



Submission in response to the National Food Security Strategy discussion paper

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Introduction

Foodbank Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the National Food Security Strategy. As the largest food relief organisation in the country, with a network of Foodbanks supporting approximately 3,000 frontline organisations and more than 3,300 schools, we have a unique window into the human impact of food insecurity and the systemic drivers that contribute to it.

Food security must be reframed as a preparedness investment and a driver of social and economic wellbeing, not just as an issue of production efficiency.

We welcome the discussion paper's focus on **people** – both in terms of individual food security and in recognising that food is not just sustenance but fundamental to education and physical and mental health and wellbeing. Food connects us socially, culturally and spiritually; it underpins our health, our capacity to learn and succeed and our ability to participate fully in community life. Food is central to family, culture and identity. By embracing this holistic view of food, the strategy has the potential to move beyond a production lens and centre on the lived experience of households and communities. Foodbanks across Australia are working with Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations that consider food is central to Closing the Gap.

We also endorse the framing of the strategy around resilience, collaboration and outcomes. In addition, we highlight four cross-cutting themes – resilient supply chains for critical inputs, shared risk assessment, economic preparedness, and food security as national security – that should be integrated into the strategy's core architecture.

Principles

Foodbank supports the principles outlined in the discussion paper and suggests the following additions:

- » **Equity and inclusion:** All Australians, regardless of income, geography or background, must be able to access sufficient, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, regardless of their income, location, or background.
- » **Dignity in food access:** Relief should provide choice and agency, along with pragmatic nutritional consideration, not just calories.
- » **Evidence-based and data-driven:** Consistent national measurement and reporting is essential.
- » **Circularity and efficiency:** In a principle established by End Food Waste Australia – rescue, redistribute, then repurpose – food first, animals second, energy last.

In terms of timeframes, Foodbank suggests the following:

- » **Short-term (1–2 years):** Stabilise supply of staples, embed food insecurity metrics in ABS surveys, ensure annual Commonwealth food relief funding (matched by each state/territory government) is committed to ensure food relief supply can match demand
- » **Medium-term (5–10 years):** Incentivise domestic production of critical inputs, implement a national food donation tax incentive, scale collaborative supply and ensure the National Food Security Strategy and National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy work seamlessly together, maximising route optimisation, including new infrastructure and transport pathways to support government's appetite for place based solutions, particularly in the provision of emergency relief and food relief.
- » **Long-term (10+ years):** Integrate food security into economic, climate, and defence policy.

In terms of Foodbank's current or planned initiatives to improve food security, we draw your attention to:

- » **Everyday Food Relief:** providing culturally appropriate, nutritious food for more than 1 million food insecure people a month.
- » **Disaster Food Relief:** preparing for, responding to and assisting with recovery from disasters.
- » **Collaborative Supply Program:** securing staples through innovative, pooled procurement.
- » **Foodbank Hunger Map:** providing comprehensive national data infrastructure for food insecurity.
- » **School Feeding Programs:** ensuring children start the day nourished, leading to long-term wellbeing, behavioural and academic benefits.
- » **Nutrition Education Programs:** providing nutrition education and cooking skills to key demographic groups in a number of states/territories.

Key Priority Areas

Resilient Supply Chains

Foodbank supports DAFF's focus on resilience and urges that it be framed broadly to reflect the real-world pressures experienced by households and communities. Resilience is not only about maintaining inputs but about ensuring continuity of supply during emergencies, natural

disasters, pandemics, and cost-of-living crises. Recent events — from bushfires and floods to the pandemic and inflationary shocks — have shown that while Australia's food system can generally absorb short-term disruption, vulnerable communities often bear the brunt of shortages, higher prices, and logistical delays, often experiencing them first, worst and for the longest.

Actions recommended:

- 1. Strengthen planning for emergency food supply continuity, ensuring national and state disaster frameworks embed food relief as a core capability eg making the ad hoc determination that food relief be categorised as priority goods during past disasters into a permanent ACCC authorisation.***
- 2. Support strategic reserves of staple foods through state/territory Foodbanks to buffer against shocks and ensure rapid deployment where needed.***
- 3. Invest in transport and storage infrastructure, especially for regional and remote communities, to avoid prolonged isolation and supply chain disruption during crises.***
- 4. Incorporate food relief logistics into national contingency and resilience planning to ensure the system can flex during both natural disasters and economic shocks.***

Resilience means having the capacity to anticipate, withstand and recover from shocks of many kinds — from cyclones to pandemics to cost-of-living surges — while keeping food affordable and accessible for all Australians. As such, it is imperative that the Strategy recommend annual preparedness investment to Foodbank to help build this resilience.

Productivity, Innovation and Economic Growth

Food security must be reframed as a preparedness investment and a driver of social and economic wellbeing, not just as an issue of production efficiency. As Foodbank outlined in its recent submission to Treasury's Economic Reform Roundtable, resilience is itself a form of productivity — ensuring that households, communities, and the economy can withstand and recover from shocks.

Preparedness must be treated as a legitimate area of economic policy, with government recognising that short-term efficiency gains cannot come at the expense of long-term resilience. Investments that stabilise household food security also deliver broader dividends in health, education, labour market participation, and national productivity.

Actions recommended:

- 1. Embed food security into economic policy frameworks, recognising that resilience and preparedness are productivity-enhancing, not costs to be minimised.***
- 2. Introduce incentives for the production and fair distribution of affordable, nutrient-dense staples, ensuring availability of essential foods for low-income households.***
- 3. Invest in last-mile logistics and community infrastructure, especially for regional and remote areas where transport challenges often magnify vulnerability.***
- 4. Align preparedness funding with fiscal reform agendas, ensuring government investment in resilience is treated as a strategic, long-term economic priority***

Competition and Cost of Living

Foodbank data shows that 82% of food-insecure households cite cost of living as the main driver of their current circumstances (2024 Foodbank Hunger Report). Rising costs of essentials like food, housing and energy place enormous pressure on low-income households. The National Food Security Strategy is an opportunity to make adjustments and remove barriers and systems conditions that hold food insecurity in place. These are exasperated but not only the result of cost of living. Poverty and inequity in food access also contribute to food insecurity. A resilient and equitable food system must therefore be underpinned by a social safety net that enables vulnerable people to consistently afford food. Without adequate income support, access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food is compromised, regardless of availability in the marketplace.

Actions recommended:

- 1. Ensure the social safety net (e.g. income support payments, concessions) is set at a level that allows all households to afford a nutritious diet as outlined in the ACOSS 'Raise the Rate' proposal.***
- 2. Implement programs of incentives and/or behavioural change to unlock additional supply in the form of food donations for food relief.***

Whole of System Considerations

Identifying and prioritising vulnerabilities

Foodbank strongly supports a **shared threat and risk assessment methodology** across government, industry and community. Without consistent identification of vulnerabilities, preparedness efforts are piecemeal.

Actions recommended:

- 1. Develop a coordinated national food system risk assessment framework, with annual updates.***
- 2. Include scenarios covering climate, biosecurity, trade, and economic shocks.***
- 3. Ensure food relief networks are formally recognised as part of national preparedness.***

Climate change and sustainability

Actions recommended:

- 1. Embed food relief organisations in climate adaptation and emergency planning.***
- 2. Invest in cold-chain resilience for extreme weather.***
- 3. Prioritise surplus food for redistribution to people, then secondary uses consistent with the EFWA food waste hierarchy (EFWA Strategic Business Plan 2024–2030).***

People

Foodbank welcomes the discussion paper's explicit focus on people — recognising that food is not simply sustenance but is fundamental to wellbeing, learning and participation in society. Food provides social, cultural and religious connection, supports physical and mental health, and is critical to children's capacity to learn and succeed. A strategy that centres people ensures that the benefits of a strong food system are measured not only in economic terms but in the lived experiences of households and communities.

The **National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities** provides an essential framework for addressing inequities in access for remote First Nations peoples. The National Food Security Strategy must explicitly complement this work, ensuring consistent principles, joint monitoring, and shared investment in infrastructure and logistics for remote communities.

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An example of improving food security and working toward food equity, including First Nations Engagement, is the Feeding Queensland Kids initiative, a collaboration between Foodbank Queensland, OzHarvest and SecondBite | FareShare. The initiative is addressing hunger and food insecurity by collaborating with communities to design sustainable, locally-led solutions to advance food security and equity. The initiative provides resources and support for communities to take practical action toward food security, especially for children and families facing adversity.

Additional actions recommended:

- 1. Provide sufficient funding to enable the food relief sector to deploy community-led, place-based food hubs, particularly Indigenous and CALD initiatives.***
- 2. Address regional infrastructure deficits including warehousing and transport to promote equitable distribution of food relief.***

Health and Nutrition

Consistent with the UNFAO definition of food security, Foodbank strongly supports the emphasis on nutrition, not just caloric intake. Food security is about access to food that enables people to thrive – supporting their physical health, mental wellbeing, and ability to contribute to community life. For children, adequate nutrition is directly linked to educational attainment and lifelong success. Access to all forms of education are impacted by food insecurity – Early Childhood Education and Care, early, primary and secondary school, vocational education and training and tertiary education. Without food families and children in Australia are excluded from school and kindy, even when kindy is free. For older Australians, it is tied to independence and dignity. By putting people at the centre, the strategy can move from ensuring “enough food” to ensuring “the right food in the right way” for all Australians.

Actions recommended:

- 1. Expand school-based nutrition education programs nationwide.***
- 2. Link food relief programs to preventative health strategies.***

National and Regional Security

Food insecurity is not just a welfare issue – it is a **security risk**. It undermines social cohesion, increases vulnerability to external shocks, and impacts Australia’s overall wellbeing.

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Actions recommended:

1. *Formally recognise food security as a pillar of national security policy.*
2. *Include food relief capacity in national security planning.*
3. *Establish strategic food reserves of essential staples, utilising the decades of expertise of Foodbank in identifying and securing appropriate products and locations, supported by government investment into infrastructure.*

Additional Commentary

- » **Governance:** The National Food Council must include food relief representation and lived experience voices.
- » **Measurement:** Annual national reporting on food insecurity should be mandated using the recognised USDA Household Food Security Measure.
- » **Funding:** Food relief infrastructure requires long-term, predictable government funding – moving beyond ad hoc emergency support.
- » **Integration:** Food security must be embedded in agriculture, health, education, climate, disaster relief and social services strategies, and coordinated with the **National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities** to avoid duplication and ensure lasting impact.

Conclusion

Above all, Foodbank Australia recommends that the National Food Security Strategy continue to put **people** at its heart: food security must be measured not only by what we grow or export, but by whether every household can access nutritious, culturally appropriate food that sustains health, fosters connection, and enables success. By focusing on equity, together we can create an Australia where everyone experiences food security.

Australia has the opportunity to develop a world-leading National Food Security Strategy that ensures resilience not only for agriculture and exports, but for every household. Foodbank Australia stands ready to work with government, industry, and community partners to achieve this.

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