

Localizing SDG2 Zero Hunger through “Fair Food” in Australia

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In Australia, and elsewhere, community food networks such as urban gardens, community supported agriculture, farmers' markets, organic cooperatives, food charities and “fair food” organizations are important civil society stakeholders who actively confront food system inequalities such as food insecurity and food waste. These organizations emphasize equitable access to food that is ecologically sustainable, healthy and fairly produced, exchanged and consumed (i.e. food justice). This differentiates them from mainstream food security approaches and provides a potentially progressive framework for thinking about alternative food futures. This paper presents a sociological analysis of community “fair food” initiatives in Brisbane, Australia as a means of expanding SDG2 Zero Hunger to encompass local priorities. Following the presentation of a broad typology of initiatives, the paper will analyze selected case studies in terms of their: (a) personal and collective visions for future food systems, and (b) activities and outcomes related to food justice and food access. How do these place-based narratives connect to global sustainability goals? Findings indicate that more equitable food access is pursued in missions and activities that seek to build and connect (a) values of food justice, sovereignty, citizenship, farmer-consumer solidarity, empowerment and community control of food systems, with (b) solving practical problems associated with local ecological food production, reduction or redistribution of food waste, providing low-cost food to vulnerable groups, and restructuring finance. Scaling up to influence policy and financing remains a key challenge. These initiatives demonstrate significant synergies between ecological, social and economic values that are central to localising the SDGs.

Keywords: Food justice, Food access, Social enterprise, Food systems, Governance, Zero Hunger

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations *2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) present a challenge to the international community—how to transform towards a more sustainable and just society. The goal of *Zero Hunger* (2) in particular calls for a “fundamental transformation of the way we grow and eat food” (SDSN, 2016:np). While Australia is not widely seen to have a food security problem—with food security efforts directed largely at building export-led agriculture—inequitable access to food is a significant local problem. Some 4 million Australians are food insecure; access to affordable, healthy foods is highly unequal; up to 40% of edible food is wasted; and there has been a 10% rise in people seeking food relief in the past 12 months (Foodbank, 2018). Access to fresh fruits and vegetables has decreased in the past decade with rising costs, especially in rural areas, and the rates

of food insecurity are higher for groups experiencing economic hardship, such as Indigenous people, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, the aged, unemployed, young and rural people, disabled people and renters (Rosier, 2011). The social costs of diminishing access to food are high.

In Australia, and elsewhere, community food networks are important civil society stakeholders who actively confront these inequalities within food systems. Examples of community food networks include community supported agriculture, food box schemes, farmers’ markets, urban farms, school kitchen gardens, organic co-operatives, food charities, online food swaps, guerrilla gardening and “gleaning”, as well as emergent “fair food” policy and advocacy alliances that connect growers, distributors, consumers, policy makers, researchers and advocates (Lyons et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2015). Fair food¹ is the term commonly adopted within the Australian food movement to encompass a wide variety of actors or activities that broadly align food systems with equity, justice, ethics and fairness. Often operating within local social solidarity economies (SSE), these organizations tend to emphasize equitable access to food that is ecologically sustainable, healthy and fairly produced, exchanged and consumed—widely understood as “food justice”. By seeking to “ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010: 6), this idea differentiates them from mainstream food security approaches focused on producing more food and provides a potentially progressive framework for thinking about alternative food futures (Carolan, 2013; 2017). In Australia, there is a vibrant community fair food movement indicating that new spaces for experimentation in food production, consumption and governance (including financing) are emerging. Preliminary research suggests that there are over 150 fair food initiatives and networks in the Brisbane region alone, and over 500 nationally. They have not been widely included in food policy making however, and the existing evidence base about their contribution to more equitable food access—as a crucial component for achieving SDG2—is weak. By analyzing the ways in which fair food initiatives in Australia are re-imagining what a sustainable and fair food system might look like, this paper illustrates the values and activities through which community food networks can influence the kind of wider paradigm shift towards sustainability that the *2030 Agenda* requires. I focus on “fair food” as a pathway to engaging locally with SDG2 Zero Hunger, and (to a lesser extent) SDG12 Responsible Production and Consumption.

This paper reports on empirical research undertaken between 2017–2019 with various types of SSE fair food initiatives operating within the South East Queensland region of Australia, all of whom identify (implicitly or explicitly) with the project of food justice. These include social enterprises, food charities, advocacy organizations, and regional coalitions for whom reducing hunger is inextricable from engaging with those most vulnerable, reducing food waste, supporting ecological production, shifting consumption practices, addressing gender inequality, and sustainable financing. Following an overview of selected initiatives, the opportunities presented by such organizations are explored next through an in-depth case study of a Brisbane-based food hub that combines alternative financing, food sovereignty and social enterprise values. These examples are analysed in terms of: (a) their personal and collective worldviews and visions for future food systems, and (b) their activities and outcomes related to food justice and food access. What specific mechanisms do they use to integrate, replicate or scale up their activities from independent initiative to systemic intervention? How are these place-based narratives connected with achieving the SDGs? In the context of pursuing food justice within the framework of the SDGs, findings indicate that there is a significant gap between SSE initiatives driven by food justice, sustainable production and consumption and sustainable financing goals and the metrics and governance processes currently shaping domestic SDG implementation. Finally, the paper discusses the challenges that fair food organizations face in scaling-up democratic forms of governance relevant to localising the SDGs, and presents directions

¹“Fair food” is the preferred umbrella term in Australia because it leaves space for plural perspectives on justice (see Schlosberg, 2002) to emerge in relation to food — “fair food” may or may not align neatly with established concepts of food justice (originating from the US) or food sovereignty (from the global South), although in many instances it does. It may also be that “fair food” is viewed as somewhat less politicized than justice or sovereignty, and so is in line with diverse food system actors’ efforts to gain legitimacy for their eco-social practices. See Smith (2018) for a clarification of the differences between food security, food justice, food sovereignty and other food-specific discourses.

for future research.

THE PROBLEM: FOOD ACCESS, CRISIS AND THE NEED FOR NEW FOOD FUTURES

Approximately 18 percent of Australians have experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months, and access to affordable, healthy foods is highly unequal (Foodbank, 2018). Access to fresh fruits and vegetables has decreased in the past decade with rising costs, especially in rural areas, and the rates of food insecurity are higher for groups experiencing economic hardship: Indigenous people (24%); unemployed people (23%); single parent households (23%); low-income earners (20%); rental households (20%); young people (15%); culturally diverse groups such as refugees; and socially isolated and disabled people (Rosier, 2011). These inequalities are likely to increase in the face of multiple global crises of food, fuel and climate set to affect food security in the future (Marsden, 2013; McMichael, 2011; Rosin et al., 2012; Smith, 2016).

In 2015, the Australian SDG Summit participants agreed that the global goals provide a positive vision of a more sustainable, inclusive and just future (ACFID et al., 2016). SDG2 *Zero Hunger* connects hunger, food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture with poverty, livelihoods, economics, health, education, gender equality, rights and social development. SDG12 *Ensure sustainable production and consumption* includes targets to halve global food waste, improve supply chains, develop sustainable public procurement policies and educate consumers (FAO, 2016). Although the exact shape of required reform is unclear, it is widely agreed that a new paradigm for governing justice in food systems is needed (Holt-Gimenez et al., 2009; Smith et al. 2017). In the past, governing sustainability decisions has been difficult because power relations and politics mean that some perspectives are privileged and others are disadvantaged (Schlosberg, 2002). For example, SDG2 has been criticized for extending the dominant food system rather than advocating structural changes that would lead to new food systems (Lim, 2016). Strong concerns have been raised about the exclusion of the right to food and food sovereignty (Spann, 2017). Civil society participation has been low in creating the SDGs (Gabizon, 2016), further excluding the perspectives of civil society actors who often emphasize justice (Sexsmith & McMichael, 2015). There is also a big difference between the type of public-private governance advocated in the SDGs and the type of “multi-actor” governance advocated by civil society (McKeon, 2017).

The National Sustainable Development Council Australia (2018) has measured Australia’s progress on SDG2 and 12 (see Appendix). First, progress against all of these targets is either off-track or needs improvement. Second, Australia’s measurement of progress clearly illustrates the predominance of a mainstream “food security” perspective: one that is based on increasing yields through continued improvements to high-input agriculture; productivity gains and a focus on calories; free-trade and trade liberalization via neoliberal reforms; and a focus on consumer growth and/or education. This quantity-versus-quality approach to food security prioritizes food availability and access to calories but tends not to address food access from the perspective of human wellbeing, agency or lived experiences of hunger (see Carolan, 2013). Indeed, in Australia, the language of “hunger” is mostly absent from national food policy debates, with food security discourse centred on producing food for export to a growing Asian middle-class. Local or regional food policies are in their infancy, and are few; Australia has no national food plan. Divergent worldviews between stakeholders in Australian food system governance present serious challenges for improving food, nutrition and health outcomes (Bryceson et al., 2016).

Community fair food networks (community gardens, food charities, cooperatives and other social enterprises) differ from dominant food security approaches concerned with availability—producing enough, and access—consuming enough calories, by promoting a plurality of food justice positions (Schlosberg, 2013; see also McMichael, 2011). Food justice is based on an understanding that poverty and inequality underpin people’s access to food rather than low levels of agricultural productivity *per se* (Sen, 2009). A vast literature has therefore argued that community food networks represent a progressive vision for food system transformation (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011). Community food networks have been described as “niches” (Marsden, 2013) embedded in alternative economies that can potentially redress the structural underpinnings of exclusion, multiple crises and

unsustainable development (Utting, 2015). Alongside values associated with SSE (Utting et al., 2014)—cooperation, solidarity, economic and political empowerment, reciprocity, social capital, ethicality and participatory governance—fair food also encompasses values, activities and actors associated with food sovereignty, regenerative agriculture and circular economies. It is based on a heavy critique that the industrial, corporate, globalized food system has failed to fulfil the original goal of food security: “full-stomachs and full (and long) lives” (Carolan, 2013: 4). As described by one fair food advocate in Australia:

...we have fully applied the technologies and the mindset of industrialisation to food and farming; we have over-exploited our land, degraded our soils and damaged our river systems ... Australia has one of the highest rates of deforestation, biodiversity loss and species extinction on the planet. It means, globally, that the food system contributes as much as 50 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions ... It means that we have a supermarket duopoly that controls 70 to 80 percent of the grocery market ... Our food system is not merely broken. It's killing us, and ruining any chance that future generations have for a decent and liveable future. We can no longer tolerate this state of affairs ... we need a transformation; we need a revolution (Rose, 2015: 1-2).

This paper begins with four key assumptions about fair food networks, which are supported in the literature and have likewise emerged from empirical research:

1. Community food networks emphasize food justice, not just food security.
2. Community food networks have the potential to transform future food systems.
3. Community food networks are important for food system governance, but are often excluded.
4. Community food networks can be instructive for localizing the SDGs.

A persistent question is whether and to what extent the values and practices of community fair food networks might promote transitions towards more sustainable and just production and consumption patterns beyond their own networks (Goodman et al., 2014: 51). Research has shown that new directions are opening up as consumers become increasingly interested in ethical food, and as governments and industry respond through new regulation (Blay-Palmer, 2016). More and more people in rural and urban communities are collectively resisting corporate capture of food systems and acting to democratize their foodscapes (Mann, 2019), demanding a food future of “good, clean and fair food” (Petrini, 2013). In some cities—such as Toronto—engaging civil society in food policy making has been highly successful in strengthening local food systems (Welsh & MacCrae, 1998). But elsewhere, findings on the impact of community food networks on food security, environmental sustainability, health or other social inequalities have been mixed or fragmented at best. In light of this, scholars have widely cautioned against non-reflexive analyses of initiatives, highlighting that “local” production and consumption should not automatically be conflated with more sustainable and socially just food systems (Goodman et al., 2014). Existing research has also shown that community food networks are important for food system governance. However, two recent Australian studies examining the role of community food networks in progressing food security (Dixon & Richards, 2016) and social-ecological resilience (Smith & Lawrence, 2018) have found that local food actors have been excluded from key sites of decision-making. Mainstream food security visions or actors tend to crowd out food justice perspectives with implications for both food access and policy, and for the extent to which SDGs are locally relevant and supported. It follows that food system governance (not only in the context of the SDGs) needs to be more inclusive of multiple food actors’ perspectives at multiple levels, so that together they may adapt their perceptions and strategies in response to complex sustainability challenges (Voss & Kemp, 2006).

In going beyond measuring food system inequalities, successful and inclusive governance requires governments “to hear the stories that local people are telling about what their futures could and should include” (UNESCO, 2016:76). Indeed, the SDGs themselves represent particular “alternative” futures that remain highly negotiated and contested. In this paper, data are drawn from qualitative analysis of publicly available information such as organizational websites and directories to document experiments in food justice and SSE in Australia, and to assess how these might inform a more justice-focused approach to Zero Hunger implementation. The

approach draws on sociological scholarship on the theory and practice of “food utopias”: a concept that reflects how various actors are re-imagining what a better food system might look like, in order to “loosen the boundaries on whose ideas matter around food” (Stock, Carolan & Rosin, 2015: 4).

It should be noted that this study does not aim to measure or evaluate the outcomes of initiatives in terms of their actual contribution to reducing hunger. Rather, the approach follows Hackmann and St. Clair’s (2012, p.18) call for making connections between (i) personal and collective worldviews and their visions for future societies; (ii) vulnerability, voice and justice; and (iii) governance and decision-making. How do these place-based narratives connect to global sustainability goals? This is the first study to apply food utopias to an empirical study of food and the SDGs in Australia.

FINDINGS: MULTI-SCALAR EXPERIMENTS IN FOOD JUSTICE—SHARED VALUES, DIVERSE ACTIVITIES, COLLECTIVE ACTION

How can we do things using food as a vehicle to get people closer to the understanding that they aren’t just one person but are part of a bigger picture, and that they have a real meaningful contribution to make in this space?

(Fair Food advocate, Brisbane, 2019)

A core concern within studies of SSE is the extent to which experiments that “give primacy to social and often environmental objectives above profits, emphasizing the place of ethics in economic activities and rethinking economic practice in terms of democratic self-management and active citizenship” (see Utting 2015: 2) can be scaled up and sustained without losing their core values and objectives. In this section, I examine how fair food networks make change happen, at what levels and scales, and in what (ethical and practical) directions. Alongside significant populations of food insecure people, Australia has a vibrant and growing fair food sector, consisting of a multitude of individual SSE initiatives that address food justice and sustainable food production and consumption in diverse ways. These are also closely networked with regional and national-level actors such as civil society organizations, local and/or regional government programs and research entities (e.g. universities), further strengthening the food justice movement in Australia. For example, the Australian Food Systems Directory² (coordinated by Sustain) lists over 400 people, organizations, projects, knowledge (research and policies), infrastructure (e.g. abattoirs, community gardens, food co-operatives), events and other resources across Australia related to making more sustainable and ethical food systems.

In line with food utopias’ focus on telling new stories about the future of food (Stock et al., 2015), this section presents an analysis of local initiatives and regional coalitions that constitute key actors in the fair food movement in South East Queensland. I also examine a case study of a social enterprise that has recently become the first in Australia to use equity crowdfunding, enabling community members to collectively own shares in property and infrastructure associated with expanding community supported agriculture. These provide lessons for local food system governance in the context of the SDGs, despite the fact that very few initiatives have been actively consulted or engaged in Australian policy-making in that space.

Local Initiatives in South East Queensland

There are over 150 fair food initiatives and networks in the South East Queensland/Brisbane region alone. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of these experiments are social enterprises (17%). Others can be described primarily as initiatives focusing on community education (13.8%), small business activities (13.8%), advocacy (3.9%), directory services (3.2%), social movement mobilization (1.9%) and health service providers (0.65%).

In Figure 2, analysis of the aims and/or activities that each initiative is engaged in provides a more detailed picture of how fair food actors seek to address food justice. Most of these initiatives seek to address food access

²See the Australian Food Systems Directory; <https://www.localfoodloop.com/sustain/>.

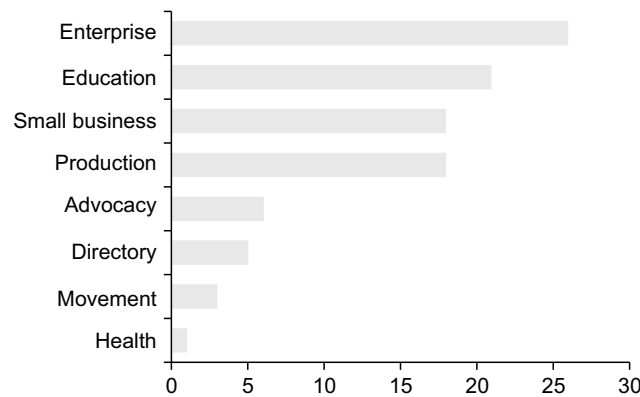


Fig. 1. Focus for fair food initiatives in SEQ (2018, n = 152).

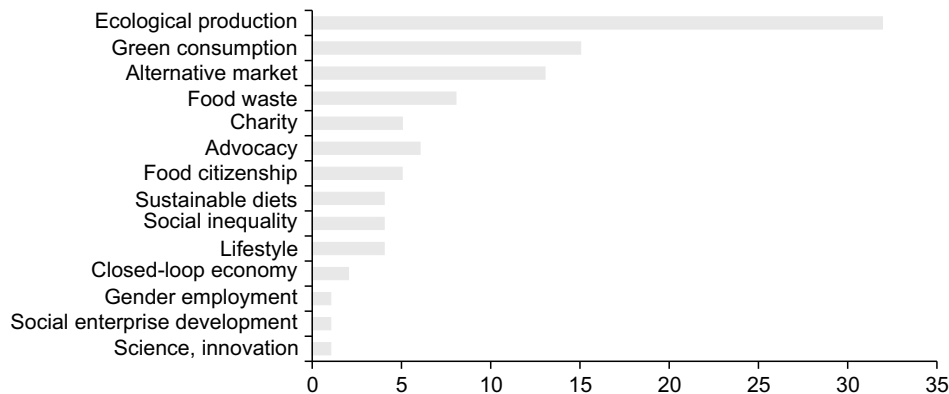


Fig. 2. Pathways to food system change, as indicated by activities of fair food initiatives in SEQ.

specifically, by defining what types of food should be accessible to whom. This appears to be a shared concern. For example, the large majority ($n = 32$) engage in ecological food production activities at the local level, mainly in the form of community gardens and urban permaculture and/or organic farms. These initiatives seek to improve urban consumers' participation in growing locally produced food, with the view to improving access to (and consumption of) healthy, ecologically produced food products. Next, numerous initiatives ($n = 28$) engage in activities that promote green or ethical consumption via alternative markets such as local food box schemes, bulk buyers groups, farmer-direct/ farm-gate purchase schemes and community supported agriculture. These seek to address food access by making the production and consumption of local, healthy food more economically accessible. They achieve this by supporting farmers with fair prices, and sharing supply chain risks with end consumers. Other initiatives take a redistribution approach (a key aspect of SSE) to food access by reducing food waste. These initiatives ($n = 13$) divert rescued food to charities, who then prepare and distribute meals to low income groups (with a strong focus on homelessness). *FoodBank Australia*, *Second Bite* and *OzHarvest* exemplify organizations who explicitly address hunger by distributing salvaged foods to groups who need it most. Other pathways to food system change pursued by initiatives include:

- Advocacy and education around food citizenship. For example, *the Youth Food Movement* is a national volunteer-led organization that aims to build the skills, knowledge and experience that young people have around food, through education projects for young people. Their values include: transparency, authenticity, inclusiveness, empowerment, equity, resilience, diversity, courage and accountability³.
- One not for profit organization—the Mini-farm Project—is using community garden pods on disused urban

³<http://www.youthfoodmovement.org.au/about-us/>.

land to provide fresh food to charities that support homeless people and people at risk. Food justice is associated with reducing poverty and vulnerability.

- Supporting consumers to pursue sustainable diets and greener lifestyles. Initiatives in this category include restaurants focusing on sustainable sourcing and plant-based diets, as well as community projects that focus on empowering consumers to make more sustainable lifestyle choices (e.g. the *Edible Suburb Project*).
- Closed loop food-economies. On one acre of property just outside of Brisbane, *Loop Growers* collect fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, eggshells and other organic matter from 15 cafes and restaurants in Brisbane, turning it into nutrient rich compost or feeding worm farms. Produce from the farm is then sold back to those same businesses at lower costs. This “enables [cafes] to align their actions with their values, and importantly, legitimize their business as truly sustainable [and gives] consumers the power to make that choice and spend their money with eateries that align with their beliefs”⁴.
- Gender empowerment: The *Good Food Trailer* is a crowd-funded catering business that offers food business training to refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are women. It is staffed by disadvantaged members of the community, who primarily cook traditional foods from their home countries⁵.

Scaling-up Food Justice: A Case Study of Food Connect

SSE as a development pathway “also interrogates structural issues”, often through “values and objectives of re-embedding markets and enterprise practices in social and environmental norms and reinvigorating the role of communities and citizens in the economy and polity” (Utting, 2015:9). This section examines how one social enterprise has sought to scale up production-consumption activities to influence deeper systemic transformation within the Australian food system.

Food Connect Brisbane was founded in 2005, driven by the need to democratize the food system in recognition of inequalities faced by farmers in getting a fair price for their produce, alongside increasing environmental pressures caused by poor agricultural practices and climate change. It began as a community supported agriculture (CSA), in which urban consumers provide farmers with a stable market by “subscribing” to regular purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products and other perishable items, produced less than 500 kilometres from Brisbane. Local producers are paid a fair price through long-term contracts, enabling them to cover the costs of transitioning to chemical free, biodynamic, permaculture or certified organic production systems. This reflects a holistic approach to farming that connects care for land, community and food. Boxes of fresh produce are delivered to urban consumers via a network of “city cousins”—engaged community members whose homes or businesses act as drop-off points throughout the city. Individual customers collect their weekly boxes from their nearest City Cousin, reducing transport and connecting and growing a community of like-minded, citizen-consumers. In return, consumers are empowered and enabled to eat seasonally, “reduce, reuse and recycle”, and build community networks. According to their website:

Food Connect envisions a world where all Australians have access to healthy, fresh, ecologically-grown food that is fair to growers and eaters. We differ from conventional, profit-driven businesses because we work to bring economic, social and environmental benefits to society and we reinvest all of our trading surplus into fulfilling our mission⁶.

Over ten years, the social enterprise has scaled-up to become Australia’s first local food hub. Currently, 89 organic and ecological farmers that are too small to compete in wholesale and too big to operate exclusively in direct to consumer channels work with Food Connect. Activities include: wholesale to restaurants, farmers markets and other cooperatives; a commercial kitchen supporting micro-enterprise start-ups; and supporting farmers and on-site processors to collaborate on marketing, waste minimization, logistics and ecological sustainability in response to Social Procurement policies. These activities aim to improve farmers’ economic advantage

⁴<http://www.willworkforfood.com.au/farmgrow/2018/loop-growers>.

⁵<http://www.espressotrain.com.au/goodfoodtrailer/>.

⁶<http://foodconnectfoundation.org.au/>.

by strengthening their capacity to supply local markets, thus re-building resilient regional food systems.

In 2009, the not-for-profit *Food Connect Foundation* was established with the express desire to “catalyse the new regional food economy”⁵. The Foundation seeks to encourage “bottom-up economies” by (a) connecting small, regionally owned food networks; (b) using public procurement contracts to express public values and create markets for smaller producers; (c) supporting First Australians in achieving their own food sovereignty; and (d) reinvigorating discussions about sustainable financing. It is this emphasis on financing that differentiates Food Connect from other SSE organizations involved in food system reform in the region. For example, the Foundation is a founding member and investor in the US-based, Slow Money Alliance, and has been instrumental in setting up Australia's first ever Investment Co-Operative (ORICoop) for farms and food businesses.

In December 2018, the *Food Connect Shed* became Australia's first ever equity crowdfunded food hub. For 13 years, the CSA had rented their large warehouse in South Brisbane. When the landlord offered the shed up for sale, the directors decided that “in order to fix our broken food system, the infrastructure needs to be owned by the public”⁷. Via online crowdfunding platform *PledgeMe*, the organization successfully raised AU\$2,115,359 needed to buy the warehouse outright. 510 “careholders”—private shareholders investing as little as \$500 each—now own the land and the shed itself, as well as rights to participate in decision-making within the business. With an added emphasis on women as key stakeholders in the production and distribution of food (but as underrepresented stakeholders in investment decisions), over 75% of investors today are women. The process has been the catalyst for the expansion of the food hub to include other local food businesses based on shared visions for food justice. This encompasses addressing food waste, supporting indigenous food system knowledge, gender empowerment, growing local-ecological production networks, slow finance, democratic governance and extensive partnerships. In 2017, Food Connect became B-Corporation certified⁸; they also actively partner with advocacy, education and industry organizations and networks such as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, Fair Food Chefs, Australian Food Hubs Network, Open Food Network, universities and the Social Enterprise sector.

Food Connect has also recently begun work to reframe their accountability metrics to align with the SDGs. Table 1 summarizes Food Connect's activities and impacts according to the SDGs. This data comes from their

Table 1: Potential metrics for Food Connect's impacts against the SDGs

1 No Poverty	25% of staff come from marginalized backgrounds or long-term unemployment
2 Zero Hunger	Over 40% of our retail dollar is paid to our farmers, compared to an industry average of 10%
3 Good health and wellbeing	Access to affordable, ecologically-produced food for over 1500 Brisbane families weekly
5 Gender equity	75% of the weekly recommended fruit and vegetable consumption is met by our customers, compared to the Australian average of 38%
10 Reduced inequalities	Majority women investors in Food Connect Shed
11 Sustainable cities and communities	Emphasis on solidarity with indigenous first nations peoples, and food system activities
12 Responsible production and consumption	Local procurement
13 Climate action	All food products meet high ecological standards
17 Partnerships for the goals	Educate consumers on ethical consumption (farm tours, research activities)
	Shorter distances from producer to consumer minimise waste and reduce CO2 emissions
	Sustainable procurement policies
	Collective equity financing
	Active in community advocacy and fair food movement
	5% annual turnover donated to community groups and food rescue programs

⁷<https://foodconnectshed.com.au/food-connect-shed-by-the-community-for-the-community/>

⁸Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose; <https://bcorporation.com.au/about-b-corps>.

self-reported measures of impact and outcomes.

Towards Collective Action

Collective action, democratic decision-making, the enlargement of public space and public “voice” are central dimensions of SSE (Utting, 2015). These play an important role in allowing multiple stakeholders to contest policy and discourse around the SDGs. As UNRISD (2017:4) states:

Interactive governance involving vertical, horizontal and diagonal networks with multiple actors at different levels needs to be strengthened by including SSE organizations and enterprises which reassert social control, democratic practices and the place of ethics in the economy in and beyond the locality.

In Australia, numerous fair food coalitions have emerged in response to the perceived need for food system governance and advocacy to decentralize. These include the *Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance*, *Sustain, Fair Food Alliance* (Brisbane), *Right to Food Coalition* (Sydney) and *Melbourne Food Alliance*. Their principles reflect diverse, yet shared, values associated with food justice, including: food sovereignty; equitable access to food and nutrition; advancing the right to food in Australia; partnerships with Australian first nations peoples on food and land justice issues; and concepts and practices of “new economies”, such as sharing and circular economy. These coalitions are engaged in a public critique⁹ of corporate food security discourses (such as the new green revolution and climate smart agriculture) that tend to underpin the dominant SDG approach to food access (Spann, 2017). Practical activities range from public advocacy, to working with social enterprises to progress knowledge and implementation of food hubs and food incubators, and civic food policy making with local governments. Future research with these fair food coalitions will co-create knowledge about food futures, governance and the SDGs.

CONCLUSIONS: FAIR FOOD, LOCALIZING SDGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Four tenets underpinning SSE as a transformative means of implementation for the SDGs are evident in the values, activities and outcomes pursued by community “fair food” initiatives and coalitions in Australia. These are:

- Core values and principles, alongside activities that are economically viable, that seek to break down structures of inequality that underpin social exclusion, vulnerability and unsustainable local development;
- Local, multi-stakeholder mechanisms that allow SSE actors to contest and negotiate policy solutions;
- Vertical and horizontal networks that reassert the place of ethics in the economy;
- Local control of production and consumption circuits. (UNRISD, 2017)

Through the food utopias framework (Stock et al., 2015), fair food initiatives can be understood and analyzed as “experiments” in SSE approaches to food justice, variously defined. Food access is pursued in missions and activities that seek to build and connect (a) the values of food sovereignty, food citizenship, farmer-consumer solidarity, empowerment and community control of food systems, with (b) solving practical problems associated with local ecological food production, reduction or redistribution of food waste, providing low-cost food to vulnerable groups, and restructuring finance. Together, these place-based values and activities reflect different understandings of, and approaches to, achieving food justice in specific local contexts.

First, fair food SSE initiatives demonstrate considerable synergies between ecological, social and economic values and priorities. For example, *Food Connect* is a rich example of complementarities between the SDGs and the principles of both SSE (such as more local and social control of food systems and shortened trade circuits) (UN-TFSSE, 2014) and radical food justice movements (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011). The initiatives assessed in this study connect to the SDGs in five key ways:

1. Very few initiatives explicitly incorporate the SDGs into their missions or aims.

⁹For example, see a civil society response to the recent EAT Lancet Sustainable Diets report, here: <https://www.ceresfairfood.org.au/chris-newsletter/regen-farming/a-seat-at-eats-table/>.

2. 17% of initiatives engage in activities related to SDG2 only. These mostly relate to ecological production-methods associated with organic or agroecological food production, building resilience and adaptation to climate change.
3. 31% of initiatives engage in activities contributing to SDG12 only, namely in regards reducing per capita-food waste.
4. 52% of initiatives engage in activities related to both SDG2 and 12. Initiatives tend to combine ensuring food access for vulnerable groups (e.g. homelessness) with a focus on improving the capacity for small-scale producers, women, indigenous and other groups to access resources for food production. Innovative business models (such as crowd-sourced funding) also demonstrate how cooperative ownership structures familiar to SSE approaches contribute to rethinking production and consumption circuits.
5. These findings reaffirm the indivisibility of SDG2 from others; including 1 (no poverty), 3 (health and well-being), 5 (gender equity), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible production and consumption), 13 (climate action) and 17 (partnerships for the goals).

In the context of pursuing food justice within the framework of the SDGs, looking to fair food initiatives for evidence of how to manage trade-offs and co-benefits between and within SDG goals and targets would be potentially beneficial. This has been identified as one of three main challenges to the governance of the SDGs, in addition to how to ensure collective decision-making spaces and accountability (Bowen et al, 2017). While some targets specify issues related to equity or reform (see Appendix), the indicators themselves leave little room for local interpretations of equitable food access to emerge. For example, what does “fair and equitable sharing of benefits” actually mean to diverse food system actors who experience food insecurity on a daily level? How do different types of food production systems define/ measure sustainability and resilience from an ecological and/ or social perspective? Existing SDG metrics do not enable a nuanced interpretation, or measurement, of many of the factors addressed by fair food.

Governance plays a crucial role in connecting food system activities with food system outcomes that are important for everyone (food security, public health, environment, social wellbeing and ethics) (Ingram, 2011; Smith et al., 2017). However, the low participation of community food networks in shaping food policy beyond individual initiatives has resulted in their critiques and solutions being left out of Australia’s SDG approach. Intersections between food access and food justice are not addressed in Australia’s response to progress on the SDGs¹⁰. Very few SSE initiatives described in this paper have engaged with public debates about the SDGs—either from a perspective of public awareness, political or discursive contestation, or co-construction of policy. This is a challenge that has recently been taken up by regional fair food coalitions, though not in direct relation to the SDGs. As such, there remains a significant gap between SSE initiatives driven by food justice, sustainable production and consumption and sustainable financing goals and the metrics and governance processes currently shaping domestic SDG implementation priorities. Stronger efforts towards enabling civil society engagement within government institutions are needed so that a broader range of values will be represented, and global issues can be better anchored to local interests (Devilacqua & Duncan, 2010).

This paper demonstrates that community food networks are examples of “real food utopias” that we can learn from. However, further research is required to advance understandings of transformation pathways, civil society participation (which has to date been low) and themes that the SDGs have not included—such as food justice. As such, this paper sets the groundwork for continued enquiry into community fair food networks’ engagement with the SDGs in Australia, and globally. Funded by the Australian Research Council, future research will collaborate with regional coalitions in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to co-design a series of fair food future scenarios. Civil society actors will be invited to document their visions (which will likely include food justice) and consider how these futures connect to the global SDGs. Participatory methods designed to engage civil society

¹⁰See *Australia’s Voluntary National Review*, 2018; <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Documents/sdg-voluntary-national-review.pdf>.

and policy makers in dialogue with researchers will further identify the factors that shape, enable or constrain the capacity for community food networks to inform food system governance in Australia. Considering that Australia is a signatory to the 2030 Agenda and needs to report progress to the UN, such research is crucial for progressing local control of the SDGs, and for opening up dialogue about alternative SDG metrics, measures and processes of engagement.

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Appendix. Australia's progress on SDG2 and SDG12, food-specific

Target	Indicator	Key findings	Progress
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. 2.1: By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.	2.1.2: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), 2015	Ranked 14 th in the world, at almost 3%, double European and North American average (1.5%)	Requires improvement
	2.1.2ALT: Proportion of households that went without meals due to financial stress; whether ran out of food and couldn't afford to buy any more in last 12 months (% population), 2015.	Indigenous persons are proportionately over represented with regards to food insecurity in terms of an absolute lack of food and inability to purchase it.	Requires improvement
2.2: By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.	2.2.2ALT: Prevalence of obesity: proportion of obese persons (body mass index ≥ 30)	Trends over the past ten years suggest that obesity levels (25%) are tending to plateau while there has been a slight decline in those classified as overweight (35%).	Off-track
2.3: By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.	2.3.1ALT: Cereal yield (kg/ha), 1960-2014	Year to year variation in annual precipitation and natural disasters significantly impact on yields and therefore on farmer incomes.	Needs improvement
2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.	2.4.1ALT1: Average use of nitrogen, phosphate and potash per area of cropland (kg/ha) 2.4.1ALT2: Soil organic carbon	Baseline data only	
2.5: By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.	2.5.1: Number of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium- or long-term conservation facilities	Australia continues to provide a significant number of accessions to securely stored plant genetic resource facilities both in Australia and internationally.	On track

Appendix. Continued

Target	Indicator	Key findings	Progress
2.A: Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.	2.A.1: The agriculture orientation index for government expenditure (score)	Australian Government expenditure in support of the Agricultural Sector is well below that seen in Europe and North America.	Off track
2.B: Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round.	2.B.1: Producer support estimate (PSE), % of gross farm receipts, 2000-2016	Compared to farmers in Europe and the US, Australian farmers receive very few subsidies and this is in line with international recommendations. Subsidies to Australian farmers have declined (1.7% compared to 9.9% of US farmers, 18.3% to EU farmers)	On track
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns 12.3: By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses	12.3.1ALT: Total annual food waste generated per capita	Over 5 mega tonnes per year; or over 200 kg per capita	Breakthrough needed

Source: The Transforming Australia: SDG Progress Report; <https://www.sdgtransformingaustralia.com/>.