

Planning for food

Towards a prosperous, resilient and healthy food system
through Victoria's Metropolitan Planning Strategy



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Planning for food

Towards a prosperous, resilient and healthy food system through Victoria's Metropolitan Planning Strategy

Summary

Planning for a strong regional food economy with a healthy and sustainable food system is a key issue for Victoria's Metropolitan Planning Strategy (VMPS). Food is among the most basic of human needs, but metropolitan strategic planning has overlooked it in recent decades.¹ However, food is now an emerging issue on the international city planning agenda, driven by:

- the economic potential of strengthening regional food systems
- the risks to food supplies from climate change, peak oil and the limited availability of land and water
- the risks to population health from increasing rates of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

Cities around the world, such as London, Vancouver, Toronto and Chicago, have made food a key element of their metropolitan strategies. They have introduced policies to strengthen their regional food economies, protect farmland and increase access to healthy, sustainable food. In Australia, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide have also incorporated food-related objectives into their city plans. It is time for Melbourne to do the same.

This paper identifies key recommendations which the VMPS should consider. Below are the top line considerations for incorporating food-related objectives and strategies:

1. Food should be included as a cross-cutting theme alongside other critical themes, such as natural resources, transport and energy.
2. A key principle of The VMPS should be to 'Promote a resilient and healthy food system'.
3. 'Drought-proof' food bowls should be established on the fringe of the city for fruit and vegetable production, and the necessary infrastructure should be funded to support the use of recycled water from the Eastern and Western Water Treatment plants (e.g. the Bunyip Food Belt).
4. The VMPS should include an objective and planning mechanism to increase access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food, and to reduce access to unhealthy food.
5. Land of high agricultural value should be identified, mapped and protected.
6. The urban growth boundary should be fixed in perpetuity, protecting areas of primary production significance to support the long-term agricultural economy.
7. To promote a compact city and to minimise the use of agricultural land for urban development, a mandatory minimum-density level should be set for urban areas of 25–35 dwellings/hectare.
8. The implementation of the VMPS should be governed by a cross-government committee that includes representatives from all relevant departments (including the Departments of Transport, Primary Industries and Health).



Cities around the world, such as London, Vancouver, Toronto and Chicago, have made food a key element of their metropolitan strategies.

Background

Over 50% of Victoria's vegetables and 17% of fruit are grown within 100 km of Melbourne.³



The VMPS will identify a set of critical issues that must be addressed in the development of Melbourne. An emerging issue that urgently needs attention in the VMPS is food systems and security. The way that our cities develop and grow will have significant influence over food production and access in metropolitan and peri-urban regions for decades. The projected level of growth for Melbourne in coming years only further highlights the need for the VMPS to consider these issues.

The aim of this document is to provide guidance and recommendations on food system issues that should be considered in the VMPS. The issues and actions raised in this paper are also relevant for the development of a number of other planning documents for local government, including municipal public health and wellbeing plans (MPHWP) and municipal strategic statements (MSS).

Who is this document for?

This document is intended for state and local government departments, planners, urban designers, health professionals and concerned community organisation and members. It aims to assist stakeholders to consider food system issues during consultations for the VMPS. In addition, it suggests actions that can be taken by planning departments in local and state government to promote a strong regional food system that supports the Victorian economy and promotes population health and wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

Why food matters in the Metropolitan Planning Strategy

Considering food in planning can strengthen regional food economies and reduce the risks to food supplies from climate change, peak oil and limited land and water availability.

Agriculture and food have historically been an essential part of city planning. However, as the source of our food has shifted from being local to global, city planning has lost its focus on planning for food.² As a result, **cities around the world, including Melbourne, have already lost much of their best farmland to urban development.**

Over recent decades, market gardens and orchards have been pushed out of the city to make room for urban development. However, land on the city fringe is still important to our food supply and economy.

The Port Philip and Westernport region (which includes the metropolitan district and 'green wedge' areas) is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the state.⁴ Yet these, and many other highly productive areas, are under threat from urban development.



Image courtesy of Port Phillip and Westernport CMA

Some areas on the fringe of Melbourne are important sites for growing particular kinds of fruit and vegetables. For example, the Casey–Cardinia region produces more than 50% of Victoria’s asparagus, celery and leeks,⁵ and Werribee South produces up to 70% of South-Eastern Australia’s leaf and kale crops.⁶

Cities around the world, such as London, Vancouver, Toronto and Chicago, have recognised the risks of failing to plan for agricultural production and food, and have made food a key element of their metropolitan strategies. They have introduced policies to protect farmland, strengthen local food economies and increase access to healthy, sustainable food.

'Healthy and sustainable food' is food that is:

- required for a nutritious diet, and is adequate, safe, culturally appropriate and tasty
- produced, processed, transported, marketed and sold without adverse environmental impacts, and that contributes to healthy soils and waterways, clean air and biodiversity
- provided through means that are humane and just, with adequate attention to the needs of farmers and other workers, consumers and communities.⁷



This growing emphasis on food in city planning is an emerging international city planning agenda. If the VMPS is to take its place alongside other world-leading metropolitan strategies, it will need to comprehensively address this issue. The increasing focus on food in city planning is driven by the:

- **economic potential** of strengthening regional food systems
- **recognition of the ongoing dependence of cities on fresh food** produced in their rural hinterlands
- **risks to food supplies** from climate change, peak oil and the limited availability of land and water
- **risks to population health** from increasing rates of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

A **regional food system** is a geographically-defined social, environmental and economic cluster that connects food production, processing, distribution, consumption and recycling.⁸

Cities, such as Chicago⁹ and Toronto⁸, have recognised that there is significant potential to develop their regional food economies by retaining prime agricultural land on the city fringe, and by more effectively linking consumers in metropolitan areas with growers in peri-urban and rural areas. Supporting small farms on the urban fringe that supply fresh, healthy foods to metropolitan consumers can also improve long-term job security and resilience. This is particularly important for Melbourne's growth areas, where communities score higher on the Vulnerability Assessment Mortgage, Petroleum and Inflation Risks and Expenses (VAMPIRE) index than in other areas of Melbourne.¹⁰

The risks to population health from rising obesity levels are significant. Nearly half of all Victorians are overweight or obese¹¹, which increases the risk of many chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancers.¹² Rising obesity levels are related to changes in our environment, including an increase in the availability of high fat, high sugar foods in our food supply.¹³

Less than 10% of Victorians eat the recommended number of serves of vegetables.¹⁴ The consumption of adequate levels of vegetables is essential for children's development, and is critical in reducing the risk of diet-related diseases, such as cardiovascular disease.

Reducing the availability of high fat, high sugar foods, and increasing the accessibility of fruit and vegetables through appropriate retail planning, should be a consideration of both local and state planning policies. This is important for creating communities where the healthier choices are the easier choices.

The time is right for the VMPS to address these health risks and to recognise the potential to grow the state's regional food economy. Cities, such as Sydney¹⁵, Brisbane¹⁶ and Adelaide¹⁷, have incorporated food-related objectives into their city plans. It is time for Melbourne to do the same.

Introduction

Food systems are not only influenced by land use planning decisions, but also by transport, economic development, health and community planning.

Planning decisions have a significant impact on our food system: on prices, transport, energy consumption and health determinants. From local planning policies to metropolitan planning strategies, decisions are made about how land is used, where activity centres are located, how shops and services are distributed and where housing is sited. These decisions influence how easy it is to shop for fresh food, how accessible perishable vegetables are to the metropolitan area and how much horticultural businesses contribute to local economies.

Planning decisions at a state level, such as those embodied in the VMPS, also guide the development of localised planning policies. At a local level, MPHWP, MSS and other planning mechanisms can embed food considerations into council policy.

Planning decisions affect all parts of the food system from production through processing, to consumption and waste disposal:

- **Food production:** land-use planning affects the availability of fertile land for community food production and agriculture in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.
- **Processing and transportation:** planning decisions affect the availability of critical infrastructure, such as food processing facilities, transportation and distribution hubs, as well as water, energy and other resources needed to process and transport food.
- **Consumer access and utilisation:** planning decisions affect the distribution of shops and food outlets in local areas, and the availability of transport to get to shops and other food outlets.
- **Waste, re-use and post-use management:** planning decisions affect waste treatment and the re-use of raw materials, as well as opportunities to recycle food and consideration of how to utilise food waste.

The American Planning Association produced seven principles to guide planners in supporting community and regional food planning:

1. Support comprehensive food planning process at the community and regional levels.
2. Support strengthening the local and regional economy by promoting local and regional food systems.
3. Support food systems that improve the health of the region's residents.
4. Support food systems that are ecologically sustainable.
5. Support food systems that are equitable and just.
6. Support food systems that preserve and sustain diverse traditional food cultures of Native American and other ethnic minority communities.
7. Support the development of state and federal legislation to facilitate community and regional food planning discussed in general policies #1 through #6.¹⁸



Recommendations for the VMPS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VMPS should be a genuine strategic plan for the metropolitan area, driven by over-arching principles that focus on broad economic, environmental and social outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food should be included as a cross-cutting theme in the VMPS alongside other critical themes, such as natural resources, transport and energy. This should lead to changes to the State Planning Policy Framework to include reference to the role of food systems in land-use planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land-use planning decisions should relate back to, and be driven by, these cross-cutting themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be clear links between the VMPS and related government policies, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the Department of Primary Industries policy on supporting marketing cooperatives, promoting farmers' markets and encouraging young farmers into farming – the Victorian Department of Health State Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, particularly Section 7.1 Healthy Eating – the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Healthy Communities Initiative and Victorian Prevention Community Model – policy flowing from the Transport Integration Act that addresses links to transport to improve food access – links to the Department of Business and Innovation policy to improve regional economies and employment

Food and agriculture was worth approximately \$6.3 billion to Victoria in 2010–2011.²¹

The influence of planning on metropolitan and regional food economies

There are significant economic gains to be made by securing land and water for food production in the metropolitan area.

Food and agriculture are highly significant to the economies of metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria, through their direct contribution to GDP and employment creation, and through their influence on hospitality and tourism.

The food industry is one of Victoria's biggest industries¹⁹, with food and agricultural products being one of the state's most significant export commodities¹⁰. Food is also important to the economy of metropolitan Melbourne, with Port Philip and Westernport generating approximately 16% of the state's agricultural value on less than 4% of the land.⁴

In 2007–2008, food contributed 12% of Melbourne's gross value added and employed approximately 210,000 people, making it one of the city's most important industries.¹⁹

The food and agricultural industries are also important to tourism in Melbourne and regional Victoria. A 2008 survey showed that food experiences are a significant aspect of Melbourne's attractiveness as a tourist destination¹⁹, and the promotion of local food is a key element of the city's strategy for food and wine tourism.²²

Despite the positive contributions of the food and agricultural industries to the economies of Melbourne and Victoria, previous metropolitan planning strategies have largely overlooked the needs of these industries.²³ The conversion of agricultural land on Melbourne's fringe to residential uses contributed to a steady decline in agricultural production in the metropolitan area between 1998 and 2008, and the loss of approximately \$7.8 billion in gross value added from the food and agricultural industries.¹⁹ If these industries are unable to access the land, water and the critical infrastructure that they need, there will be further negative impact on local economies.



Case study: Adelaide – strengthening tourism by protecting food production areas

The 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide¹⁷ aims to support South Australia's economy and tourism industry by protecting areas of primary production. The plan lists places, such as the Barossa Valley, Adelaide Hills and the Fleurieu Peninsula, as key areas for tourism, but also identifies these areas as having primary production significance.

There is a clear economic impact if water availability is limited for food production. In Victoria between 1998 and 1999 and 2001 and 2002, approximately 35,000 jobs were lost in the food and agricultural industries, and over 20,000 in Melbourne, primarily due to drought.¹⁹

There are significant economic gains to be made by securing land and water for food production in the metropolitan area. Some cities in other parts of the world have recognised the economic potential of strong metropolitan and regional food systems, and their metropolitan plans include a focus on securing the necessary natural resources and on making it easier for residents to buy food produced within the region. For example 37 of the 50 states in the USA have strategies to promote their regional food economies.²⁴

Case study: Illinois's Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act of 2009²⁵

Illinois's Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act of 2009 aims to stimulate the state's regional food economy by improving the profitability of small-to-medium-sized farms. The metropolitan plan of the state's capital, Chicago,⁹ complements this policy by supporting the protection of farmland, the development of urban agriculture, the expansion of the market for local foods and the creation of local employment.

A report from Ohio in the USA estimated that if consumers and businesses in that state increased their demand for regionally-produced food by 25%, it would create approximately 27,000 new jobs in the state's agricultural and food industries.

Case study: Bunyip Food Belt

The Casey, Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula shires have together proposed the establishment of the Bunyip Food Belt, an intensive agricultural precinct that would be irrigated with recycled water from the Eastern Water Treatment Plant. It has been estimated that the Bunyip Food Belt could increase the value of agricultural production in that region by approximately \$200 million per annum, creating an additional 1400 jobs in agriculture and another 1000 jobs in the wider economy.⁵

Victoria's food producers face many challenges, including the high Australian dollar and growing competition from low-cost imports, yet demand for local food in Victoria is increasing. This is evident in the growth of farmers' markets in the state from the first farmers' market in 1998 to over 50 farmers' markets today.²⁶ There are opportunities to **grow the regional food economy** in Victoria by tapping into this demand for local food, and by making it easier for Victorian consumers and businesses to buy food produced within the state.

An opportunity exists in Victoria to create jobs and grow the regional food economy. The VMPS must support this by securing land and water supplies for agriculture in the peri-urban regions, and by supporting the provision of the infrastructure required.



Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
Promote strong metropolitan and regional food economies as a key principle of the VMPS	A globally-connected and competitive city
Identify and give special protection to key agri-tourism areas on the fringe of Melbourne (e.g. the Mornington Peninsula)	A globally-connected and competitive city
Policies within the VMPS need to link with regional strategies to protect agricultural land for food production	Social and economic participation Strong communities Environmental resilience Regional cities and a polycentric city model
Identify and protect agricultural land, food zones (e.g. the proposed Bunyip Food Belt and the Werribee market gardens) and activity clusters (i.e. food processing and transportation hubs), which support a resilient food system	Environmental resilience Strong communities
Develop strategies to secure the natural resources, infrastructure and markets required to grow Victoria's regional food economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect highly-productive agricultural land in metropolitan and peri-urban areas from development and other uses. • Enable value-adding activities (i.e. food processing) to take place in green wedge areas close to sites of production. 	Environmental resilience Social and economic participation Infrastructure investment supporting the growth of the city
Make it easier for Victorian consumers and businesses to buy food produced in the state by improving the marketing channels for regional produce (e.g. by promoting metropolitan markets and food hubs where local produce is featured)	Social and economic participation A globally-connected and competitive city Strong communities

Planning for a resilient and healthy food system

Resilience

Resilient local food systems respond to shock and adapt to change, helping to mitigate future risks to food supplies posed by climate change and diminishing supplies of land, water and fossil fuels.

The resilience of food systems is receiving increased attention from planners¹ because of the growing risks to food supplies posed by climate change and diminishing supplies of land, water and fossil fuels.²⁸

Our food system depends on the availability of plentiful supplies of cheap oil.²⁹ This plentiful supply has enabled food to be transported around the world, and this expansive nation, at relatively low cost, but as fossil fuel supplies diminish, the price of both oil and food will rise, and communities that rely on food from distant sources will be vulnerable to the impacts of rising energy prices.¹



Case study: Planning for food system resilience in Bristol

The City Council of Bristol, in south-west England, is planning for a sustainable and resilient food system. In 2008, the Council-commissioned study on peak oil revealed that the city's food system was vulnerable to spikes in the price of oil and interruptions in supply. The City Council responded by adopting a food charter that focused on sustainable food, and establishing a food policy council, whose terms of reference include increasing access to food produced in a way that is resilient to the impacts of climate change and fossil fuel depletion. The Council has also commissioned a study of Bristol's food system that focuses on the system's resilience, and identifies its strengths and weaknesses.

Planning for a strong regional food system is a way of reducing this risk, but if we have already developed our best farmland close to the city, our options will be limited.

A strong regional food system can also underpin a community's resilience to the impacts of climate change, particularly during severe weather events, such as storms and floods. Food supplies along key transportation routes are often disrupted during severe weather events, and short food supply chains, based around infrastructure for delivering locally-grown food, can play an important role in keeping residents fed during emergencies.³⁰

Case study: Climate disruption – Brisbane floods

During the Brisbane floods, food systems based on long-distance road transport were severely disrupted when major roads were cut off.³¹ However, organisations, such as Food Connect, were able to continue delivering boxes of local fruit and vegetables to flood-affected residents, because they had good knowledge of the available food supplies and transport routes, and could use their strong local networks to adapt quickly to the situation.³²

Food production in Australia is expected to reduce by approximately 15% as a result of climate change.³³ Building a food system that can adapt to shocks, such as extreme weather events, is an important aspect of metropolitan strategic planning, and should be taken particularly seriously in Melbourne, which is no stranger to weather extremes.

Case study: The London Plan

The London Plan places food at the heart of the planning process,³⁴ and the Plan's strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation both include food components. For example, the climate change adaptation strategy includes urban greening and the promotion of green roofs, with an emphasis on food growing.

Case study: Bacchus Marsh and Werribee

Bacchus Marsh and Werribee are two of Victoria's most important vegetable growing areas.³ During Victoria's decade of drought, production came close to collapse at times due to lack of water as irrigation was severely restricted in these areas.³⁵ In 2004, vegetable growers at Werribee received an 'emergency water allocation' to save their crops before the introduction of a scheme to supply recycled water from the Western Water Treatment Plant.³⁶ In early 2010, vegetable producers in Bacchus Marsh also ran out of water, and were only able to continue production through the provision of 'emergency' water allocations.³⁵

Less than half of Victorian adults eat the recommended number of serves of fruit daily, and less than 10% eat the recommended number of serves of vegetables.

At the height of the last major drought in 2010, production in several of Melbourne's key vegetable-growing areas came close to collapse due to lack of water.^{35, 36} A return to drought conditions associated with an El Niño weather pattern is considered likely for the state by the end of 2012.³⁷ The VMPS should include a plan to establish drought-proof food bowls, such as the proposed Bunyip Food Belt, that can continue to produce fruit and vegetables during drought using recycled water.

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">'Promote a resilient and healthy food system' should be a key principle of the VMPS	Social and economic participation Strong communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Establish 'drought-proof' food bowls on the fringe of the city for fruit and vegetable production, and fund the necessary infrastructure to support the use of recycled water from the Eastern and Western Water Treatment plants (e.g. the Bunyip Food Belt)	Environmental resilience Infrastructure investment supporting the growth of the city

Health

The Government should follow the lead of other major cities in the world and incorporate health as a goal into the VMPS

Research suggests that adequate consumption of fruit and vegetables is important to health and prevention of chronic diseases. It reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, and has an indirect role in reducing the risk of some cancers.³⁸ However, less than half of Victorian adults eat the recommended number of serves of fruit daily, and less than 10% eat the recommended number of serves of vegetables.¹⁴

The food and nutrition related risk factors responsible for the ill health in Victoria are:

- obesity 8.0%
- hypertension 7.3%
- high blood cholesterol 6.1%
- insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables 3.3%³⁹



The food-sensitive planning and urban design work undertaken by the Heart Foundation reviewed evidence of key problems with the food system today: “The design and layout of our cities and towns can have a major effect on what foods people can readily access. Access to healthy foods is more difficult when areas have a low range of healthy and affordable foods available via food retail and food-service outlets”.⁴⁰

The Victorian parliamentary inquiry into environmental design and public health made important recommendations for the VMPS. Recommendations 3 and 20 propose the inclusion of public health and wellbeing as a goal in the VMPS, as well as measures to identify and protect agricultural land in peri-urban Melbourne.⁴¹

This consultative process recommended that the Victorian Government should develop planning mechanisms to assist local councils to limit the oversupply of fast-food outlets in communities, and to facilitate the supply of healthy food choices. See below for further details.

Relevant recommendations from the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry⁴¹

Recommendation 1

That the Victorian Government:

- works with VicHealth to commission further Victorian research into the cumulative health and wellbeing impacts of the density of fast-food outlets on a community
- assists local governments to map all food outlets within a local government area
- develops a planning mechanism that can be used by local councils to limit the oversupply of fast-food outlets in communities
- develops a plan to facilitate the supply of healthy food choices to all Victorians.

Recommendation 2

That the Victorian Government conducts a review into the economic, environmental and social importance of food production and distribution in Victoria and its consequences for public health.

Recommendation 3

That the VMPS includes measures to identify and protect valuable agricultural land in peri-urban Melbourne.

Recommendation 12

That the Victorian Government amends Section 4(1) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to include ‘the promotion of environments that protect and encourage public health and wellbeing’ (or similar wording) as an objective of planning in Victoria.

Recommendation 18

That Planning Panels Victoria ensures that all panels established as part of the growth areas Precinct Structure Planning process have a public health specialist as part of their membership.

Recommendation 20

That the Victorian Government ensures the VMPS includes public health and wellbeing as a key goal supported by measurable initiatives, such as the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure, public transport and public open space. The committee further recommends that the VMPS provides for a review of implementation every 5 years.



Case study: Hot food takeaway controls, Borough of Barking and Dagenham, UK

The supplementary planning document, *Saturation point – addressing the health impact of hot food takeaways*, was developed to control the number of hot food takeaways in a given area, with a particular focus on reducing high levels of obesity and childhood obesity. This involved defining hot food takeaway exclusion zones, so that no hot food takeaway applications would be granted within 400 m of a primary or secondary school. It also meant limiting the distribution of hot food takeaways within activity centres.⁴²

Health should be incorporated as a goal into the VMPS, following the lead of other major world cities. For example, Chicago has as a goal to ‘increase access to fresh, nutritious and affordable foods’; the London plan has a goal for ‘improving health and addressing health inequalities’ and the Portland plan includes ‘access to healthy food’ as an objective.

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
The VMPS should include an objective and planning mechanism to increase access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food, and to reduce access to unhealthy food	Strong communities
The VMPS should ensure that access to healthy food choices is supported by the built environment	Strong communities Social and economic participation
Small-scale activity centres should be provided, with an emphasis on medium-density neighbourhood-level activity centres and the provision of healthy food retail and foodservice options. Surrounding development should achieve a desired level of density to support such service provision	Strong communities Social and economic participation Living and working locally – a 20-minute city



Over 50% of Victoria's vegetables are grown within 100 km of Melbourne.

Urban density and protection of agricultural land

Melbourne 2030's promise of 'a compact city' has been lost to extended growth corridors and urban development.

Over 50% of Victoria's vegetables are grown within 100 km of Melbourne.⁴³ This highly-productive agricultural land on the city fringe is not only a valuable source of fresh food, but also a source of employment for local communities. However, this agricultural land is at risk of disappearing altogether. The Victorian Government has signalled its intention to review the urban growth boundary (UGB) every 2 years,⁴⁴ and with each review, more high-quality agricultural land is likely to be lost to urban developments. Melbourne 2030's promise of 'a compact city' has been lost to extended growth corridors and urban development.

Continual development of the urban fringe also leads to housing developments that deliver poor outcomes for residents. At the current Growth Areas Authority 'low-density' recommendation of 15 dwellings per hectare,⁴⁵ only a limited variety of shops and services can be supported, and effective public transport is financially unviable. This low-density development on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne also fails to provide adequate housing choice, infrastructure provision and access to healthy foods.

If the density of residential developments were to be increased, there would be greater scope to improve infrastructure and provide effective public transport to reach jobs, services and food outlets. Residential densities should be increased to medium density (25–35 lots per hectare),¹⁷ providing a variety of housing options and mixed land use, supported by required infrastructure. This would support better-connected walkable communities, reduce the amount of land required for urban development and protect valuable agricultural land.

Case study: Urban growth in the City of Casey

The City of Casey has investigated and developed their own urban growth scenario. This identifies that increased densities focused around major activity centres and mixed-use zones along their key transport and employment corridors will result in the same population yield due to higher-density development. Less land would be required than what is identified within the current UGB. Casey's preferred growth scenario used the principles of Smart Growth Planning; being the integration of jobs, transport and residential densities.⁴⁶

In the 1950s, Melbourne had over 2000 km² of agricultural land within the urban boundary, and approximately 90 km² of land for fruit and vegetable growing. By 2030, it is estimated that none of the original fruit and vegetable-growing areas will be left, and there will be less than 200 km² of agricultural land.⁴⁷

Case study: Greater Adelaide agricultural land protection and providing for access to food

The 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide¹⁷ includes a map of agricultural land abutting the metropolitan area, with a classification of its agricultural use. The map clearly identifies the potential impact of urban growth on food and wine production, and aims to protect up to 375 hectares of land with primary production significance. The policy theme of ‘health and wellbeing’ clearly links planning with food systems. For example an objective is ‘protect Greater Adelaide’s high-quality food bowl areas to ensure a supply of affordable fresh food’.

The negative impact of low-density development on the urban form and access to healthy food is also recognised in the plan’s objective to ‘increase housing density and encourage a variety of high-quality shops to locate near railway stations and major bus stops so people can buy groceries and fresh food on their way home, rather than making a separate car journey.’



Case study: Agricultural Land Reserve – British Columbia, Canada

The Agricultural Land Reserve is a 4.7 million hectare zone in the province of British Columbia, in which agriculture is recognised as the priority land use. Subdivision and use of land for non-farm purposes are regulated by a commission. The Right to Farm Act also gives farmers the right to farm on land in the Reserve, and protects them from ‘nuisance’ lawsuits arising from normal farm practices. The Reserve was established in 1976 to protect the province’s dwindling supply of agricultural land. The quality of agricultural land is rated according to a seven-step land capability classification, based on its soil type and climate. Ratings consider the land’s potential, as well as its current condition. Coal exploration and extraction are regarded as a non-farm use in the Reserve, and cannot be undertaken without the approval of the commission.

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
<p>Protect areas important for food production on the city fringe by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> controlling urban growth and minimising the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land by creating more liveable, medium-density communities identifying, mapping and protecting areas of high-value agricultural land protecting green wedges from development expansion to maintain their original intent, and the preservation of significant agricultural and environmental areas protecting agricultural land with existing or potential access to secure sources of water to maximise infrastructure delivery and agriculture production. (e.g. land around the Eastern and Western Water Treatment plants in Casey/Cardinia and Werribee) 	<p>Environmental resilience</p>
<p>The UGB should be fixed in perpetuity, protecting areas of primary production significance to support the long-term agricultural economy</p>	<p>Environmental resilience A globally-connected and competitive city Social and economic participation</p>
<p>To assist in protecting agricultural land, the VMPS should consider the implementation of a land trust program that will facilitate the purchase or donation of agricultural land, placing covenants on the title for continued agricultural use. A similar system exists with the 'Trust for Nature' program</p>	<p>This recommendation relates to future implementation of objectives contained within the VMPS</p>
<p>To promote a compact city, and to minimise the use of agricultural land for urban development, a mandatory minimum-density level should be set for urban areas of 25–35 lots/hectare. This will also support the provision of walkable small-scale activity centres, encouraging the provision of healthy food retail and foodservice options</p>	<p>Strong communities Environmental resilience Regional cities and a polycentric model</p>

Governance of the VMPS

Shared governance of The VMPS is needed at the highest possible level with bi-partisan agreement to avoid a repeat of past mistakes, such as frequent changes to the UGB in response to pressure from developers.

Lessons learned in the implementation of previous metropolitan strategic plans for Melbourne point to the need for tighter governance of the new metropolitan plan.

Weaknesses identified in the governance of Melbourne 2030 include:

- poor 'whole-of-government' coordination of the plan, and a lack of clarity regarding where overall responsibility lies⁴⁸
- a lack of political will to maintain the urban growth boundary in the face of lobbying to extend the boundary⁴⁹
- Insufficient partnering with local communities and councils affecting the understanding of and support for the plan.⁴⁹

These weaknesses must be addressed in governance of the new plan. The Strategy requires shared governance at the highest possible level to avoid a repeat of past mistakes, such as frequent changes to the urban growth boundary in response to pressure from developers. Coordination of activity across relevant government departments is also essential for effective management of competing values, such as agricultural and residential development concerns about land use, and to encourage all departments to pursue a common vision for the VMPS.

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
The implementation of the VMPS should be governed by a cross-government committee that includes representatives from all relevant departments (including the Departments of Transport, Primary Industries and Health)	These recommendations are separate to the themes identified within the VMPS, but rather relate to a governance section that should accompany the VMPS to guide implementation
The cross-government committee overseeing the VMPS should report directly to parliament	
The VMPS should be promoted widely to the general public, so that there is a shared understanding of its aims	
The implementation of the plans should be underpinned by the participation of and partnership with local government	
To ensure that the VMPS does plan for the long-term future of metropolitan Melbourne, bipartisan support should be achieved in the delivery of the VMPS	

Taking action at a local level



Food should also be considered in local governments through MSS's, MPHWP's, local policies, planning strategies and guidelines.

Local councils have a number of avenues available to support strategies for a sustainable, healthy food system and food security for all. The renewal of MPHWP, and the amendment of MSS, are an ideal opportunity to embed food considerations into council policy. Integrated transport plans also offer opportunities to provide sustainable transport options for farmers to convey produce to market, as well as providing easy access for consumers to local food retail and foodservice.

The following options illustrate where food can be addressed within local council policy documents. The *Food-sensitive planning and urban design* resource⁷ provides further detail regarding the opportunities to incorporate food considerations into planning at a local level (see pp. 20–24).

Municipal public health and wellbeing plans

These plans could include actions to address:

- provision for, and support of, active transport modes
- equity of food distribution, while curtailing the distribution of fast-food outlets and inappropriate foodservice
- preservation of good-quality arable land (where available)
- the need to address population health goals by providing access to fresh, nutritious, accessible food outlets and service.

Municipal strategic statements

MSS set the strategic framework for local government planning schemes, and should incorporate explicit statements about healthy and resilient food systems. Policy statements could include:

- a liveability clause that emphasises the need for supportive built environments for healthy and sustainable food and physical activity (e.g. building on the format already available in Latrobe City's MSS)
- guidance about activity-centre hierarchy, including neighbourhood centres that offer a variety of local destinations, such as healthy food retail foodservice outlets (e.g. Wodonga MSS)
- a clause that reflects the importance of agricultural land, and explicitly states the services that it provides to the local community, such as employment, health, a resilient and sustainable food system and tourism
- spatial identification of areas with potential for local job and industry growth, which can link with State Government stimulus for future job growth in Melbourne (e.g. the Werribee and Casey Agricultural Innovation precinct and the Bunyip Food Belt)
- Use of public open spaces for food growing (e.g. edible landscapes)

Case study: Wodonga MSS

Wodonga has moved from having just one activity centre to also providing neighbourhood-level activity centres. These create local destinations for a walkable neighbourhood catchment, supported by higher residential densities. The central shopping area has also been upgraded to provide street-based, rather than shopping mall-based, retail and activity nodes.⁵⁰

Case study: Brisbane community plan

Brisbane City Council's community plan, *Our shared vision – living in Brisbane 2026*,⁵¹ has incorporated food considerations into its natural environment goals. Its 'food in the city' targets are:

- increase resident and community participation in food gardening
- increase economic value of food gardening and local processing
- reduce food miles (food miles are the vehicle kilometres travelled by food before it gets to the table).



Local policies

Local government can also consider food-related issues through the following types of planning mechanisms:

Planning strategies and guidelines

- Structure plans and growth strategies
- Urban design/urban landscape guidelines
- Subdivision guidelines
- Development plan overlays
- Municipal and shire agricultural provisions.

Local planning policies

- Housing strategies
- Retail and activity-centre policy
- Integrated transport plans
- Open space/recreational strategies
- Municipal public health and wellbeing plans
- Rural land strategies
- Amending local by-laws.

The food-related considerations that can be incorporated into these local policies and strategies include:

- Control urban growth and minimise the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land.
- Where greenfield development on agricultural land must occur, ensure that land or open space is available to maintain local food production.



- Provide for mixed land uses that provide opportunities for healthy and sustainable food production, distribution and sale of food.
- Link land uses for healthy and sustainable food production, distribution and sale of food with accessible transport options.
- Design for residential development and supporting mixed land uses to be proximate to activity centres.
- Ensure that residential density and walkable catchment areas support the viability of healthy and sustainable food outlets, active transport infrastructure and public transport.
- Avoid large format retail outlets and island shopping centres that are largely car-dependant destinations.
- Provide a diverse range of public-realm shopping areas, including markets, activity centres and strip shops with frontages that are accessible by active or public transport.
- Develop the public realm to provide food opportunities and visibility, incorporating food production, food preparation and food contact.
- Integrate productive landscapes, such as fruit and nut trees, in public and open spaces. Incorporate community gardens, city farms, farmers' markets and healthy food cafes.
- Utilise clean stormwater for community food production.
- Design for urban stormwater, wastewater and nutrient management to improve the viability of agricultural production.
- Design subdivisions to:
 - incorporate water-sensitive design characteristics
 - provide for private and shared garden space for food production
 - provide for food access, exchange and interaction in neighbourhoods via roads and pathways.

Case study: Mornington Peninsula Shire

In 2010, Mornington Peninsula Shire conducted an agricultural audit⁵² to better understand the role of agriculture in the region and to develop a picture of farming industries, their products and the opportunities for raising the profile of agriculture in the shire. The audit revealed the multiple roles of agriculture within the landscape and opportunities to expand the economic contribution of agriculture within the region.

Case study: Cardinia Shire's special agricultural zone

Cardinia Shire Council has recognised the high-quality agricultural land it has within its boundaries, and has set out to protect it by creating a special-use zone (Schedule 1 – Horticultural Preservation). This schedule's purpose includes:

- preserving land of high agricultural quality for horticulture and other farming activities
- discouraging non-agricultural and non-soil based uses on soil of high agricultural value
- protecting the area from the encroachment of urban and rural residential-type development.⁵³

An area of Cardinia Shire, Koo Wee Rup, currently grows 93% of Australia's asparagus crop due to the high-quality soil conditions it provides.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In recent decades, food, the most basic of human needs, has been overlooked in metropolitan strategic planning.¹ Cities are now recognising that they can no longer take their food supplies for granted in a world where the availability of land, water and fossil fuels is rapidly reducing, and where climate change is increasingly likely to affect food production. Cities are also recognising the potential for stronger regional food systems to grow their local economies.

Victoria must follow the lead of cities around the world which are making food a key element of their metropolitan strategies. Victoria needs to introduce policies to protect farmland, strengthen local food economies and increase access to healthy, sustainable foods. The Victorian Metropolitan Planning Strategy is the opportunity to encourage and enable local government to implement policies that promote strong local food economies, providing healthy and sustainable food.

Summary of recommendations

Below is a summary of recommendations for the VMPS, collated from each section.

Planning and food: overview

Recommendations for the VMPS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The VMPS should be a genuine strategic plan for the metropolitan area, driven by over-arching principles that focus on broad economic, environmental and social outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food should be included as a cross-cutting theme in the VMPS alongside other critical themes, such as natural resources, transport and energy. This should lead to changes to the State Planning Policy Framework to include reference to the role of food systems in land-use planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land-use planning decisions should relate back to, and be driven by, these cross-cutting themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There should be clear links between the VMPS and related government policies, for example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– the Department of Primary Industries policy on supporting marketing cooperatives, promoting farmers' markets and encouraging young farmers into farming– the Victorian Department of Health State Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, particularly Section 7.1 Healthy Eating– the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Healthy Communities Initiative and Victorian Prevention Community Model– policy flowing from the Transport Integration Act that addresses links to transport to improve food access– links to the Department of Business and Innovation policy to improve regional economies and employment

The influence of planning on metropolitan and regional food economies

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
Promote strong metropolitan and regional food economies as a key principle of the VMPS	A globally-connected and competitive city
Identify and give special protection to key agri-tourism areas on the fringe of Melbourne (e.g. the Mornington Peninsula)	A globally-connected and competitive city
Policies within the VMPS need to link with regional strategies to protect agricultural land for food production	Social and economic participation Strong communities Environmental resilience Regional cities and a polycentric city model
Identify and protect agricultural land, food zones (e.g. the proposed Bunyip Food Belt and the Werribee market gardens) and activity clusters (i.e. food processing and transportation hubs), which support a resilient food system	Environmental resilience Strong communities
Develop strategies to secure the natural resources, infrastructure and markets required to grow Victoria's regional food economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect highly-productive agricultural land in metropolitan and peri-urban areas from development and other uses. • Enable value-adding activities (i.e. food processing) to take place in green wedge areas close to sites of production. 	Environmental resilience Social and economic participation Infrastructure investment supporting the growth of the city
Make it easier for Victorian consumers and businesses to buy food produced in the state by improving the marketing channels for regional produce (e.g. by promoting metropolitan markets and food hubs where local produce is featured)	Social and economic participation A globally-connected and competitive city Strong communities

Planning for a resilient and healthy food system

Resilience

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles of the VMPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Promote a resilient and healthy food system' should be a key principle of the VMPS 	Social and economic participation Strong communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish 'drought-proof' food bowls on the fringe of the city for fruit and vegetable production, and fund the necessary infrastructure to support the use of recycled water from the Eastern and Western Water Treatment plants (e.g. the Bunyip Food Belt) 	Environmental resilience Infrastructure investment supporting the growth of the city

Health

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles
The VMPS should include an objective and planning mechanism to increase access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food, and to reduce access to unhealthy food	Strong communities
The VMPS should ensure that access to healthy food choices is supported by the built environment	Strong communities Social and economic participation
Small-scale activity centres should be provided, with an emphasis on medium-density neighbourhood-level activity centres and the provision of healthy food retail and foodservice options. Surrounding development should achieve a desired level of density to support such service provision	Strong communities Social and economic participation Living and working locally – a 20-minute city

Urban density and protection of agricultural land

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles
Protect areas important for food production on the city fringe by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> controlling urban growth and minimising the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land by creating more liveable, medium-density communities identifying, mapping and protecting areas of high-value agricultural land protecting green wedges from development expansion to maintain their original intent, and the preservation of significant agricultural and environmental areas protecting agricultural land with existing or potential access to secure sources of water to maximise infrastructure delivery and agriculture production. (e.g. land around the Eastern and Western Water Treatment plants in Casey/Cardinia and Werribee) 	Environmental resilience
The urban growth boundary should be fixed in perpetuity, protecting areas of primary production significance to support the long-term agricultural economy	Environmental resilience A globally-connected and competitive city Social and economic participation
To assist in protecting agricultural land, the VMPS should consider the implementation of a land trust program that will facilitate the purchase or donation of agricultural land, placing covenants on the title for continued agricultural use. A similar system exists with the 'Trust for Nature' program	This recommendation relates to future implementation of objectives contained within the VMPS
To promote a compact city, and to minimise the use of agricultural land for urban development, a mandatory minimum-density level should be set for urban areas of 25–35 lots/hectare. This will also support the provision of walkable small-scale activity centres, encouraging the provision of healthy food retail and foodservice options	Strong communities Environmental resilience Regional cities and a polycentric model

Governance of the VMPS

Recommendations for the VMPS	Relevant strategic principles
The implementation of the VMPS should be governed by a cross-government committee that includes representatives from all relevant departments (including the Departments of Transport, Primary Industries and Health)	These recommendations are separate to the themes identified within the VMPS, but rather relate to a governance section that should accompany the VMPS to guide implementation
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To ensure that the VMPS does plan for the long-term future of metropolitan Melbourne, bipartisan support should be achieved in the delivery of the VMPS	

Further reading

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