

EDIBLE BENDIGO

Reclaiming Foodscapes and their Role in the Future of Gastronomy

Cr Dr Jennifer Alden

Mayor

Councillor – Lockwood Ward

Abstract

The challenges of environmental and climate breakdown have broader impacts on our food system and health. An opportunity exists to identify ways to better align ecology and health via re-linking food to our landscapes and also to provide an aesthetic impact.

UNESCO contributes to gastronomy heritage and the universal value of cultural landscapes, including foodscapes, by promoting gastronomy as a category of the Network of Creative Cities. This includes making creativity a lever for urban development and developing new solutions to tackle common challenges. Gastronomic aspects of aesthetic experience can expand the notion of foodscapes beyond culinary frameworks to include productive, sustainable landscapes. A new approach to 'foodscapes', via creating edible landscapes in public places, can reverse the community disconnect with food growing, increasing awareness of and participation in food production. Redesigning streetscapes and aesthetic edible precincts create more resilient and environmentally sound food systems.

As Australia's newly and only designated UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Bendigo's focus includes creative approaches to tackling the challenges of climate change, in the process ensuring fair access to health and wellbeing via a focus on sustainable local food systems. Our gastronomy story is about innovating and adapting to new landscapes while learning from our Dja Dja Wurrung heritage, to celebrate environmental aesthetics by new approaches to growing, sourcing, cooking and sharing food in the community. Our foodscapes represent our culture and provide a fundamental focus for gastronomy of the future.

Keywords

Bendigo, foodscapes, gastronomy, urban agriculture

Foodscapes and Urban Agriculture

The challenges of environmental and climate breakdown have broader impacts on our food system and health. An opportunity exists, particularly at local government level, to align ecology and health using urban agriculture, incorporating the public realm in food growing. Increasingly this relinking of food to our landscapes can be described as the creation of 'foodscapes'.

Historically there are many examples worldwide of integrating edibles into more formal landscapes that provide numerous benefits, including an aesthetic one. Over time urban development has become far removed from a visually driven aesthetic, with taste and health benefits foregone.

Novel strategies to reshape the food environment have been promoted in the past two decades. Ideas of farming the suburbs, surveying of vacant land plus edible street tree plantings were preferred in an effort to correct what was perceived to be out of balance. The observation "It's surprising what can spring from the soil when the right seeds are planted," could relate equally to ideas (Erlach et al 2007).

The term 'foodscape' appeared in academic literature in 1995. A recent review of typologies of foodscapes (Vonthron et al 2020) originated in awareness of the negative public health impacts

generated by the global corporate food system. Three main categories of foodscape have predominated to date: for diet and health, synonymous with our food environment, and those that are not, such as social and cultural approaches and behavioural approaches linked to food perception (Burgoigne et al 2009). The capacity of foodscapes to address public health, social justice and sustainability concerns led the review authors to advocate for interdisciplinary research on foodscapes, combining place-based and people-based approaches at different scales.

Another approach is that of Aesthetic Foodscape Design, used by Australian landscape architects attempting to shift Australia's cultural awareness of food practices towards a more resilient and local food system (Zuenert 2011). Echoing the Volthus review findings, they defined it as:

A practice that marries the productive yields of edible plants with the aesthetics of landscape architecture's spatial design practices, that if successfully realised, provides potential environmental, social, economic and health benefits to participants and to the wider sphere. It has the potential to connect the increasing demand for fresh, local and organic produce in highly visible, public places.

Some are dismissive of the aesthetics of the urban agricultural movement, deeming it inappropriate in public urban spaces. However, it can be viewed as a means to overcome the urban disconnect to growing food in highly productive and visually striking landscapes, encouraging community participation in growing and sharing food.

Another concept for integrating urban agriculture into urban space planning is the Continuous Productive Urban Landscape. It is considered an essential element of sustainable infrastructure in cities (Viljoen et al 2005). Urban infrastructure links food-producing spaces of varying scales and operating types to citizens across a town or city. Its proponents claim it will not meet all of a city's food needs, but it could meet about a third in fruit and vegetable requirements.

Local Government and Planning for Urban Food Growing

Local government has a role to respond to the improvement of healthy eating under the Local Government Act. The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan also specify a focus on climate impacts on health.

The City of Greater Bendigo serves as an example of how local government policy can educate and plan for urban food growing across several areas. Aimed at community health, liveability and climate resilience, they often have an aesthetic impact:

1. The Greater Bendigo Municipal Health and Wellbeing plan 2017–2021 (City of Greater Bendigo) endorses public space as a health-promoting setting plus actions for healthy eating.
2. Urban agriculture is one of the multiple initiatives now acknowledged in the City of Greater Bendigo's ten-year Food Systems Strategy 2020—2030 (City of Greater Bendigo).
3. The City of Greater Bendigo's Public Space Plan 2019 (City of Greater Bendigo) articulates support for community-based urban agriculture. It recognises the importance of opening up opportunities for community-based food production in public spaces to improve community health, wellbeing, and local food security and encourage community custodianship of the public space. Providing support for the establishment of resident- and/or community-managed nature strip gardens as a means of food production and amenity improvements to residential streetscapes, it aims to develop, promote and apply a streamlined and clear pathway through City approvals for community-based urban agriculture initiatives. In this way, food production can continue to be incorporated into the permanent design and management of selected, higher-profile public spaces as demonstration and leadership projects to promote food production in the public landscape.
4. The Greater Bendigo Environment Strategy 2016–2021 (City of Greater Bendigo) has an action area of local and sustainable food, with a priority action of council supporting local

urban food production through community gardens, nature strip gardens and community orchards in public spaces, plus supporting and promoting Traditional Owner food harvesting.

5. Greater Bendigo's Reimagining Bendigo Creek project (City of Greater Bendigo) has a four-year action plan that includes: Support improved access to fresh produce via initiatives to develop sustainable, edible foodscapes across our City and region, for example, through the planning, zoning and development of land that better supports agriculture, food precincts, urban agriculture, city farms and avoidance of 'food deserts'; the growing of seedlings for the community; the planting of a range of edibles in parks and nut trees in streets. Council will work with the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners to protect and restore areas with food and fibre plants. The production, harvesting and selling of food and fibre to the broader community is an ultimate objective.

Community

Foodscapes are becoming increasingly popular in Bendigo. The creation of edible landscapes in public places is being attempted in an effort to reverse the community disconnect that has occurred with food growing.

The Bendigo Regional Food Alliance has a focus on Growing, Sourcing, Cooking and Sharing food with the community. Their Edible Oasis project was popular, providing instruction in aesthetically pleasing food growing in public places using raised wicking garden boxes. The plantings were able to be harvested (in moderation) by community members. It is built on the initiative Incredible Edible Bendigo, based on and loosely affiliated with Incredible Edible Todmorden in the UK, which encourages edibles to grow in public places.

Work has been undertaken by the Parks and Open Space Department of the City of Greater Bendigo in 2019 and 2020 in extensive planting of edibles in the high profile Conservatory Gardens in the

centre of the City. There were extensive plantings of sculptural globe artichokes, beds of silverbeet, strawberries and pumpkins, and a lush parsley border surrounded tomatoes and chilli. These, too, were available for public harvest.



Figure 1. Edible plantings at the Bendigo Conservatory Gardens, Pall Mall, Bendigo

Testament to its popularity with the community was the fact that the reach of the Incredible Edible Bendigo Facebook postings about the initiative at the time had a reach of over 50,000 residents, with 300 shares and hundreds of positive comments. It was repeated in 2020 with more plantings inside the Conservatory, information and signage for plant identification. This time fruiting trees were included. Again it was popularly received and will become a regular feature, along with edible plantings at the Bendigo Botanic Gardens children's garden.

Bendigo as a Creative City of Gastronomy

Food provides an essential link between place, identity, culture and tourism, with traditional food mapping and trails now being linked to landscapes in the regional scope of gastronomy (Hall and Gossling 2016). According to UNESCO gastronomy weaves together the threads of the region's history, culture, urban and rural communities, health, environment, agriculture, viticulture, horticulture, economy, industry, tourism, creativity and long-term sustainability. Internationally

UNESCO has contributed to gastronomy heritage by promoting the universal value of cultural landscapes and foodscapes in the World Heritage List and promoting gastronomy as a category of the Creative Cities Network.

The Creative Cities Network creates a lever for urban development and the pursuit of new solutions to tackle common challenges. This now includes climate change. Gastronomic tourists' interest in edible places has now combined with the growth of 'foodscapes' that reflect distinctive local cuisines. This has created a new role for gastronomy (Richards 2015), where foodscapes are becoming culinary destinations, and sustainable landscapes link communities, gastronomy and aesthetic experience (Long 2010). When visiting Italy in 2018 as part of my Municipal Association of Victoria fellowship to examine Creative Cities of Gastronomy (Alden 2019), there was evidence of strong linkages with food in the landscape, none more so than in the UNESCO World Heritage wine landscapes in the North, the home of the Slow Food movement.

In 2018 the City of Greater Bendigo applied to UNSECO to become Australia's first Creative City of Gastronomy. Successful accreditation followed in November 2019, one of thirty-six in total worldwide. It is the only one of the seven Creative Cities categories to incorporate a region, and it covers nine local government areas in Central Victoria.



As Australia's newly and only designated UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Bendigo's focus seeks to broaden the scope of traditional gastronomy to include creative approaches to tackling the

challenges of climate change, in the process ensuring fair access to health and wellbeing via a focus on sustainable local food systems.

The application was developed with four pillars at its heart:

- Celebrate and elevate First Nations' culture, creativity and knowledge
- Recognise our creativity, cultural diversity and innovation
- Improve health and wellbeing, particularly through healthy eating
- Prioritise environmental sustainability, sustainable agriculture and food production as we tackle climate change (and now recovery from COVID-19)

These will continue to focus and guide ongoing work, and there is a possibility for foodscaping to bring all of these themes together as part of future activities.

Bendigo's City of Gastronomy Implementation Framework and Action Plan 2020–2024 (City of Greater Bendigo) states:

Gastronomy ... can also be a driver for change, an enabler of resilience and an umbrella for a whole of municipality/region approach to using food as the linkage for a community needing a new way forward. It can be part of a collective approach to public health, environmental sustainability and equitable and liveable communities.

Our gastronomy story is about innovating and adapting to new landscapes while learning from our Dja Dja Wurrung heritage to celebrate environmental aesthetics by new approaches to growing, sourcing, cooking and sharing food in the community. Our foodscapes represent our culture and can help tackle the complexity of the food-people-place nexus. At the same time, they provide a fundamental focus for gastronomy of the future.

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