article/food-and-climate-change-infoguide)
- <sup>xii</sup> OECD Climate Change & Food Systems [www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/climate-change-and-food-systems/](http://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/climate-change-and-food-systems/)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021
- <sup>xiv</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P15
- <sup>xv</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Burden of Disease Study 2015
- <sup>xvi</sup> VicHealth <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/our-work/promoting-healthy-eating>
- <sup>xvii</sup> VicHealth [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/be-healthy/which-foods-help-make-you-happy](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/be-healthy/which-foods-help-make-you-happy)
- <sup>xviii</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P4
- <sup>xix</sup> Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-25 - P7
- <sup>xx</sup> NSC Green Wedge Management Plan - P29
- <sup>xxi</sup> Good Food for All - VicHealth 2020 - P3
- <sup>xxii</sup> Good Food for All - VicHealth 2020 - P2
- <sup>xxiii</sup> VicHealth Building Better Food Systems for Healthier Communities 2021
- <sup>xxiv</sup> NSC Green Wedge Management Plan - P29
- <sup>xxv</sup> Good Food for All - VicHealth 2020 - P4