



Inquiry into food security in Victoria

SecondBite & FareShare submission

July 2024

About SecondBite & FareShare

Founded in 2005, [SecondBite](#) was borne out of a realisation that perfectly healthy, edible food was being discarded and farmers and retailers, while millions of people faced hunger through food insecurity. With operations in every state and territory, SecondBite works with farmers, retailers and manufacturers to harness surplus quality produce, providing it to more than 1000 charity partners supporting their communities experiencing food insecurity. Last financial year, we distributed over 4.4 million kilograms of food across Victoria, via a network of 227 charity partners.

Founded in 2001, [FareShare](#) operates Australia's largest non-profit kitchens in Melbourne and Brisbane, where chefs transform rescued and donated food, as well as produce grown on their own farms, into millions of delicious, nutritious meals for people in need. These meals are given away free to frontline charities, such as soup vans, homeless shelters, women's refuges, First Nations organisations and groups providing dignified food relief and providing the right meals to people most in need. Last financial year, FareShare distributed over 740,000 meals across Victoria, via a network of approximately 150 charity partners. Over the next 12 months, 1.2 million meals are expected to be produced from the newly refurbished Victorian kitchen site in Abbotsford.

SecondBite and FareShare have long recognised the complementary nature of each organisation; realising that working together enables increased support to those in the community who need it most. In a transformative move for the food relief sector, FareShare and SecondBite merged on July 1, 2024. This major advancement combines the incredible community-led culture of FareShare with the national scale and heartfelt reach of SecondBite, to provide a transformative, all-encompassing solution, providing free, healthy food and homecooked nutritious meals, to communities who need it most. You can read more about our merger [here](#).

Together, SecondBite and FareShare harness Australia's significant food surplus and redistribute it around the country, to provide a free food solution to charity partners and the communities they serve.

Our aspirations for the combined entity are outlined below:

SecondBite & FareShare Vision & Purpose

OUR VISION Every Australian has access to nutritious food – no matter their location or situation		
WHO WE ARE By combining the incredible community-led culture of FareShare with the national scale and heartfelt reach of SecondBite, we provide a transformative, all-encompassing solution, providing free, healthy food to communities who need it most		
OUR PURPOSE We partner with communities to provide free, healthy food and nutritious cooked meals that help Australians thrive		
We meet the community's need	We harness Australia's bountiful food supply	We cover the breadth and depth of the country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work with community to determine their needs. • Community needs are at the forefront of the food we provide. • We cater for cultural, dietary and nutritional requirements, providing people with dignity and respect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We harness Australia's significant food surplus to provide fresh fruit and vegetables – direct from the farmgate and supermarkets. • We use healthy, fresh ingredients to create nutritious, delicious meals. • We focus on continuous improvement of the quality and supply of food. • We benefit the environment by using food that would otherwise be wasted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In every state and territory, we offer a free food solution to charity partners and the communities they support. • We access parts of the country where the distance may be great – but so is the need. • We use innovative technology to provide food solutions that address need and support the health of our communities. • We utilise the support of unpaid services through our volunteer model.

We welcome the inquiry into food security in Victoria and the opportunity to provide a submission for the committees' consideration.

Food insecurity in Victoria

The most recent statistics available for Victoria (2022) show us that approximately 8.1% of the community has experienced severe food insecurity¹. The Foodbank Hunger Report, released every year, shows a steady increase in the demand for food relief, year on year. In 2022, 33% of households surveyed reported experiencing some kind of food insecurity in the last 12 months² in comparison 36% in 2023³. One of the major drivers of food insecurity is financial hardship⁴. With the cost of living continuing to rise, it is likely that the real number of food insecure in 2024 is much higher, and that the demand for food relief is set to continue to rise.

Food insecurity disproportionately affects those who traditionally face disadvantage. Those who are unemployed, face homelessness or insecure housing, asylum seekers, some culturally linguistically diverse communities, those in remote areas and First Nation's people are all more likely to face food insecurity and for the level of food insecurity to be more severe⁵. The impacts of being food insecure are well reported. Food insecurity negatively impacts the physical, mental and social health of adults and children and these consequences may be greater as the severity of food insecurity increases⁶. Poor quality diets are responsible for a plethora of preventable diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and renal disease⁵.

There are pockets of disadvantage in Victoria and many of these areas are also underserved by the food relief sector (defined for the purpose of this submission as SecondBite, FareShare, OzHarvest and FoodBank). This can be caused by distance, poor agency infrastructure and sheer demand for food relief services. The Foodbank Hunger Map is a tool that has been developed by the food relief sector as a way of visualizing the gaps in service delivery, in the locations where food insecurity is higher. The Hunger Map is a collaborative tool that the food relief sector will use to tackle the demand for food relief in the state, together.

¹ Victorian Population Health Survey 2022

² Foodbank Hunger Report 2022

³ Foodbank Hunger Report 2023

⁴ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum](#). Rome, FAO.

⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies *Understanding food insecurity in Australia* 2020

⁶ Valerie Tarasuk et al *Chronic physical and mental health conditions among adults may increase vulnerability to household food insecurity* Journal of Nutrition 2013 available [here](#)

Our comment on food relief as a solution to food insecurity

We recognise that food relief is not the answer to food insecurity. In a perfect world, hunger and food insecurity would not exist. However, in the last 12 months, in Victoria especially, the after-effects of the covid lockdowns plus the increase in cost-of-living is putting pressure on many cohorts within the community and they are struggling to make ends meet. SecondBite estimates that the demand for our services has increased significantly over the past 12 months and at the time of writing, FareShare had 93 Victorian charities on their waiting list. If we are to transition to a fairer food system, it will take decades to achieve. In that time Victoria's population is set to explode. Victoria remains the fastest-growing state in the country with the population expected to reach 10.3 million by 2051⁷.

While government and other stakeholders within the food security system concentrate on the solutions to solve the root causes of food insecurity, the food relief sector still has a large part to play to ensure vulnerable Victorians have access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food. As a combined entity, SecondBite and FareShare plan on doing this by continuing with the mass collection and redistribution of surplus food, while providing targeted and tailored programs, such as those outlined below.

How SecondBite and FareShare can improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food for Victorians

a. Farmgate collections

SecondBite has been delivering surplus food to people experiencing food insecurity in every state of Australia since 2005, rescuing 25 million kilograms of unsold, edible food in 2023-2024 alone. But the surplus from markets, supermarkets, and other retail outlets only represents just 3% of total food waste generated in the country⁸. Australia produces more than enough food for its population, yet nearly 30% of that food is wasted⁹. Bananas that are slightly too bent, apples with some hail damage, potatoes that have retained too much water, all are deemed unsuitable for market and without financial incentives to donate, farmers resort to ploughing this nutritious produce back into the soil, leaving it on vines to rot or sending it to landfill. Conversely within food relief, fruit and vegetables are needed most to help support the holistic food needs of

⁷ Department of Transport and Planning [Victoria in Future](#) 2024

⁸ CSIRO [The challenge of ending food waste and food insecurity in Australia](#) 2023

⁹ Food Innovation Australia (FIAL) [National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study](#) 2021

vulnerable Australians and the food that is wasted in Australia is a significant contributor to climate change¹⁰.

Using our existing retail food rescue model, SecondBite has commenced work with some of Australia's largest growers, manufacturers and freight companies to provide a regular stream of fresh produce into the food relief supply chain. We have also been conducting collaborative advocacy work with Foodbank and OzHarvest, lobbying the government to consider a food donation tax incentive for food businesses who donate their surplus food, instead of sending it to landfill. KMPG has estimated that a national food waste tax incentive would have the potential to directly assist in achieving the 50 percent target in reduction of food waste for Australia and generate up to \$2billion per annum in social, economic and environmental benefits¹¹. The tax incentive has garnered support in recent government inquiries and was a key recommendation in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture inquiry into Food Security in Australia. It also has widespread endorsement from representative organisations and businesses in the Australian food industry. [The tax incentive bill](#) recently passed the Senate and is currently going through a Senate committee inquiry stage.

b. Meals for the Mob

First Nations people represent the world's oldest continuous culture, rich in history, diversity, language and culture. Yet research indicates that the rates of food insecurity amongst First Nations peoples are disproportionately high. First Peoples are four times more likely to be food insecure compared to non-First Nations people in Victoria¹². This inequality in diet and prolonged experiences of food insecurity is contributing to larger health disparities and long-term impacts on health compared to that of the non-indigenous Australian population.¹³ For example, First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas have rates of liver failure that are 20 times higher than those of comparable non-indigenous peoples¹⁴.

FareShare is committed to collaborating with First Nations communities to address the disproportionately high levels of food insecurity amongst their Peoples and to Closing the Gap. Meals for the Mob was created to address both the disproportionately higher incidence of food insecurity and subsequent higher incidences of long-term health impacts, in particular diet-sensitive chronic diseases, in First Nations communities,

¹⁰ Climateworks Centre [Living within limits: Adapting the planetary boundaries to understand Australia's contribution to planetary health](#) 2022

¹¹ KMPG [Australian National Food Donation Tax Incentive Implementation Analysis](#) 2022

¹² Sherrif et al 2022 [Murradambirra Dhangaang \(make food secure\): Aboriginal community and stakeholder perspectives on food insecurity in urban and regional Australia](#)

¹³ Australian Government [Closing the Gap Report](#) 2020

¹⁴ Kidney Health Australia [First Nations Australians](#) 2023

that is driven by chronic food insecurity. Our work with communities started with, and continues with, listening to First Nations Peoples first and foremost, to understand how we can assist in providing culturally appropriate, familiar and nutritious meals. Our approach is to work with Elders and leaders, local service providers and communities to co-design initiatives that tackle the lack of access to affordable, healthy food. FareShare's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) signifies this commitment.

Led by FareShare's First Nations Officer, the Meals for the Mob program starts with endorsement from local leaders, elders and champions and consultation from local land councils and tribes to seek permission to deliver food and partner with community services. By placing trust and on-the-ground relationship building as key tenets of Meals for the Mob, we have gained endorsement from leaders, laying the foundations to expand our work in First Nations communities.

Master recipes for our meals have been developed by FareShare's Head Chef in collaboration with the University of Queensland's Dietetics Department to maximise nutrition and deliver an appealing, familiar taste profile. Adequate intake of protein and vegetables minimises an individual's overall risk of malnutrition, preventing worsening chronic disease outcomes over time, and this is especially true for children¹⁵. Meals for the Mob aims to mitigate these barriers to healthy food access by providing meals for free that focus on maximising the intake of protein and vegetables within food insecure communities, whilst maintaining low levels of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar. With the Meals for the Mob program, FareShare aims to contribute to Closing the Gap outcomes related to health disparities caused by poor diet in First Nations communities (CtG outcomes 1,2,4).

In 2022, our successful pilot program delivered 20,850 tasty, nutritious meals to First Nations communities and services in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. We have since cooked more than 200,000 Meals for the Mob, supporting First Nations families and individuals experiencing food insecurity. Meals for the Mob continues to gain momentum in our Brisbane (Meanjin) kitchen and is now being expanded to Melbourne (Naarm), likely in partnership with [Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's Food Path Project](#). We are looking for other partners to support the pilot and subsequent roll out of MTFM for the First Nations communities in Victoria.

Medically Tailored Meals

Australia is facing a deepening crisis of chronic conditions that are caused and exacerbated by poor quality diets. Sub-optimal diets cause more health disease deaths than smoking and physical inactivity combined¹⁶. Additionally non-dietary risk factors

¹⁵ Tarasuk et al 2013. [Chronic physical and mental health conditions among adults may increase vulnerability to household food insecurity](#) 2013

¹⁶ Global Burden of Disease study: [Data Visualisation](#)

for chronic disease, such as smoking and high BMI maybe be compounded by the prevalence of food insecurity¹⁷.

Chronic disease costs healthcare systems billions each year¹⁸. While the public health message has consistently been to eat healthier diets, this is not accessible for many, and diet quality of food insecure people is lower, typically consuming less fruit, vegetables and dairy products and consuming higher fat dairy products, salty snacks, processed meat and sugar-sweetened beverages than those who were food secure¹⁹.

There is a growing interest in innovative ‘Food is Medicine’ programs, yet Australia lacks high- quality evidence demonstrating the benefit that targeted healthy meal plans have on particular health conditions. Traditional food relief does not often take the health condition of a recipient into account when providing support, nor does it leverage the interest and resources that healthcare could bring to the food relief sector to maximise the potential of nutritious food for health and wellbeing. Emerging evidence from the USA suggests that Medically Tailored Meals designed for those experiencing social-economic hardship improves health and wellbeing, reduces nutrition insecurity and subsequently, inequality surrounding access to nutritious food^{20 21}

In 2023, FareShare partnered with The George Institute for Global Health to investigate trialling a Medically Tailored Meals program in Australia. With this initiative, we aim to revolutionize food assistance for individuals and families in Australia facing the challenges of both food insecurity and chronic illness by tailoring meals to the participant’s illness, specifically adults living in inner city Melbourne who have type 2 diabetes. Data from the pilot program will assist us to refine our Medically Tailored Meals service model and provide the evidence needed to attract additional funding for a randomized controlled trial to define the clinical effectiveness of Medically Tailored Meals for adults with type 2 diabetes. We are also looking for funding to conduct pilots to investigate how Medically Tailored Meals might benefit other health conditions, including Medically Tailored Meals for renal disease considering that it severely and disproportionately affects First Nations peoples, and FareShare’s commitment to our

¹⁷ Lindberg et al 2022 *The Diet Quality of Food-Insecure Australian Adults-A Nationally Representative Cross-Sectional Analysis* available [here](#)

¹⁸ [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) 2023

¹⁹ Machado et al [Ultra-processed foods and recommended intake levels of nutrients linked to non-communicable diseases in Australia: evidence from a nationally representative cross-sectional study](#) 2019

²⁰ Leung et al 2014 [Food Insecurity Is Inversely Associated with Diet Quality of Lower-Income Adults](#). Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

²¹ Berkowitz et al [Medically Tailored Meal Delivery for Diabetes Patients with Food Insecurity: a Randomised Cross-over Trial](#). Journal of General Internal Medicine

RAP. This project also aligns with the Federal Government's 10-year plan for Primary Health Care²².

Shelf-stable Meals

A considerable challenge for the food relief sector is the provision of food for regional and remote areas, areas that are cut-off due to seasonal weather events, responding to disasters and supporting communities with disaster preparedness and resilience. Natural disasters especially can quickly disrupt food supply, power and cold storage. Cooking a healthy, hot meal for a family who have been displaced due to disaster is a challenge in this situation. Food that is easy to store and requires little or no refrigeration can be delivered to an area in bulk can overcome these barriers to nutritious food access. They are also a way for the homeless, those feeling domestic violence or those who cannot afford to pay their power bills and have been cut off, to receive a nutritious hot meal.

To tackle these challenges, FareShare is currently developing an innovative meal range, using the latest freeze-dry and thermal- processing technologies, to transform our meals so that they do not require refrigeration and have a greatly extended shelf life. By removing water from food via freezing, then reducing the pressure and applying heat to vaporise the ice crystals, our freeze-dried meals retain nutrition yet dramatically reduces the weight of the food item by up to 80%, meaning that we can fit three times the volume of food onto a pallet for shipping. Additionally using heat and pressure to sterilise low acidic foods, then packaging the food hermetically (sealing 'gas tight' keeping moisture and gases that cause food to decay out of the food packaging), our retort meals allow for transportation of food across vast distances without the need for chilling. FareShare non-perishable meals can be put in place prior to events occurring, helping communities to become more resilient to natural disasters.

After a successful pilot of the meals in Queensland's remote Gulf of Carpentaria, we are now in the early stages of a project with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries which will see the development of tasty nutritionally balanced meals that recognise cultural and dietary preferences. These meals will be subject to trials across various thermal processes, rigorous laboratory testing for shelf life and sensory evaluation within community before the program can be rolled out nationwide. We would welcome support to conduct trials in Victoria.

²² Department of Health [Future focused primary health care: Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032](#)

In conclusion

The need for our services is unlikely to abate in the near future, and to attempt to meet this demand, the food relief sector needs considerable resourcing and support for an extended period of time. For SecondBite & FareShare, our focus is on supporting access to healthy nutritious food, providing targeted and tailored solutions for those who are in need of food relief. We believe that the programs outlined in this submission have the potential to improve the physical, mental and social well-being of cohorts in Victoria who are more likely to experience food insecurity, especially those experiencing entrenched, longer-term food insecurity. These programs, although not solutions to end food insecurity, play an important role in supporting Victoria's most vulnerable, understanding State and Federal governments have a focus on addressing the economic and policy settings which remain the root causes of food insecurity.

We thank you for this opportunity to provide a written submission for the inquiry and confirm that we would be delighted to attend the oral hearing and give evidence to the committee on the matters contained in this submission.

For any further information please contact Solly Fahiz, Director of Advocacy, Strategy & Impact solly.fahiz@secondbite.org