

Community Food Programs in Victoria

**A report on the food needed
and the infrastructure required**

April 2011

Report prepared by:



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Executive Summary

Each year, at some stage, 300,000 Victorians are unable to afford or access food. Many of them turn to welfare, religious, community and other organisations for support.

There are over 500 Community Food Programs (CFPs) registered with VicRelief Foodbank – the state’s largest distributor of food relief. To better understand the current and the required levels of food relief and the adequacy of CFPs’ capacity to handle food, FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank have undertaken a comprehensive survey of 108 organisations they currently support.

The key findings were:

- Three quarters of CFPs surveyed serve 25,000 meals every week. Three quarters of the organisations surveyed also supply food parcels to over 7,000 people each week.
- CFPs are currently able to provide 66% of the food needed to meet the need for support within their communities. Two thirds of the food they distribute is donated to them by FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank and local businesses, and the rest they purchase.

- The table below (Table 1) highlights the amount of food distributed by CFPs and the shortfall.
- CFPs do not have sufficient kitchen infrastructure to accept enough available surplus quality food to meet requests for food support from within their community. Of the 108 CFPs, 21% require at least one microwave oven, 44% need better transport capacity and 54% have insufficient refrigeration.

The key courses of action for FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank are:

- FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank are working to secure additional regular supplies of food – with a priority being given to milk, meat, fruit and vegetables.
- FareShare is increasing the number of meals it cooks containing meat. While FareShare will make the most of surplus meat, the challenge is to secure meat with a longer life for CFPs.
- FareShare is establishing a larger kitchen to double its production to one million meals each year. This is in response to the research identifying there being demand for more FareShare prepared meals and limited cooking facilities

available to CFPs, as well as there being unmet demand for food relief in rural and regional Victoria.

- SecondBite’s emphasis on delivering fresh food to CFPs reduces the need for these agencies to purchase refrigerated transport. Expanding SecondBite’s service in the Melbourne metropolitan area via more refrigerated van deliveries is the most efficient way for the sector to distribute larger amounts of food to CFPs in this area.
- VicRelief Foodbank is working with suppliers of different ingredients, packaging and transport needed to cook and secure staple foods, e.g. pasta, pasta sauces and breads.
- FareShare and Leader Community Newspapers will continue their Feed Melbourne campaign to raise funds for CFPs to purchase ovens, refrigeration and other kitchen equipment, and for FareShare to rescue, cook and distribute food.

Food Category	Amount used by CFPs (kg)	Percentage currently donated	Shortfall [additional requirement plus purchased food] (kg)	Shortfall as a percentage of current use	Percentage of CFPs requesting additional food
Fruit	4,793	74%	3,449	72%	56%
Vegetables	5,527	71%	3,733	68%	56%
Meat/Fish	3,667	58%	4,102	112%	44%
Bread	4,070	90%	904	22%	30%
Cereal, Pasta, Rice	3,353	75%	2,890	86%	29%
Milk	4,950	36%	5,318	107%	54%
FareShare Meals	n/c	100%	1,048	n/c	25%*
Other	4,278	59%	4,866	114%	52%
Total	30,638		26,310		

Table 1. The amount of food distributed by CFPs and the shortfall.

n/c – Data not collected in this research.

* 40 of the 108 CFPs surveyed currently receive FareShare meals.

The Authors of this Report

FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank are three not-for-profit food relief organisations that collect surplus and/or donated food and redistribute it to Community Food Programs (CFPs) that support people living in disadvantaged circumstances. This food support may be in the form of food parcels, community meals, cooking programs or other social programs involving food.

FareShare uses its large volunteer base to cook and distribute free nutritious meals for CFPs using donated surplus food from markets, farmers, processors and retailers around Melbourne.¹ In 2010 FareShare rescued over 600,000 kg of food and donated more than 1.2 million meals.

SecondBite is committed to making a positive difference to people by identifying sources of nutritious surplus fresh food and produce that might otherwise go to waste and facilitating its safe and timely distribution to CFPs and people in need.² In 2010, SecondBite rescued and redistributed 880,000 kg of fresh food, which provided more than 5 million serves of fruit and vegetables to marginalised community members.

VicRelief Foodbank has been operating since 1930 and works with food manufacturers, distributors and primary producers to source and deliver healthy food to individuals and families experiencing hardship. Food is delivered via a network of over 550 community organisations³ and in 2010, VicRelief Foodbank distributed over 3.1 million kg of food.

Background

Food insecurity in Victoria

Community Food Programs support some of the estimated 300,000 Victorians who do not have regular access to safe, culturally appropriate and nutritious food. These people are 'food insecure',⁴ often resulting from a combination of factors: homelessness, unemployment, mental health issues, illness, limited access to transport, limited nutritional knowledge.

The term 'Community Food Programs' is used in this report to capture the range of organisations that provide various forms of food relief. This includes meals served on-site, food parcels, soup vans, and food collection points. Often the food program is just one part of the many functions that these agencies fulfil. Their core business can range from support for asylum seekers, crisis accommodation for women and children, disengaged youth sporting programs and Indigenous health and wellbeing centres.

In 2009, a survey of 81 Community Food Programs (CFPs) in Melbourne revealed that 90% of those programs had experienced an increase in demand for their services over the previous 12 months.⁵ The increased hardship that leads to families and individuals turning to CFPs for help is significantly influenced by the rising cost of food, utilities and petrol.⁶ Unfortunately, while access to fresh food is vital for the prevention of chronic disease, especially diabetes and cardio-vascular disease, it is low income communities that are often exposed to the poorest food options.⁷ CFPs therefore play a critical role in providing access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods for these communities.

The Food Support Survey presented in this report aimed to quantify the growing demand for food relief by providing a detailed picture of the capacity and needs of CFPs around Victoria.

When sourcing food for relief work, CFPs are faced with two options: receive donated food or purchase it themselves. Purchasing a high proportion of food at market prices reduces the funds available to provide the other core services of each agency. Donated food, provided it is of good quality, is therefore a more effective option for any CFP.

The role of this report

The survey was conducted with the aim of improving the supply of priority surplus/donated food to CFPs by quantifying the need in the food relief sector. The data will assist the three food distribution organisations to plan and build their own capacity and their relationships with food businesses to ensure they are providing CFPs with the food that they require. This data will also inform strategic planning and collaborations within the sector to create sustainable solutions that best meet the needs of the community by:

- fostering greater coordination of services provided by FareShare, VicRelief Foodbank and SecondBite, which in turn will maximise the sector's efficiency
- contributing to SecondBite's research into finding long term preventative solutions to the issue of food insecurity
- assisting VicRelief Foodbank in mapping areas of greatest need regarding food supply
- assisting FareShare in helping CFPs build their own capacity to support clients through its Feed Melbourne campaign and to determine the need for FareShare to increase its own capacity to provide cooked meals.

The findings will also help raise awareness about the food insecurity issues faced by many Victorians and the significant challenges the sector is seeking to resolve.

Objectives

The collaborative Food Support Survey was carried out to gauge the current status of the food relief sector from the perspective of Community Food Programs in Melbourne and Regional Victoria.

The specific objectives of this data collection were to:

- identify the amount and categories of food used by CFPs to meet the need in their communities
- quantify any unmet demand for food relief
- quantify the current infrastructure capacity of CFPs and identify potential shortfalls in their capacity to collect, store and distribute food.

Methodology

Survey Design

[The Food Support Survey](#) (FSS) was developed by the three food rescue organisations, Right Lane Consulting and The University of Melbourne. The FSS comprised nine sections that dealt with the following content:

- Meals served by CFPs, including ingredients and quantities used.
- Food parcels provided by CFPs, including ingredients and quantities used.
- Profile of clients who access food support programs.
- CFP facilities for storage, preparation and transport of food.
- Any shortfalls in supply of food or access to facilities as identified by CFPs.

Interviews

A total of 110 CFPs participated in the FSS. Of these 101 were interviewed face-to-face. Volunteer and staff interviewers were recruited and trained by project coordinators from FareShare and SecondBite to ensure consistency of data collection. Two interviewers met with the interviewee from each CFP, one to conduct the survey and the other to record the responses. The completed paper survey was then returned to FareShare or SecondBite, where the responses were entered into an online database.

Online Survey

The online version, created using Survey Monkey, was designed to reach CFPs that the three organisations did not have the resources to interview. CFPs were sent an email link requesting them to complete the online survey. Nine CFPs participated in the online survey.

The response rate from rural and regional Victoria was relatively low (six CFPs) so the results strongly reflect the status of CFPs in Greater Metropolitan Melbourne at the time of survey (September/October 2010). One hundred and eight CFPs were included in the final analysis as two did not provide sufficient information. The data were compiled and analysed using Microsoft Excel (v 14.0.4756).

The research was undertaken to identify the level of support community food programs need.

Findings

Food provided by Community Food Programs

Services and scale

The major form of food relief was meals served directly to clients, either from permanent premises or a mobile facility. These programs reported an aggregate total of 24,952 meals served each week. Sixty-eight per cent (74/108) of CFPs interviewed serve meals to their clients and 18 of these serve more than 400 meals per week. Food relief was also provided in the form of ‘take-home’ parcels. Seventy-five of the CFPs (69%) operate food parcel programs that support approximately 7,324 people with a food parcel each week.

Current supply of food

CFPs provided clients with a variety of food via their food programs. The proportions of food types were generally similar for parcels and meals. However, there was a much lower proportion of meat used as part of parcel programs (6.8%) compared to meal programs (17.5%) (Figure 1). There was also a higher proportion of non-perishables such as bread, cereal, pasta and rice used for parcels (29.3%) compared to meals (18.8%).

Forty of the 108 CFPs serve FareShare meals and/or include them in food parcels.

Combining meal and parcel programs, the 108 CFPs currently provide a total of 30,638 kg of food to their clients each week (Table 2). A large proportion (46%) of this food is raw produce such as fruit, vegetables and meat; another 29% consists of the basic processed foods, milk and bread.

Shortfall in food support

The CFPs indicated that they currently receive 20,132 kg of donated food each week. This represents 66% of the weekly food relief provided to the community by these CFPs. The shortfall in donations is most evident for milk, meat, fresh fruit and vegetables (Figure 2).

- Meat: CFPs cook or hand out 3,667 kg of red meat, fish and chicken every week. A little over half of this is donated – 2,116 kg – and 1,551kg is purchased.
- Fruit and vegetables: Each week, 4,793 kg of fruit and 5,527 kg of vegetables are used or distributed by CFPs. Of these amounts, 74% of the fruit is donated to CFPs and 71% of the vegetables are donated. A further 3,449 kg of fruit and 3,733 kg of vegetables are needed if CFPs are to meet their communities’ needs.

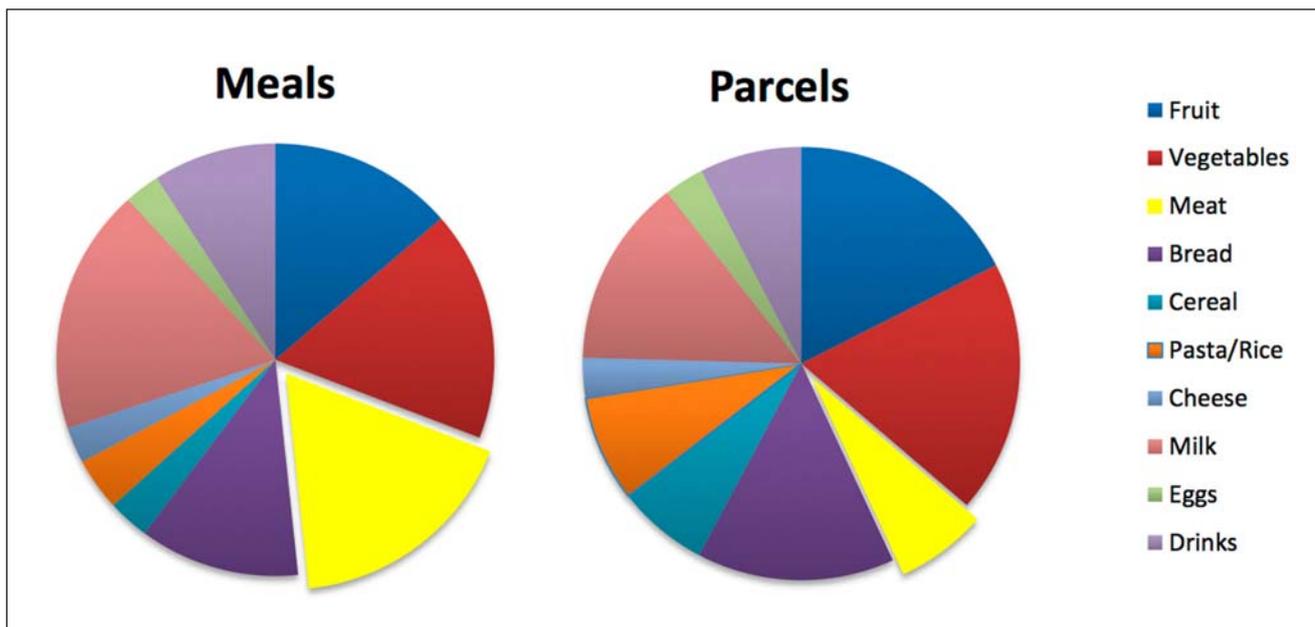


Figure 1. The proportional contributions from each food category to the meal and parcel programs provided by the 108 CFPs.

- Milk: CFPs currently use or distribute 4,950 litres of milk every week, of which 3,179 litres are purchased and only 36% is donated. A further 2,139 litres of milk is needed to meet the needs of the 108 CFPs.
- FareShare meals: Donations are also not meeting demand for pre-cooked FareShare meals provided to CFPs for use in their programs. One third of CFPs have requested FareShare meals either in addition to their current order or as a new source of food. Forty of the 108 charities were receiving FareShare meals at the time of the survey. More than half of these charities (27) stated they needed more FareShare meals. In addition, 13 charities that were not previously receiving FareShare meals also requested these to complement their current food supplies. This equates to 2,621 additional pre-cooked meals per week.
- Eggs: Only half of the product currently being distributed – 857 kg – is currently donated. Sixty per cent of charities are requesting more and this represents a total shortfall of almost 100% of current use, or 820 kg (Figure 3).
- Bread: Many CFPs are sourcing bread from local bakeries and this is reflected in the findings of this research. Over 90% of bread currently being used is donated (Figure 2). While 30% of CFPs require more bread, the additional demand for product as a percentage of current use is only slightly more than 10% (Figure 3).

Food Category	Current amount used by CFPs (kg)	Current amount being donated (kg)	Current amount being purchased (kg)	Additional food required to meet demand (kg)	Total shortfall (additional requirement plus currently purchased food) (kg)
Fruit	4,793	3,557	1,236	2,213	3,449
Vegetables	5,527	3,940	1,587	2,147	3,733
Meat/Fish	3,667	2,116	1,551	2,551	4,102
Bread	4,070	3,676	394	510	904
Cereal	1,524	1,192	333	798	1,131
Pasta/Rice	1,829	1,336	493	1,266	1,759
Cheese	876	466	410	636	1,046
Milk	4,950	1,770	3,179	2,139	5,318
Eggs	857	413	444	820	1,264
Tea/Coffee/Drinks	2,546	1,667	879	1,677	2,555
FareShare Meals	n/c	n/c	n/c	1,048	1,048
TOTALS (kg)	30,638	20,132	10,506	15,804	26,310

Table 2. The weekly amounts of food in kilograms currently used by Community Food Programs (CFPs) in Greater Melbourne and Victorian regional centres and the additional amounts required for food relief in these communities as perceived by the 108 surveyed CFPs.

n/c – Data not collected in this research.

Findings

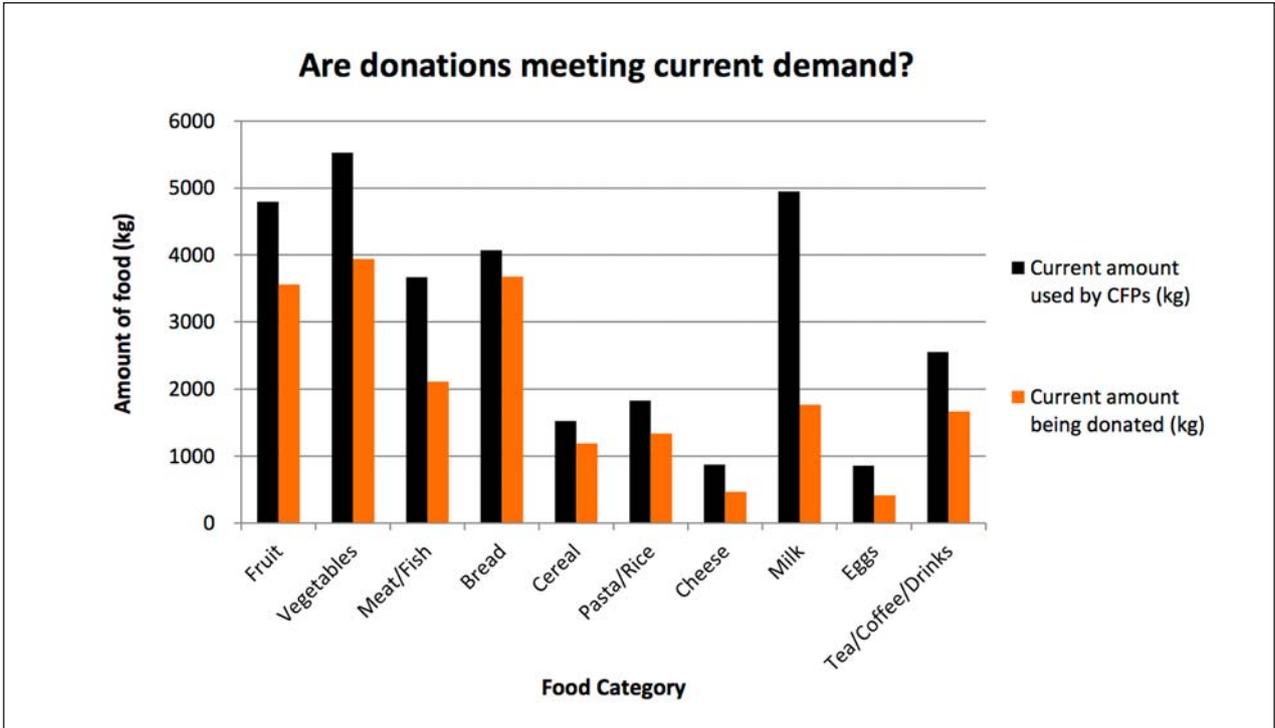


Figure 2. A comparison between the current amounts of food used by 108 Victorian CFPs and the amounts being donated for each major food category. These amounts include food used for meal and parcel programs.

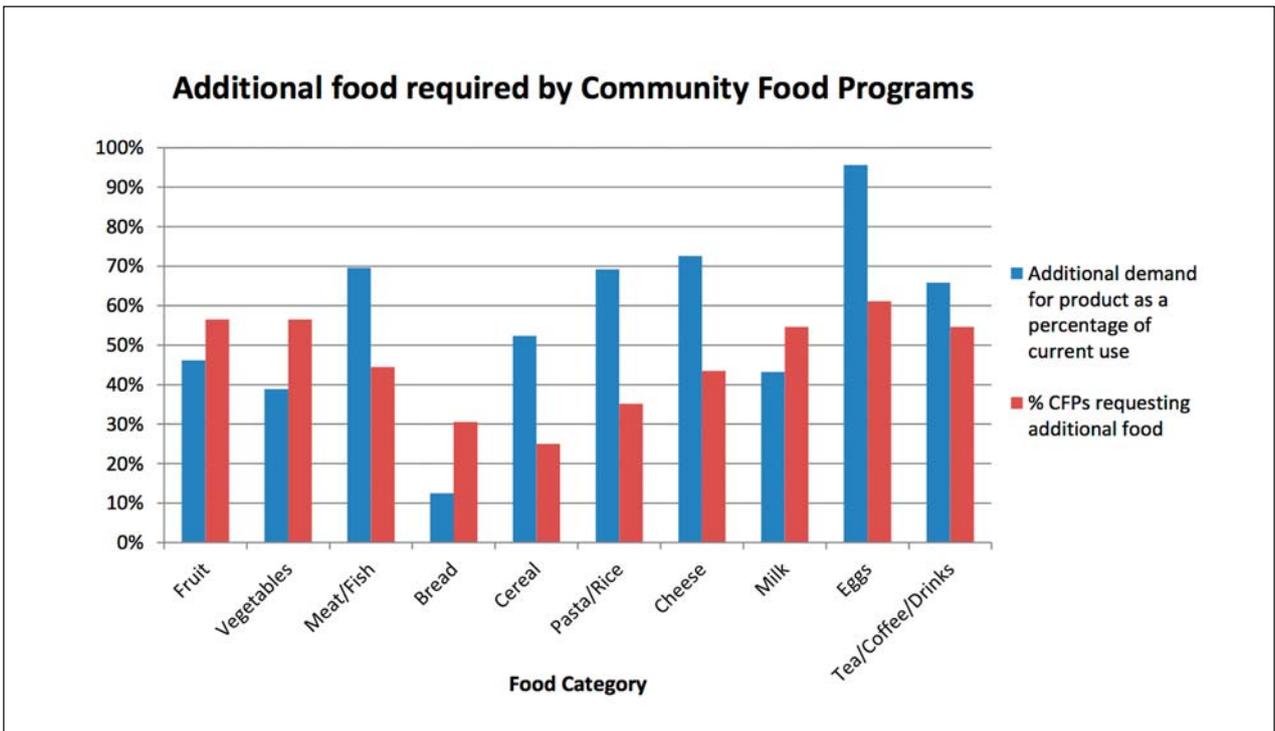


Figure 3. The additional demand by CFPs for food in each category. The blue bars show the increased demand as a percentage of current amounts used, while the red bars show the proportion of CFPs requesting more food in each category. For example, in the Fruit category, 56% of CFPs surveyed needed more fruit and the amount needed represents 46% more than what they currently use.

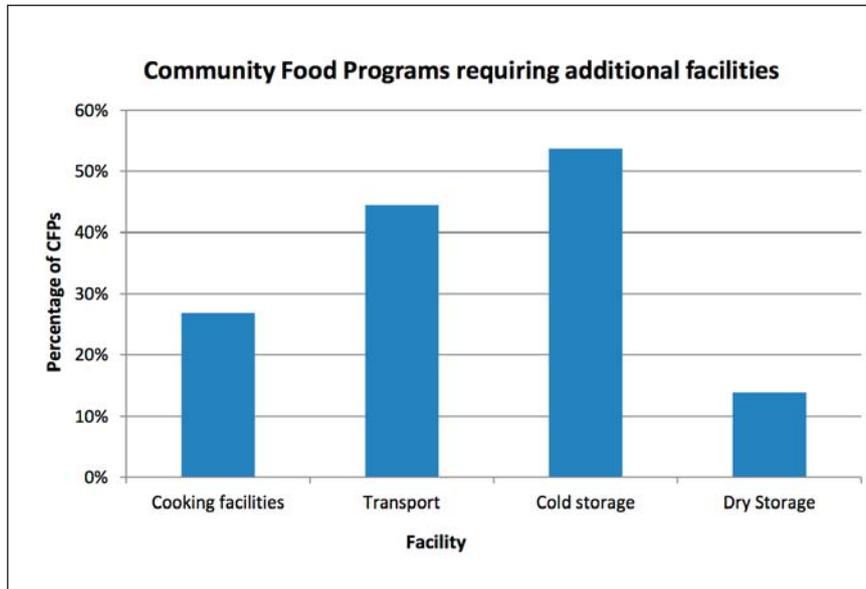


Figure 4. The proportion of the 108 CFPs surveyed that require additional facilities for preparing and cooking, transporting and storing food to meet community needs for food relief.

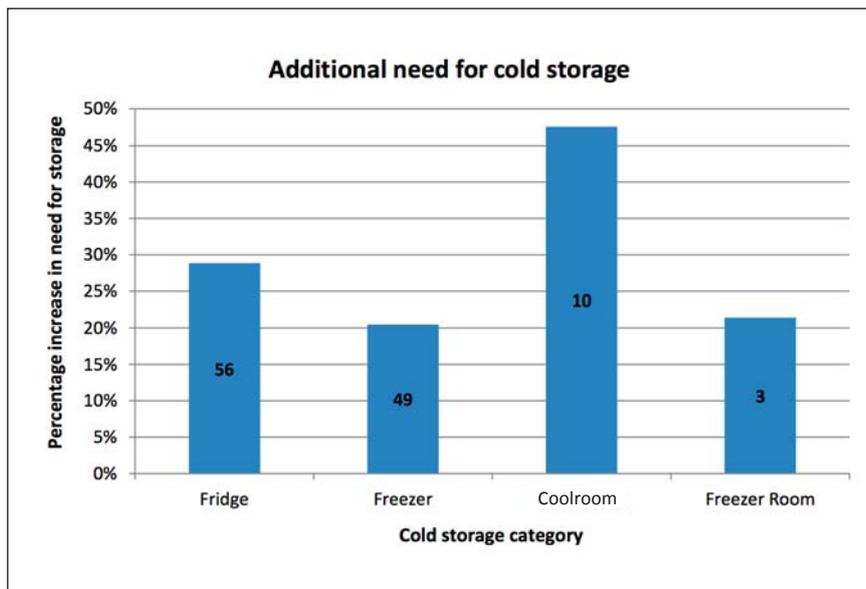


Figure 5. The proportional increase requested by CFPs relative to the current capacity for cold storage (fridges, freezers, coolrooms and freezer rooms). The numbers on the bars indicate the total number of items requested in each category by all 108 CFPs surveyed.

Findings

Facilities used by Community Food Programs

Facilities for cooking, transport and storage of food are essential to the operation of Community Food Programs. The majority of CFPs (78%) in this survey indicated they need additional facilities to help them meet the demand for food relief in their communities.

Food preparation and storage

The cooking facility in highest demand was a microwave oven, with 21% of CFPs indicating a need for this item. Around 10% of CFPs were in need of kitchen facilities, both commercial and domestic. Facilities for storing food, particularly cold storage facilities, were most in demand with more than half of CFPs surveyed (54%) indicating they had insufficient cold storage space (Figure 4). Figure 5 shows the division of need between the different cold storage categories. Fridges and freezers were the most numerous items identified (see numbers on bars), however there was a larger proportional increase in demand for coolrooms above current capacity.

Transport

Additional transport facilities are needed by 44% of CFPs. Many CFPs (56%) do not have access to dedicated vehicles and rely on volunteer drivers using their own vehicles for the collection and distribution of food.

Twelve per cent of CFPs (13) currently have no access to a vehicle, however only three of these CFPs indicated that they needed one.

Many CFPs said they need access to refrigerated transportation for their relief programs. Currently only 4% of the vehicles used by CFPs for food relief are refrigerated. Refrigerated vehicles are needed by a large proportion of the CFPs surveyed (almost 30%) as well as being the most common vehicle type requested.

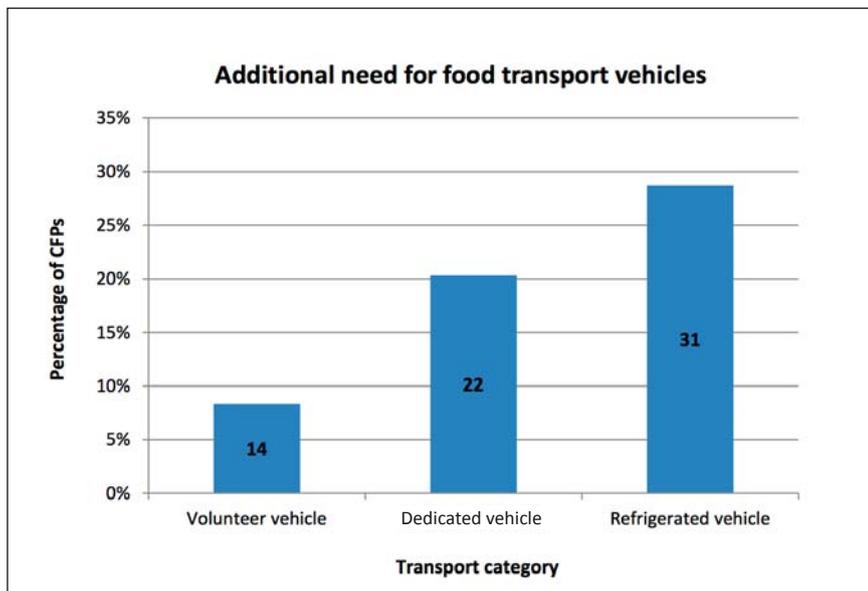


Figure 6. The proportion of Community Food Programs surveyed that indicated they needed additional vehicles (volunteer drivers with vehicles, dedicated vehicles for food transport – van or truck, or refrigerated vehicles – van or truck) for their food relief work. The numbers on the bars indicate the total number of vehicles in each category being requested by the 108 CFPs.

Conclusions and Courses of Action

In 2010, the author organisations, FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank, donated more than 4.5 million kg of food to Community Food Programs across Victoria. The 108 CFPs surveyed for this study – less than one fifth of total CFPs operating in the state – are serving approximately 25,000 meals and distributing approximately 7,300 food parcels to disadvantaged Victorians each week. Despite this large food relief effort, CFPs have still indicated a shortfall in the supply of food to meet the demand in the community.

The supply of food to CFPs

Fruit and Vegetables

Fresh, raw produce is in high demand by CFPs. More than 50% of CFPs indicated they have an insufficient supply of both fruit and vegetables for their needs.

To meet the demand for fruit in their communities, CFPs would need to source an additional 2,213 kg per week. CFPs are already purchasing 1,236 kg per week, therefore the challenge to the three author organisations is to secure an extra 3,449 kg of rescued or donated fruit per week.

CFPs surveyed stated they needed to supply an extra 2,147 kg of vegetables per week. Given CFPs already purchase 1,587kg of vegetables per week, FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank should seek for a further 3,734kg of rescued or donated vegetables per week.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are a valuable source of vitamins and minerals and essential for good health and fighting disease. Recent Victorian data suggests that wealthier households are more likely to be eating their recommended serves of two fruit and five vegetables every day – highlighting the importance of improved access of fresh produce in CFPs.⁸ An increased intake of fresh fruit and vegetables by one serving a day for every person in Australian would result in health care savings of \$24.4 million per year, with \$8.6 million associated with breast and lung cancer alone.⁹

Large quantities of good quality fresh produce are available free to charities from supermarkets, wholesale markets and primary producers. The three food relief organisations are working with businesses in these sectors to secure regular fresh produce for CFPs to cook, serve and include in food parcels.

Meat and Fish

The CFPs surveyed need 70% more meat than they are currently receiving. They currently use 3,667 kg of meat each week, of which 2,116 kg is donated to them and 1,551 kg is purchased.

To meet community demand the CFPs require an extra 2,551 kg of meat per week, therefore the challenge for the three food distribution organisations is to find a further 4,102 kg of meat per week to provide to CFPs.

Many charities commented on difficulties with safe handling and storage of meat, particularly in relation to food parcel programs. This also reflects food safety standards of the three food distribution organisations and their donors. It explains the lower proportion of meat in parcels compared to meals.

For charities with kitchen facilities that do their own cooking, the three author organisations need access to a greater supply of donated meat products to distribute. Collecting surplus meat for CFPs to distribute in food parcels carries significant risks, and therefore securing donations of meat with a relatively longer life would be imperative.

Local food programs need an additional 3,449kg of fruit per week.

Conclusions and Courses of Action

FareShare Meals

Clients that receive food parcels are unlikely to be able to afford to buy their own fresh meat, which highlights the importance of nutritious, pre-cooked meals that can be safely given away as part of food parcels. For those charities without kitchen facilities, an increased supply of pre-cooked meals containing meat from FareShare may provide agencies with iron and protein-rich meals that can either be heated and served on site, or safely given away as part of food parcels.

Nearly one third of CFPs requested more FareShare meals. These CFPs have requested an extra 2,621 FareShare meals be cooked and distributed per week. Given that the CFPs surveyed represent no more than one fifth of CFPs in Victoria, FareShare is aiming to double its current production to 20,000 meals per week.

In addition, CFPs placed significant emphasis on meat, thus FareShare will work with supermarkets and other suppliers to collect more meat with which to cook meals.

Milk

Milk is a staple food and a valuable source of calcium. More than 50% of CFPs said they needed more milk to meet the demand in their communities. Only 35% of milk used by CFPs is currently being donated.

By weight, milk is the food or drink most needed by CFPs. The current amount of milk being purchased plus the additional amount required to meet demand is 5,318 litres per week.

VicRelief Foodbank and SecondBite are currently speaking with potential suppliers to secure more milk for CFPs.

Non-perishable products

Due to their relatively non-perishable nature, pasta, rice, cereal, tea, coffee and drinks are often more difficult for the three food distribution organisations to rescue, yet the challenge is to secure an extra 4,445 kg of these items each week to support the 108 CFPs.

VicRelief Foodbank is working with suppliers of different ingredients, packaging and transport needed to cook and secure staple foods, eg. pasta, pasta sauces and breads.

Eggs

Although eggs are not a high priority product in terms of the amount required (approximately 850 kg per week – 17% of the amount of fruit being used), only 50% of that amount is being donated and CFPs indicated a need for almost 100% more eggs than they currently use.

In response to this, FareShare has identified the potential for more efficient use and redistribution of surplus eggs from supermarkets to help meet the shortfall. The organisation collects surplus eggs from supermarkets that are often not suitable for redistribution to CFPs uncooked. In future, FareShare will cook any non-distributable stock into meals and redistribute more of the higher quality rescued eggs directly to CFPs.

SecondBite is currently seeking out more primary producers of eggs to access a regular and reliable bulk supply for CFPs year round.

FareShare is aiming to double its current weekly production to 20,000 meals.

The cost of purchasing food

There is a significant amount of food and drink being purchased by the 108 CFPs (34%) each week, with the highest expenditure items for CFPs appearing to be meat, fruit, vegetables and eggs.

Adding the amount of food already purchased by CFPs with the shortfall they have identified, the amount that the three organisations are seeking to service the needs of these 108 CFPs is approximately 26,000 kg of food.

Furthermore, the real need for food in this sector is likely to be much higher given only one fifth of CFPs registered with VicRelief Foodbank were surveyed and there are many CFPs operating that do not receive food from VicRelief.

Each year approximately 700,000 tonnes of food ends up in Victorian landfills – a significant portion of which is fit for human consumption. This is an unnecessary waste of the water, fertilizer, fuel and other resources used to produce and transport food and an unnecessary source of greenhouse gas emissions.

CFPs already run very lean operations, e.g. it costs Destiny Care in Dingley \$7,700 to operate for six months, during which time it hands out hampers and meals to the approximate value of \$92,500. If meat, fruit, vegetables, eggs, milk and other items could be rescued, or donated, before being sent to landfill and supplied to CFPs, then the money saved could be spent on other

programs for their communities such as financial counselling, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and languages courses.

The amounts of food needed to provide adequate supplies to CFPs for their communities are trivial compared with the amounts that are produced, manufactured, imported and sold in Victoria. FareShare, SecondBite and VicRelief Foodbank encourage businesses to allocate a very small portion of their turnover as donations for charity as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Facilities required by Community Food Programs

Seventy-eight per cent of the CFPs interviewed indicated they had inadequate access to facilities to operate their food relief programs. Refrigeration was the most commonly identified infrastructure needed by CFPs, with 54% of programs surveyed requiring fridges, freezers, coolrooms or freezer rooms. CFPs require an additional 56 fridges, 49 freezers and 10 coolrooms.

The annual Feed Melbourne campaign, run by FareShare and Leader Community Newspapers, has helped to fund whitegoods, coolrooms, vehicles and other infrastructure to CFPs. VicRelief Foodbank programs have also helped deliver 80 fridges and freezers to CFPs in the last two years.

While the three food distribution organisations will continue to increase the amount of food they rescue and distribute to CFPs, a complementary strategy of also helping community groups to increase their food handling capacity is essential.

Most CFPs have access to transport, but this is usually volunteers using their own vehicles. It is worrying that only 4% of vehicles used by CFPs for transporting food are refrigerated. Of the 108 CFPs surveyed 44% expressed a need for transport facilities. SecondBite uses refrigerated vehicles and delivers 85% of the food they rescue in order to support CFPs that have limited transport capacity.

However, the responses of CFPs indicate that the sector as a whole likely requires better access to refrigerated transport facilities. Having identified CFPs with inadequate access to refrigerated transport, SecondBite will investigate whether their needs can be met by their refrigerated vehicles and delivery services. It may be that part of their need is their own deliveries to clients once food is received. This need will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to improve the distribution of food to and from CFPs.

Community food programs face a shortfall of 5,318 litres of milk per week.

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