

INQUIRY INTO FRESH FOOD PRICING

Organisation: Vine Community FoodCare

Date Received: 30 May 2018



Dear Portfolio Committee Members,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the members and volunteers of Vine Community Food Care, a small food pantry that supplies low-cost groceries to members from Yass and surrounding districts. While many of our members live within the few kilometres of Yass Town, we also have an increasing number who have travelled from 15-50km away to visit our pantry, shop and have a cuppa and a chat.

Vine Food Care was established in 2015 and since opening we have seen the membership increase to 450 registered individuals, representing up to 2,000 rural residents that we have helped. Typically we have 55-70 individual shops at our access point each Thursday. In recent months we have been advised by regular retail donors of particularly fresh produce that they are changing their management of fresh items and expect to have less excess to donate. At the same time, Food Bank can only send us a limited offering of fresh produce as we are in a rural area. (If you can pick up from FoodBank NSW Warehouse, the options of food are vastly increased, distance makes this prohibitive for rural NSW) While we have a number of local home gardeners who sporadically donate extra produce, this is a top-up rather than a regular supply.

We were previously able to provide each family with half a bag of vegetables and half a bag of fruit each week, which is still below the amount needed for a healthy diet, we now find even this supply is dwindling which means our members are likely unable to access fresh fruit and vegetables or a very small amount given the relatively high cost of fresh produce at retail outlets.

Our members are people experiencing food insecurity, are generally but not exclusively in receipt of a Centrelink benefit, and are struggling for a variety of reasons, including low living wages for farm workers, insecure income stream through seasonal and contract work. Providing good food at reduced prices is an important way that we can support our community by helping to ensure that people do eat, they eat reasonable quantities, and a reasonable diet. An interview with a mother who accesses the services revealed "Now through FoodCare, my children can have fruit and vegetable every day of the week, not just sometimes".

The reduced supply of fresh fruit and vegetables is reducing our ability to provide good food to our members and we believe that action by the NSW Government may assist us, and the many other food pantries in communities across the state, to better serve our members and community. We believe that two actions may assist us to increase the amount of fresh, healthy food available at the Vine Food Care store and similar services across the state. Firstly, provision of further financial support to Foodbank NSW (ongoing support) to both increase the amount of fresh produce available and reduce the cost of transport, particularly to rural areas. Second, funding a collaborative program between community groups, social services, agriculture or local land services, and the department of small business to find ways to increase the local supply of fresh fruit and vegetables available to community groups by partnering with existing and new farms – as has been pioneered in Canada by the Community Food Centres and The New Farm. Together these two actions will improve the supply of fresh produce in the short-term from foodbank, make that more affordable through reduced transport costs, and develop a long-term solution to ensuring that everyone in our community has access to good food every week, and grow farms and jobs in local areas.

While this letter introduces you to Vine Community FoodCare and some of the challenges we face in continuing to provide a quality service to our community, we know from our experience as volunteers that these challenges and issues make so much more sense when experienced directly rather than read about. Our pallet arrives from Foodbank on Wednesday afternoons and our store is open on Thursday mornings and evenings. We invite you to visit us, meet our members and volunteers and see first-hand what we do, and how your action and our action to redress food insecurity is so important and has so much impact on the general wellness, health and happiness of rural Australians.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Beresford

Administrator, Vine Community FoodCare on behalf of our

Vine Community Food Care Members and Volunteers

vinecommunityfoodcare@gmail.com.au

66 Lead Street Yass, NSW

Open Every Thursday 10 am-12 and 6-7 pm.