MEANDER VALLEY COUNCIL – COMMUNITY FOOD ACCESS PROFILE

Introduction & disclaimer – This profile have been developed by the Heart Foundation Tasmania as part of the Healthy Food Access Tasmania Project. The information highlighted in this profile was gathered in 2014. At the time we put it together it was up to date. Sometimes things change and when they do we are happy to update it for you. Also if there is other information you think should also be included please contact us.

Why does access to healthy food matter?
Limited or poor access to healthy food has both health and social outcomes for people who are struggling with this issue. There are many health conditions and diseases which are associated or caused by a poor diet which results from poor economic or physical access to healthy food. The diseases include heart disease\(^1\), diabetes\(^2\), some cancers\(^3\) and other health conditions such as overweight\(^4\) and obesity\(^5\). Poor access to healthy food can cause poor physical development in children and impact their learning and attendance at school\(^6\). For adults who have poor access to healthy food it is often very stressful and causes them to be anxious and ashamed\(^7\). This often also means they avoid social occasions in their communities and with family so can become socially isolated\(^8\).

How are the residents of Meander Valley doing?
Currently 42.7\% of adults living in Meander Valley eat the recommended 2 pieces of fruit per day and 7.3\% eat the recommended 5 serves of vegetables, this compares with 42\% and 9.8\% state averages\(^9\). The Meander Valley residents are unfortunately eating less fruit (42.7\% versus 50.3\%) and vegetables (7.3\% versus 9.6\%) in 2013 when compared with 2009\(^9\).

For adults living in Meander Valley 24.5\% is obese\(^9\). Compounding this, 17.8 \% of local adults report that their health is poor or fair versus (19\% for the state average)\(^10\).

While we don’t have results for children at the local government level we do know that rates of overweight and obesity are increasing across Tasmania. The teenage years are when significant changes are observed and up to 29\% of young people become overweight or obese\(^11\).

How easy is it to access healthy food across Meander Valley Council?
Often we hear about people being food insecure across Tasmania. People who are food insecure do not have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life. Across Tasmania about 5-10\% of the adult population is effected but it is estimated at between 25-40\% in low income households.
The Healthy Food Access Tasmania project is focused on improving physical and economic access to fruit and vegetables in communities across Tasmania. When we think about access to healthy food we think about what is available and where, and how affordable is it. Can all residents easily get to the shops?

Across Meander Valley residents’ ability to get to the shops is of course impacted by where shops are located and what transport they may have available to them. Recent research conducted by the University of Tasmania\(^\text{12}\) showed that there is a variety of shops across the local government area. In total there are 10 shops where fresh food such as fruit and vegetables can be purchased, there are major supermarkets (2 – in Deloraine and Prospect Vale), minor supermarkets (3 – Hadsden, Mole Creek & Westbury), general stores (5 – Meander, Bracknell, Carrick, Chudleigh & Hagley) and fruit and vegetables shops (2 – Deloraine). As a general observation there no shops located in the areas where the average household income is very low. Often people living in low income areas have challenges getting to the shops to purchase healthy food because there is a lack of shops in their local area. Some low income households do not have access to a car and may also have inadequate public transport to get them to the shops.

While there is not currently any produce markets running in the municipality, however, there is a commitment by council to explore establishing markets and food cooperatives in councils Meander Valley Oil Vulnerability Action Plan.

**Healthy Food Access Basket Survey – Tasmanian results 2014\(^\text{13}\).**

In March and April of 2014 the University of Tasmania, as part of the Healthy Food Access Tasmania project, conducted a price and availability survey for healthy food across Tasmania. The Healthy Food Access Basket survey collected data on 44 foods which are consistent with the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGHE). The AGHE was developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and provides recommendations for how Australian’s should eat for good health across the lifespan. This survey has been used widely in Australia as measure of the cost of eating well. Data was collected in 142 of Tasmania’s 353 stores where fresh food is available. On page 3 there is a summary of the state wide results contained in Table 1. These results show the range in the price by the different kinds of stores and also the percentage of income required for 4 common household types using Centrelink payments as the income. It shows that the cost of healthy foods vary across store types and the varying impost on the household budget depending on household type. The range of cost of food was determined by the survey results and the calculation for the percentage of income has been made by the Healthy Food Access Tasmania Project. Results from the fruit and vegetables shops are not included here. **These results are preliminary findings only and will be reviewed and updated in September 2014.**
Table 1. Healthy Food Access Basket Survey – Preliminary results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORE TYPE</th>
<th>FAMILY TYPE</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>% Income</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Supermarket (For example Coles, Woolworths, &amp; Supa IGA)</td>
<td>2 parents (female and male age 44) &amp; 2 children (ages 18 &amp; 8)</td>
<td>$311-$413.38</td>
<td>23-31%</td>
<td>$211.50-$284.33</td>
<td>20-27%</td>
<td>$98.67-$129.43</td>
<td>20-26%</td>
<td>$76.18-$100.73</td>
<td>10-13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total n=50; Surveyed =23</td>
<td>Single parent (female age 44) and 2 children (ages 18 &amp; 8)</td>
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<td>Minor Supermarkets (For example IGA Everyday, local supermarket)</td>
<td>Single Male (&gt;31 years)</td>
<td>$280.30-$391.50</td>
<td>27-37%</td>
<td>$125.93-$173.52</td>
<td>25-35%</td>
<td>$99.23-$136.05</td>
<td>13-18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total n=82; Surveyed =37</td>
<td>Age Pensioner (age 70)</td>
<td>$98.67-$129.43</td>
<td>20-26%</td>
<td>$76.18-$100.73</td>
<td>10-13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General &amp; Convenience Stores (For example local, general, convenience and corner shop)</td>
<td>Age Pensioner (age 70)</td>
<td>$280.30-$391.50</td>
<td>27-37%</td>
<td>$125.93-$173.52</td>
<td>25-35%</td>
<td>$99.23-$136.05</td>
<td>13-18%</td>
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<td>Total n=165; Surveyed = 60</td>
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Which residents in the Meander Valley Council may have difficulty accessing healthy food?

In the Meander Valley local government area there are 7324 households and 18867 residents. The people and households who are likely to find it hard to access healthy food are:

- Households with a low incomes including residents on Centrelink payments (29% of the local population are Concession Card Holders; 6% unemployed) often have a reduced ability to buy sufficient healthy food as there are many other costs such as housing, transport and utilities which drain the household budget.

- Single parents and their children particularly if they rely on Centrelink payments. (there are 296 single parent households & 14% of children 0-14 are estimated to be living in poverty across the local government area)

- People with a disability or chronic disease (17.8% of adults report their health as fair or poor and 901 residents are receiving the disability support payment) because they may have difficulty carrying shopping and their medical expenses may reduce the household food budget.

- Households without a car (5% of households which equates to 366 households)

- People experiencing housing stress. This is people who have a low income (bottom 40% of income distribution) and who pay more than 30% of their household income on rent or mortgage (24.6% of households)

- People living in areas which rely on general stores or do not have any shops at all within walking distance limiting their physical access to healthy food.

- People who have inadequate access to public transport.
What can we do about improving access to healthy food for local residents?

While the data about health and residents diets may paint a daunting picture there are some terrific programs and initiatives that are working towards improving outcomes and when a systems approach is used good results can be achieved. Australian research\(^{17}\) has shown that when several factors occur together for residents they are able to eat well, even if they have a low income. We call these *resilience factors*, which means people can still eat well despite other challenges. To have this resilience it is important to have several factors working to support people to make healthy food choices easy choices. These success factors include:

1. Residents having good personal skills around food preparation, cooking and shopping. Being able to grow some of your own food is also very helpful

2. Growing up or living in a family or community that values healthy eating and sees it as a ‘normal’ thing to do. Including eating fruit and vegetables.

3. Importantly residents must have access to affordable healthy food, this means it must be available in their community or it must be easy to get to where it is available.

Using these success factors we have compiled some of the characteristics of the Meander Valley municipal area to show how strengthening coordination between these factors, organisations and/or program activities that are underway can help contribute towards to building a community in which healthy eating is achievable for all.
Linking and coordinating these factors present in the community will contribute towards making healthy food choices easy choices for Meander Valley residents.

**Supportive environments influencing healthy food access and supply**

- **Meander Valley Oil Vulnerability Action Plan**
- **Meander Valley Food Connect Network.**
  - Seasonal Farmgate sales provide an opportunity for residents to purchase affordable locally grown food direct from growers.
  - Local supermarkets and fruit and vegetable shops
  - Meals on wheels and home delivery from the supermarkets and other shops helps ensure people who can't get to the shops can still get nutritious food
  - Agencies which provide fresh fruit and vegetables as part of their food relief for residents who are food insecure

**Individual skills, knowledge to shop, cook, grow and prepare healthy food**

- Schools and community groups and gardens and other community organisations maybe running programs that teach people to cook, grow food, shopping/budgeting and how to eat well and affordably.
- Meander Valley Food Connect
- Family Food Patch Volunteers

**A culture of healthy eating in a variety of community settings**

- Schools and early childcare centres which are part of the Move Well Eat Well program are working towards children, young people and their families regarding healthy eating as normal and important to achieve.
- Some workplaces have health and wellbeing programs which promote healthy eating to their workers.
- Healthy catering or food at community events assists people to make healthy food choices more often.
- Promoting locally grown food
How can it make a difference when we connect it all together?

Seeing the resilience factors as a ‘system’ and ensuring they are linked to each other can have a positive impact on making healthy food choices easy choices for local residents. For example if cooking programs use local seasonal produce available in local shops it is easier for people to purchase affordable healthy food and prepare and eat it. If schools teach children that eating tasty fruit and vegetables are important and ‘normalise’ it, this makes the family meal more enjoyable for the ‘cook’ and the whole family. If shops and markets in neighbourhoods and towns have a ready supply of affordable fruit and vegetables this makes it easier even for people on a tight budget to buy it and eat well. If it is locally grown it is also a great boost to the local economy. Making sure that people who need support in times of crisis also receive healthy food such as fruit and vegetables helps them to continue to eat well and maintain their health during challenging times.

Below is a list of the businesses, organisations and groups who have an interest in improving access to healthy food that we are currently aware of.

**Supportive environments influencing healthy food access and supply**

- Emergency Relief Food agencies, including agencies that disperse fruit and vegetables provided by SecondBite
- Farmgate sales
- Supermarkets & general stores
- Produce Swaps
- Meander Valley Food Connect Network
- Community Transport can help people get to the shops

**A culture of healthy eating in a variety of community settings such as schools and early childcare and community meals programs**

- Move Well Eat Well Schools - Bracknell PS, Deloraine PS, Hagley PS, Mole Creek PS, Westbury PS
- Move Well Eat Well Early Years Education and Care Centres - Goodstart Early Learning Prospect Vale, Giant Steps Tasmania. Toddler Inn Child Care
- Breakfast programs in schools and accredited school canteens

**Individual skills, knowledge to shop, cook, grow and prepare healthy food**

- Meander Valley Rural Primary Health Service
- Deloraine Community House
- Meander Valley Food Connect Network
- Community & school gardens
- Family Food Patch Volunteers
What can partnership between local government and other important community organisations, businesses and members achieve?

There is no doubt that when the efforts of groups of people are combined and linked together many of the reasons why people have poor access to healthy food can be resolved. As a guide there are 10 Key Ways to Act which are recommended. They are listed below along with examples to explain their importance:

1. Allocate Responsibility – it is key that there is strong leadership and also that the responsibility is shared. Forming a network of coalition to drive change is important.

2. Build the local picture – it is important to understand the local reasons why people have poor access to healthy food by collecting information and speaking with the people who are impacted. This helps to inform future decisions and approaches.

3. Develop Policy and Plans – when you understand the issues develop a response to bring about change and create a connection between organisations and people who can bring about change together. Make sure you discuss your ideas with the people who you hope will benefit.

4. Set a good example – where you work or live demonstrate what healthy affordable eating looks like, considering your catering, events or canteen policy to model good behaviour.

5. Use Regulatory and fiscal power – regulation can be used to promote healthy affordable food choices across a variety of locations. As examples they could positively influence the food sold in community spaces, vending machines or ensure there are no local laws to prohibit food growing in public spaces.

6. Land use planning – protect land for farming and make sure within townships it is land use is mixed use to support growing food together within open spaces and neighbourhoods.

7. Healthy eating for residents – support training and skill building opportunities through grants programs and providing access to kitchens in public buildings as a place for education opportunities.

8. Growing food locally – make the connection between what is grown locally and what is available for purchase. This strengthens the local economy and can also apply to home growers who swap and share food.

9. Getting food and residents together – consider that not everybody can jump in the car and get to the shops easily, work on solutions that get people to food and food to people.

10. Advocacy – get your voice heard. When the issues are well understood it is important to speak out and make submission to bring about change.
In the Meander Valley local government area there are several interesting examples of how community organisations and members are planning to or already working together to improve access to healthy food.

Meander Valley Oil Vulnerability Action Plan

In 2013 council undertook a process to investigate the potential impacts of increasing oil prices and investigating ways to reduce the community’s reliance on fuel. With predicted increases and even limitations to fuel supplies into the future, the Meander Valley Oil Vulnerability Action Plan identified several areas of risk including food production and access. The Meander Valley is well known for its fertile agricultural land and the capacity for local food production.

“Food supply and production is highly vulnerable to increasing oil prices. This is due to the diesel and petrol reliant farm machinery and road-based distribution networks as well as the relatively long distances between suppliers and markets. Food production is also dependent upon the use of synthetic fertilisers derived from oil and gas products. Oil supply disruptions resulting from peak oil would make it more difficult for food to reach the municipality. With the existence of private open space in the municipality, opportunities may exist to expand localised food production.”

The action planning process identified that in the municipality there are opportunities to expand localised food production, through commercial and community food growing. While developing the action plan a community survey revealed that many community members are growing their own food and like to shop locally. The implementation of the Action Plan will be lead by the Meander Valley Council Economic Development and Sustainability Department. In the short term they have committed to:

- Facilitating and supporting community and industry led initiatives to promote local food production, including food co-operatives and farmers markets.
- Developing a position on food security

Meander Valley Food Connect

Meander Valley Food Connect is a network of local residents that recognise the importance of a clear connection and understanding between food consumers and food producers and growers. Food Connect aims to inform and inspire people to take an interest in where food comes from. In recent years their activities have included a forum and they regularly provide opportunities for community members to improve their food growing skills and share their produce at community meals. The network would like to contribute to improving the resilience of local food production, reduce exposure to oil vulnerability risks and increase the community’s capacity to be increasing self-reliant. In the Meander Valley Council Oil Vulnerability Action Plan council has committed to continue to support the network proposing that this might be done by: engaging with local schools; the promotion of local ingredients in pubs, cafes and restaurants; providing information and hosting workshops to encourage home vegetable production; and supporting establishing a local farmers market in a manner that compliments the existing retail options for purchasing fresh produce in the municipality.
**Healthy Food Access Tasmania**

The Healthy Food Access Tasmania project runs till mid 2016 and we are hoping to work with communities and stakeholders from the paddock to plate to increase access to fruit and vegetables, preferably locally grown, in communities across Tasmania. The Healthy Food Access Tasmania project seeks to make healthy food choices easy choices by ensuring that fresh foods (preferably locally grown) are readily available across Tasmania. The project will contribute towards addressing this important health, economic and social objective over the next three years. Healthy Food Access Tasmania is a Tasmania Medicare Local funded project (and will seek to link with the future Social Determinants of Health project). The project will be led by the Heart Foundation with the University of Tasmania as a key project partner. We believe the project will have positive health, social and economic objectives for communities across Tasmania.

We encourage communities to consider the important issues raised in this profile and welcome inquiries about how the HFAT project might support your effort to better understand and address local determinants of access to healthy food. We are interested to explore how we can work with council and community businesses and members to deliver against the commitments made in the Oil Vulnerability Action Plan.

We are committed to Tasmanians in all communities being able to make healthy food choices which are easy choices.

For more information please contact the project manager Leah Galvin 03 6220 2210 or leah.galvin@heartfoundation.org.au

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