



NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER

OzHarvest's Submission - 1 October 2025

OzHarvest's core recommendations

For strategy development

1. Include in the guiding principles: equity and inclusion, and a prevention-first approach.
2. Embed lived experience of food insecurity in design, governance, delivery and evaluation.
3. Ensure targeted, tailored responses for communities experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity.
4. Commit to a 10-year horizon (with 1-2-year action cycles) to tackle structural drivers.
5. Elevate Health and nutrition from a whole-of-system consideration to a key priority area.
6. Re-frame 'productivity' to include maximising the value of existing production, and the interconnection between household food security and national productivity.
7. Elevate food waste reduction and diversion as a lever for food security improvements.

For improving food security in Australia

1. Target core drivers of household food insecurity (poverty and inequality) with long-term cost-of-living relief and income support.
2. Expand community food literacy training.
3. Embed food literacy in the school curriculum.
4. Increase training opportunities with employment pathways in the food sector.
5. Provide universal school meals.
6. Support dignified, place-based food relief as an interim safety net.
7. Appointment a dedicated Food Minister, and allocate funding for strategy implementation.
8. Set an annual, scaling national hunger reduction target towards SDG 2 - Zero hunger by 2030, and a triennial national measure using the USDA's validated HFSS Module.
9. Improve food availability by reducing food waste: accelerate date label reform; incentivise food donations from primary producers; scale food rescue to make use of surplus food; mandate measurement of national food waste; help households save food and money with proven tools.

About OzHarvest

Founded in 2004, OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation. We work across the food system to support those experiencing food insecurity, prevent food waste, rescue surplus food, and nourish communities. Our rescue and relief operations span nationally with 75 vans, 1500+ food donation partners, delivering much-needed food to 1500+ frontline charities, schools and service providers, with 1300+ on our waitlist. We're rescuing over 300 tonnes of food weekly, and, alongside the national food relief sector, we collectively feed a million people every month.

Education is core to OzHarvest's mission; we deliver programs that build long-term food security by improving food literacy and driving sustained behaviour change. Our free supermarkets and community restaurants provide dignified access to food, while strengthening local connections and offering valuable on-the-ground insights. Our real-time data and community linkages give us a unique perspective across the food system.

OzHarvest is deeply committed to solutions that address the core drivers of food insecurity, to reduce upstream demand and improve food security for all, for good. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the discussion paper and contribute to the direction of a meaningful National Food Security Strategy

OzHarvest welcomes the discussion paper

OzHarvest supports the current direction of the development of the Strategy. We commend Minister Collins and the Department on their work, and welcome:

- The inclusion of the FAO definition and the six dimensions of food security,
- A clear focus on household food security and cost-of-living drivers, given 80% of households are experiencing food insecurity due to the cost of living – exacerbated by poverty and economic inequality,
- Recognition that climate risks, market concentration and critical infrastructure gaps, especially in remote and regional communities are also key determinants of household access to nutritious food, and
- The broad, holistic view of food security and the interconnected, systems-level approach needed.

However, there are several opportunities to strengthen and sharpen the forthcoming strategy, outlined on the cover page and throughout our submission below.

There is broad community support for bold action

In mid-2025, more than 1,200 of OzHarvest's partner organisations and community supporters added their voices to an Open Letter, calling on government to enact bold, systemic policy shifts to tackle food insecurity. This groundswell of public support shows people want urgent, evidence-based solutions – from food systems governance, to stronger income support. The message is clear: there is a public mandate for leadership that delivers a fairer, more sustainable food system.

More here: <https://www.ozharvest.org/open-letter/>

Seizing and unifying this momentum

Now is the time for reform. The push to strengthen food security aligns with other major government processes – from the Productivity Roundtable and Opportunities in the Circular Economy Inquiry to state-based investigations such as South Australia's school meals inquiry. OzHarvest has contributed submissions to each of these (in Appendices on the final page). This Food Security Strategy provides the opportunity to bring these and other threads together, for a coherent national approach.

1) What other principles should government, industry and community prioritise to support the development of the strategy and why are these important?

We support the existing principles, and urge the addition of the following:

1.5 Equity and inclusion

Gender, racial and ethnic background, income and socioeconomic status, and geographic location drive inequities at the core of food insecurity and must be addressed¹. Targeted solutions are needed for groups experiencing highest levels of food insecurity (low-incomes, single-parents, First Nations, remote and regional communities) – addressing these, through Equity as a core principle, is vital to delivering a fair and effective National Food Security Strategy.

OzHarvest also urges the embedding of lived and living experience of food insecurity in Strategy design, implementation, and review, to ensure solutions are inclusive, fit-for-purpose and delivered with dignity. This could take the form of a Lived Experience Advisory Council, or members with lived/living experience (or direct access to those with lived/living experience, e.g. from a not-for-profit that serves those experiencing food insecurity) on the National Food Council.

1.6 Prevention first

OzHarvest urges the Department to prioritise and seek interventions that increase food security long-term, and reduce demand for food relief over time. Prevention improves equity, health, productivity, and reduces long-term fiscal pressure. We encourage DAFF to urgently aim towards UNSDG's Zero Hunger by 2030 target.

OzHarvest notes that until prevention is achieved, there is a concomitant need to pursue interventions that alleviate immediate needs. Such an approach would mirror OzHarvest's own, where ~40% of our current programs are aimed at systemic change, and 60% on food rescue and relief. This ~60% on food relief has reduced from ~80% a decade ago, and we anticipate it will fall further over the coming years as the National Food Security Strategy is executed – with our end goal being to see it fall to zero.

2) What timeframe should the strategy work towards – short (1 to 2 years), medium (5 to 10 years) or long (10-plus years) term, and why?

Recommendation: Long-term (10+ years) with short (1-2 year) action plans, and triennial measurement.

Household food security has multiple structural drivers operating over decadal scales (especially income inadequacy) which require multi-portfolio reforms with long-term vision and commitments. Cost drivers (climate impacts, market concentration) need sustained action and investment. Previous national inquiries have called for an 'enduring' approach, the forthcoming strategy should match that ambition². Under FAO's definition, the sustainability element of Food Security calls for security across future generations – adding to the call for a long-term strategy³.

While the National Food Strategy should aim for long-term interventions towards prevention and eradication, short term support is needed for those experiencing food insecurity. OzHarvest and the food relief sector can continue responding to immediate, dignified relief requirements, which can be scaled with government investment.

3) Are there examples of current or planned initiatives by your organisation to improve food security in your sector?

The following initiatives reduce household food insecurity, support those experiencing food insecurity, reduce food waste, or a combination of all three.

Name	Description
1. OzHarvest's NEST: Food literacy program	NEST is an evidence-based training program that builds food literacy, cooking confidence and healthy eating habits. Over six hands-on sessions led by nutritionists and dietitians, NEST fosters community, using inclusive resources. Evaluations show 67% of graduates increase consumption of healthy food and 95% feel more confident making choices on a budget, and food security increased by 11%. NEST is a scalable way to boost utilisation, a core dimension of food security, by empowering people to cook nutritious meals on any budget ⁴ .
2. OzHarvest's Nourish: Hospitality training and employment pathways	Nourish is a 18-week hospitality training program for young people aged 16–25 facing barriers to work or study. Students earn a Certificate II in Cookery, supported by mentoring and job-readiness training. An independent Griffith University evaluation confirmed Nourish creates meaningful opportunities and strengthens long-term food security through skills, agency and employment pathways ⁵ .
3. OzHarvest's FEAST: Curriculum-aligned food education	FEAST is a curriculum-aligned program for primary and high schools that teaches students to eat well, utilise food and lead change in their communities. FEAST is independently reviewed ⁶ , and is an important complement to any school meal program. By embedding food literacy and sustainability into education, FEAST is equipping young people with lifelong skills that strengthen long-term food security.
4. Food relief: Supported through food rescue	<p>OzHarvest supports community food relief by ensuring vulnerable people have dignified access to quality food. By redistributing rescued food through local partners, we play a critical role in supporting those experiencing food insecurity - reducing hunger in the moment while easing pressure on stretched community services. The national food relief sector supports around one million people each month, and OzHarvest is a vital part of that system.</p> <p>Our model is distinct in both the food and how it is delivered. Ninety-five per cent of the food we rescue is nutritious and high quality (fresh produce, dairy, protein), and would otherwise go to waste. We operate a localised, place-based model, delivering food directly to charities and organisations, including smaller agencies that might otherwise miss out. OzHarvest also empowers regional communities: our chapter model enables volunteers to establish food rescue and relief in their own towns. This grassroots approach strengthens community connection and ensures good food is shared where it is needed most.</p>
5. Free supermarkets (Adelaide and Sydney)	<p>OzHarvest operates Australia's first free supermarkets, supporting over 3,000 individuals each week with free, nourishing food and groceries. These supermarkets reduce stigma by providing a dignified shopping experience, and act as hubs for community connection, referrals, and education – efficiently supported by rescued food.</p> <p>At these supermarkets, food is the connector; it's the reason people come, and it opens the door to further support. For many who are doing it tough, OzHarvest is the first port of call. Our social workers and volunteers provide immediate relief through food, while also linking people to essential services – from housing to mental health support – helping them navigate challenges and build longer-term resilience.</p>
6. OzHarvest's Refettorio: A place of dignity	The Refettorio is a free restaurant in Sydney, welcoming over 300 people each week to share free, nourishing meals made from rescued ingredients in a dignified and supportive setting. The Refettorio provides connection, links guests to wrap-around services, and gives OzHarvest vital insights into evolving community needs.
7. OzHarvest food rescue operations	OzHarvest operates an agile, national rescue network, weekly diverting 300 tonnes of surplus (mostly fresh) food from producers and retailers to more than 1500 charities. Our free B2B model underpins the social services sector, allowing organisations to focus on service delivery. Food rescue prevents emissions, improves productivity, reduces costs and supports food insecure households.
8. OzHarvest's Use It Up: Household campaign	OzHarvest's Use It Up campaign is in over 260,000 households, providing simple tools to make food go further, saving money and easing cost-of-living pressures. By helping families stretch their food budgets and reduce waste, the campaign directly supports household food security while also cutting emissions and landfill.
9. OzHarvest Ventures	Ventures is OzHarvest's social enterprise arm - developing circular economy solutions to keep food in the system - valorising food otherwise destined for waste. With industry partners, we transform waste into new products, fostering local agricultural food production, fostering local manufacturing, employment and resilience. With the right enabling environment, circular innovation can become a powerful driver of food security, sustainability and industry transformation ⁷ .

4) Do the proposed key priority areas and whole of system considerations adequately represent the actions needed for an effective food security strategy? If not, what is missing?

Health and nutrition, featured within core pillars of FAO's Food Security Framework, should be elevated from a whole-of-system consideration to a key priority in this Strategy. More than simply 'taking into account' health outcomes - it is a critical issue the Strategy must directly address. Without utilisation-focused action, increased availability will not translate into improved food security in the long term.

We recommend framing this pillar as 'Nutrition and health' rather than 'Health and nutrition'. The Strategy can take direct action on nutrition (access to, and use of, nutritious food) with flow-on benefits for health outcomes across the system.

5) What actions could the strategy take to address challenges under each key priority area?

2.2 Productivity, innovation and economic growth

Given the discussion paper acknowledges that Australia produces sufficient food, we recommend reframing 'productivity' from producing more, to maximising the value of existing production (for example by reducing waste to landfill). This aligns with other calls for a consideration of total system productivity, which emphasises optimising social, environmental and economic value across the whole food system, not just measuring output.

Further, tackling household food insecurity by reducing poverty and inequality is both a moral imperative and a strategic economic strategy. Ensuring households can access and utilise nutritious food improves health and wellbeing, increases workplace engagement, reduces reliance on crisis services, and drives long-term productivity gains across all 'economies'⁸. Suggested actions:

2.2.1. Food waste reduction: Until food waste is eliminated, the most effective way to improve productivity is to divert surplus food to people who are hungry - delivering the dual benefit of reducing waste and meeting immediate need. While this should become redundant over the longer term, it is the most impactful first step and should be scaled up now (see further actions in 3.1 Climate change and sustainability).

2.2.2. Foster workplace engagement: Expand education programs that build local skills, create employment pathways into food and hospitality, increasing household incomes, for example, OzHarvest's Nourish program⁹.

The link between food security and productivity is explored further in OzHarvest's submission to the Treasury's 2025 Economic reform roundtable: www.ozharvest.org/app/uploads/2025/07/250725-Economic-Reform-Roundtable-OzH-submission.pdf

2.3 Competition and cost of living

This section should explore measures to boost household disposable income and reduce essential costs, enabling people to exercise agency and afford self-selected, nutritious foods. Suggested actions:

2.3.1. Universal school meals: Introduce a nationally-funded, state-specific, holistic and nutrition-led school meals program to improve education, behavioural and long-term health and community participation outcomes.

2.3.2. Strengthen social supports: Align social security settings with the real cost of living. Raise the rate of welfare and increase Commonwealth support to communities experiencing the greatest levels of food insecurity.

2.3.3. Date label reform: Accelerate best-practice guidance to reduce confusion between use-by and best-before dates, helping to stretch budgets.

2.3.4. Fund food literacy: E.g. OzHarvest's NEST program, which bolsters the utilisation element of food security, teaching households to cook low-cost healthy food.

6) What actions could the strategy take to address challenges under these whole-of-system considerations?

3.1 Climate change and sustainability

Food waste reduction is a critical element of climate change and sustainability. Wasted food generates significant greenhouse gas emissions, and also wastes the land, water and energy used in its production. Reducing food waste creates a more efficient, resilient and sustainable food system – see more on page 7 below. Suggested actions:

3.1.1. Date label reform: Accelerate the implementation of best-practice guidance to reduce confusion between use-by and best-before dates, reducing avoidable household food waste

3.1.2. Increase food donations: Introduce incentives to encourage food donation and make use of already-produced produce that would otherwise go to waste.

3.1.3. Scale food rescue: Establish ongoing, indexed federal funding to support the food rescue sector to scale. While food rescue is ultimately a temporary measure until food waste is eliminated, it represents a powerful, low-hanging-fruit solution. Scaling food rescue reduces waste, contributes to circularity, and ensures nutritious food reaches people who need it, delivering immediate social, economic and environmental returns.

3.1.4. Mandate measurement: Update the 2023 National Food Waste baseline and mandate business reporting, proven to reduce waste and increase progress toward national targets.

3.1.5. Help households waste less: Given households are the largest source of food waste in Australia, fund national education campaigns, community programs and tools to support consumers.

3.2 People

3.2.1. Lived and living experience at the centre: Provide remunerated participation in strategy and program development and implementation, from individuals who are food insecure, with clear lines of reporting into DAFF and other departments responsible for the Strategy¹⁰.

3.3 Health and nutrition

We recommend 3.3 Health and nutrition be elevated to a key priority area. Significant, local research supports food literacy as a key intervention in long-term food security and flow-on health outcomes¹¹.

3.3.1. Universal school meals: Introduce a national, holistic and nutrition-led school meals program to improve education, behavioural and long-term health and community participation outcomes.

3.3.2. Support proven food literacy programs (e.g. OzHarvest's NEST, page 4 of this submission) scaled nationally through community services.

3.3.3. Mandate food literacy across the curriculum: Including the support of existing curriculum-aligned programs (e.g. OzHarvest's FEAST, page 4 of this submission).

Gaps and opportunities

Governance

Given food spans 11 portfolios, without a clear point of accountability, policy risks being fragmented or inconsistent. Establishing a dedicated Minister for Food (supported by a cross-departmental taskforce) would provide the leadership and coordination needed to deliver this strategy and support long-term improvements.

Measurement and data

Reliable, ongoing and robust data is needed to build the direction of the Strategy and ensure its ongoing success. We urge the Strategy to include the following:

1. Set a National Household Food Security reduction target (e.g. % annually reduction in moderate/severe food insecurity – towards UNSDG Goal 2 of zero hunger before 2030)¹³, with disaggregated sub-targets for regional/remote and priority cohorts.
2. Establish a consistent, triennial national measure using a validated instrument (e.g. USDA Household Food Security Survey Module)¹⁴, with publicly reported dashboards.

Implementation funding

It is well established, through recent examples such as Closing the Gap, that a strategy alone will not shift outcomes. To deliver on the priorities identified, dedicated, substantial and sustained funding is required. Investment in implementation ensures policies translate into tangible improvements for households, producers and communities, rather than remaining aspirational statements.

In the short term, this would mean expanded funding for food rescue and relief, which is a proven, immediate and cost-effective intervention. While relief and rescue are temporary measures, both play a critical bridging role (addressing urgent need and reducing waste) until more permanent, systemic fixes to food insecurity and food waste are established. Over time, this funding can appropriately taper as those long-term reforms take effect.

Elevate food waste reduction as a central lever for food security

We recommend food waste be given greater prominence in the Strategy, fitting within 2.2 Productivity, and/or 3.1 Climate change and sustainability. Reducing food waste is one of the fastest, most cost-effective ways to enhance productivity, resilience and build an equitable food system. While the discussion paper mentions food waste, we urge stronger focus given its direct connection to food security – 1/3 of all food produced is wasted.

Reducing food waste is connected to food security, through:

- Boosting efficiency and productivity of food systems: Wasted food wastes land, water, energy, labour and transport. Reducing waste ensures spent resources feed people, and builds resilience against shocks.
- Improving affordability: Waste inflates costs across the supply chain, pushing up retail prices. Cutting inefficiencies can lower costs of fresh food, improving access for low-income households.
- Increasing food availability, including for relief: Food currently lost between farm and retail sectors could instead be feeding people. The current rate of rescue, while small (just 0.2% of surplus food) already delivers hundreds of millions of meals annually.
- Supporting national climate goals: Food waste drives 8–10% of global emissions¹². Cutting waste reduces climate risks that threaten yields, affordability and supply stability.

A waste hierarchy approach must be applied: prevention first → rescue/redistribution for people → animal feed/processing → energy. This will ensure edible food is not diverted to lower-value uses such as composting.

Conclusion

OzHarvest commends DAFF on the Discussion Paper - it provides a strong framework to guide Australia towards a more food secure future. We see this as an important milestone in addressing the complex drivers of food insecurity and strengthening the resilience of our food system.

Our recommendations above seek to support and strengthen the existing approach, helping ensure long-term food security is achieved across all dimensions. With a long-term horizon, prevention-first investments, and committed governance for delivery, Australia can improve and protect household food security, strengthen resilience, and unlock total productivity benefits across the food system - while mitigating and adapting to climate change.

OzHarvest is buoyed by the opportunities presented by this strategy and welcomes the chance to further contribute to its development and implementation.

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Appendices

1. OzHarvest's submission to the Economic Reform Roundtable: <https://www.ozharvest.org/app/uploads/2025/07/250725-Economic-Reform-Roundtable-OzH-submission.pdf>
2. OzHarvest's submission to the Productivity Commission's Opportunities in the Circular Economy: <https://www.ozharvest.org/app/uploads/2025/01/241022-OzHarvest-Submission-to-Circular-Economy.pdf>
3. OzHarvest's submission to SA's inquiry into school meal programs: <https://www.ozharvest.org/app/uploads/2025/07/250704-Feeding-the-Future-OzHarvest-SA-Inquiry-into-SMPs.pdf>
4. OzHarvest's Open Letter calling for bold policy interventions to tackle food insecurity: <https://www.ozharvest.org/open-letter/>