



COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE CONNECTIONS

Welcome to Community Enterprise Connections

Welcome to the 5th edition of Community Enterprise Connections and to 2008.

Australian communities continue to experience difficulties accessing affordable, fresh, healthy food. Food insecurity data highlights this continuing trend. It is also reflected in the number of groups that choose to develop enterprises based on supplying fresh food to local communities.

This edition focusses on food specific enterprises.

We've gathered stories from several enterprise initiatives. These include:

Atherton Gardens Fruit and Vegetable Market—a volunteer based initiative working on public housing estates in north Melbourne

FoodConnect—a Community Supported Agriculture model linking farmers and consumers to provide greater access to good food and enhance economic stability for farmers

Grasslands—a west Melbourne Cooperative providing a home delivery of organic food produce

CERES—a Melbourne based food system growing fresh food, running a

food market, a café, a seed savers project and numerous other community based food initiatives.

This issue provides data on food insecurity in Victoria and Australia, as well as links to further information for people working on food related community enterprises.

We hope the issue is useful—and remember, we're always keen to hear your feedback and community enterprise stories!

Happy reading.
- The CEDI Team



Brotherhood of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Vol. 1, Issue 5, February 2008

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Community Enterprise in Your Town—Atherton Gardens Fruit and Vegetable Market

The Atherton Gardens Fruit and Vegetable Market was developed in response to the need for fresh, accessible and affordable fruit and vegetables on the Fitzroy high-rise estate.

Cultivating Community is a not-for-profit organization that works with communities through gardening and sustainable food system initiatives. With support from the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Fitzroy Housing Office, Cultivating Community worked with residents to determine the demand for a fresh fruit and vegetable outlet on site and the model of service that would best suit the community. The community

became passionate about the enterprise, with resident volunteers coming forward to develop, operate and work in the business.

The market on the Fitzroy estate operates one afternoon a week and turns over about \$550 each time. It aims to increase access to fresh, in-season and affordable produce for tenants and wider communities, addressing both issues of food insecurity and social isolation. The project now employs a buyer from the Collingwood Estate to go to the Footscray Wholesale Market at 4.30am on Monday mornings. The market also provides a training ground for residents to

build skills, such as English language, retail service skills, business management and community development skills. The market has volunteers from several cultural groups including Vietnamese, Chinese, Pakistani, Greek and Sudanese.

The market has been running for four years. It is still volunteer-run and is an important community hub. Cultivating Community continues to assist in operations, including seeking ongoing funding support from other sources. Based on its success, similar markets have also been set up on the Collingwood and Carlton high-rise estates.



For more information, please contact Ben at CultivatingCommunity on ben@cultivatingcommunity.org.au 9415 6580.

Community Enterprise in AnyTown—Food Connect

“Food Connect engages communities to support agriculture, enabling equitable and efficient distribution of genuine quality fresh food between local farmers and families.”

Further information can be found at
www.foodconnect.com.au

Food Connect is a fresh food distribution enterprise based in South East Queensland, linking communities to good, ethically grown food from local and regional farmers within a 5 hour radius of Brisbane.

The enterprise works on a Community Supported Agriculture model. The model originated in the 1960s in Switzerland and Japan, where consumers interested in safe food and farmers seeking stable markets joined to form economic partnerships.

The model operates by customers making a com-

mitment to purchase a farmers produce over the course of a year by buying it upfront. Funds committed go directly to the farmer, providing them with much needed economic stability. There is no agent involved in distribution. Distribution is supported by community based volunteer networks - for FoodConnect, this is “City Cousins” - groups across Brisbane that distribute the produce in different suburbs. This in turn builds local social networks.

Produce is seasonal and customers can

“subscribe” to particular boxes or selections across the year. This provides health and environmental benefits by reducing reliance on chemicals to grow produce when they are out of season. Food Connect also provides weekly and monthly information to customers on the farms they source from, recipes, healthy eating tips, upcoming events and more.

FoodConnect promotes self-sufficiency and self-reliance within local communities and provides access to nutritious food at an affordable price.

Feature: Grasslands—Means to an End

“Grasslands now aims to improve access to healthy organic fresh produce by offering discounts to low income earners and people who volunteer in the shopfront.”

This may be a good way to describe community enterprise, and was on the minds of a small group of community workers who decided to open Grasslands, a grocery store-come-café in 1997, as a way of funding innovative community projects.

Funding for small community groups in the 90s was quite limited. The group wanted to raise funds and ensure that this would be done in a socially and environmentally ethical manner. They were inspired by the work of others, particularly Friends of the Earth (FoE) in Melbourne, an organic collective operating for over 2 decades. FoE sources locally produced, minimally packaged organic food which is good for the consumer, the producer and the environment. Grasslands aimed to emulate this approach.

Grasslands started as a pilot organic home delivery service from a van one

day a week. A few months later, the group rented a shopfront in Footscray and opened for 3 days. Other members joined the group, forming a larger collective of people who helped run the store and make key decisions. Eventually, the collective (operating as an unincorporated association) started trading 6 days a week, with most of the work done on a voluntary basis.

The first 5 years proved a steep learning curve for Grasslands. It donated over \$70,000 to a range of innovative community projects. This included the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre - now Australia’s most comprehensive asylum seeker agency. However, the collective lacked members with financial planning expertise. They gradually realised that the existing operations were not financially sustainable and were reliant on loans arranged by the original

group. A financial plan to pay back the loans was developed. The enterprise then refocused its mission to food security rather than fundraising. Grasslands now aims to improve access to healthy, fresh, organic produce by offering discounts to low income earners and people who volunteer in the shopfront. It continues today as a 1 day a week shopfront and operates an organic home delivery service throughout inner Melbourne. Grasslands also established a community garden in a neighbourhood renewal site and is a partner in the local council’s food security project.

For more information contact Grasslands on 9362 0830, email grasslandsorganic@telstra.com visit their website at <http://www.grasslandsorganic.org.au/> or pop into see them on Thursdays between 10am-6pm at 211 Nicholson St Footscray.

Please contact Annie Major at: amajor@bsl.org.au if you would like more information.

A third of the groups supported through CEDI have worked on food based enterprises. These range from community cafes, to fruit and vegetable markets, to catering enterprises. There seem to be a number of reasons for this: 1. Workers in the community sector identify food business as good opportunities for community engagement. 2. There is concern in the community about low access to nutritious and affordable food, particularly in lower socio-economic areas. 3. Food businesses provide an appropriate entry level for people with lower skills and education levels, offering easily transferable skills.

How difficult are food enterprises to start and sustain? Start-up infrastructure and labour costs present a barrier. Private

food businesses work on a “sweat equity” model, whereby initial months focus on building the business and may not cover labour costs and break even. Community enterprises can’t always operate in this way and accessing capital to cover labour costs (or infrastructure) can be challenging. Plus, with low profit margins, often long hours, high turnover and strong competition, the food industry can be a tough area in which to build a sustainable business.

Yet, food enterprise projects continue to emerge.

The tension of balancing community needs against a solid business base has prompted innovative solutions that help to sustain these enterprises, in an environment that challenges many for-profit providers. These include

controlling costs by restricting opening hours and using the café to provide volunteering and training opportunities (which can also attract government subsidies). A number of enterprises partner with agencies, Councils and community groups who are able to provide in-kind support. This innovation and ability to mix income streams to cover costs show the true “bottom line” to developing a social business – responding to a social need in the community, over a necessarily profitable business opportunity. It also highlights the complicated nature of community enterprise, opportunities should be seen in the context of the social goal or the community need, the way in which this will be achieved will most influence the feasibility of an enterprise idea.



Community Calendar

27–29 February, Queensland

EcoForum

The conference will explore the themes of business and government protocols when establishing Men’s Sheds with particular reference to recovery materials being sent to landfill. This is based on a demonstration project in northern Sydney. The conference aims to establish a model that can be rolled out nationally.

For program and registration details, visit the EcoForum website at: <http://www.ecoforum.net.au/2008/>

13-14 February, Sydney

Living Co-operatively: Affordable Housing—Sustainable Communities

A two day symposium to examine the connection between housing and strong communities and to develop a response at all levels of government to urban Australia’s ‘affordable housing’ crisis.

For further information and registration details visit the Mercury Centre website at: <http://www.mercury.org.au/lc/>

Registrations close on 8 February.

1-4pm, 26 February, Parramatta, Sydney

Introduction to Social Auditing Workshop

To provide a better understanding of social auditing and its benefits. The workshop will also provide the opportunity to register for a 2-3 day master class facilitated by Social Audit Network Chair John Pearce in July / August 2008. For more information, contact Matt Jones, Social Alchemy on matt.jones@fusemail.com

Registrations close 12 February.

Facts and Figures—Food Insecurity in Victoria and Australia

Food insecurity continues to impact on the lives of Australians. VicHealth outlines some of the key statistics in their fact sheet on Food Security (April 2007):

- In 2005, almost one in 20 Victorians had experienced food insecurity at least once in the previous 12 months. That is, they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more.
- In 2006, almost 6% of children were from households where a parent reported there had been times in the last 12 months when they had run out of food and were unable to buy more
- Disadvantaged communities in Melbourne have up to 2.5 times the exposure to fast food outlets. Men and women living in these low socio economic status suburbs are likely to be up to 3 kg heavier than if they lived in one of the advantaged areas.
- In 2005, only 1 in 14 Victorians were consuming the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables
- People who are on low incomes and are food insecure report lower levels of consumption of fruits and vegetables, often due to difficulties in accessing, purchasing and storing fruit and vegetables

Your say

We would like readers to contribute to Community Enterprise Connections—you could write an article on your enterprise activities, reflect on the subject of community enterprise, or highlight to interesting enterprise work in Australia and beyond. If you have any comments or suggestions about this newsletter, please contact Annie on 9445 2410 or amajor@bsl.org.au.

CERES—Growing Food Systems in Your Neighbourhood

Community food systems aim to promote sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of our communities.

Beside the Merri Creek in Brunswick, Melbourne, CERES (the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) is well on the way to developing a diverse community food system. CERES aims to foster awareness and action on environmental and social issues affecting urban areas. The site has displays and functional demonstrations on a range of environmental issues to show just what can be achieved at household, community and global levels. It is a diverse site - now encompassing a nursery, a café, an organic market and farm, an ecohouse, wormfarms, a water conservation demonstration, community garden plots and more. Chris Ennis, Manager of the CERES Organic Farm and Training Programs, tells us the CERES story.....

“25 years ago, the East Brunswick tip became CERES. Much activity with chooks, community gardens and environmental education followed and in the late

90’s a work-for-the-dole crew built a small market garden we called Honey Lane. Produce from Honey Lane spawned the thriving CERES Market. The market runs weekly and plays an important role in the local food network.

In time, the market began a whole slew of allied projects. The Urban Orchard Project, a backyard produce swap table, grew through the Market. The project counts over 170 households as members and aims to minimise organic food waste, reduce food miles and promote locally grown backyard produce. The Seed Savers project also grew from the market and supplies excess seed to new seedling propagators.

Following this, a 2.5 acre market garden was leased along the Merri Creek and farmers grew more produce for the Market. The CERES Café was established and a burgeoning group of neighbourhood food co-ops developed. CERES coordinates the food co-ops which provide affordable organic produce, grown on site and sourced as locally as possible, to our staff and volunteers, and a growing number of inner city food co-operatives.

Last year, CERES developed a partnership with AMES growing organic swiss brown and shiitake mushrooms by Karen refugees. The mushrooms are produced for CERES Market, café, food-cops and excess sold to Melbourne Wholesale Market. CERES and AMES also support The Seven Stars, a catering enterprise run by Kurdish women. The Project trains Kurdish and Turkish migrants to work in and run their own food business while making use of seasonal peaks in locally grown organic produce. As business grows, the workers will create permanent employment for themselves whilst gaining accredited training in Hospitality, small business and English language experience.

CERES enterprises proudly employs and trains farmers, market workers, teachers and cooks. CERES enterprises also play host to a range of horticulture and hospitality courses for high school students and adults.”

For further information on CERES, visit their website at www.ceres.org Chris can also be contacted on chris@ceres.org.au

Making Connections—Links to Resources and Further Information

Community Enterprise Connections

For community enterprise news, resources, links and contacts. The Community Enterprise Resource Kit and DVD is also available to download or order from: www.communityenterprise.org.au

The Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies

www.ceres.org.au

Cultivating Community is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes and supports the development of community garden projects across the entire community

www.cultivatingcommunity.org.au

VicHealth—The Victorian State Government department dealing with health issues – fact sheets on food security and

related issues are available

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Gardening and health information

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/gardening_health?open

Growing Power, Inc. is a U.S based non-profit organization and land trust supporting people from diverse backgrounds and the environment in which they live by helping to provide equal access to healthy, high-quality, safe and affordable food.

<http://growingpower.org/>

FoodBank Australia is a not for profit organisation that seeks and distributes food and grocery industry donations to welfare agencies which feed the hungry.

<http://www.foodbankaustralia.org.au/>

Nutrition Australia is a not for profit community based organisation that aims to provide scientifically based nutrition information to encourage all Australians to achieve optimal health through food variety and physical activity.

<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/>

Moreland Energy Foundation’s November newsletter – featuring food

<http://www.mefl.com.au/newsletter/17/>

Seed International aims to contribute to the emergence of an ecological and sustainable future through ecoliteracy and ecodesign.

<http://www.seedinternational.com.au/community%20food%20systems.html>



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