



# **OZHARVEST PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026-27**

**Submitted 30 January 2026**

OzHarvest welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2026-27 Federal Budget consultation.

Australia faces two interconnected crises; widespread food insecurity and escalating food waste. One in three Australian households – around 3.5 million – experience food insecurity, with severe impacts on health, education, and employment. At the same time, Australia wastes one-third of all food produced, costing the economy \$36.6 billion annually and driving 3.5% of national emissions.

Food waste reduction is a critical pillar of building a more circular economy. Globally, momentum on this issue is accelerating, including through initiatives such as the Food Waste Breakthrough launched at COP30 in Belém. This growing international focus reinforces the need for Australia to strengthen its own approach to food waste reduction and highlights the broader global recognition that transforming food systems is essential to achieving climate, sustainability, and economic goals.

Food waste and food insecurity share underlying structural drivers and require a coordinated, whole-of-government response across health, agriculture, environment, social services and education. OzHarvest commends the Government's development of the Feeding Australia Strategy, which provides a vital opportunity to address these dual crises while delivering economic, social and environmental gains. Strategic federal investment and policy reform can:

- Improve food security for vulnerable Australians.
- Cut emissions and reduce waste, contributing to Australia's national goal to halve food waste by 2030.
- Boost productivity and advance Australia's circular economy transition.

The following pre-budget submission outlines four priority areas for federal investment to deliver a more resilient, sustainable, and food-secure Australia. The funding proposals reflect a mix of investments in OzHarvest, the broader food relief sector, and other subject-matter expert organisations.

If you require further information, please contact Katinka Day, OzHarvest's National Advocacy & Policy Lead [katinka.day@ozharvest.org](mailto:katinka.day@ozharvest.org).

	Delivery partner
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# 1. ADDRESS IMMEDIATE FOOD INSECURITY THROUGH GREATER INVESTMENT IN FOOD RESCUE & RELIEF

## 1.1. Establish a baseline Commonwealth commitment to everyday food relief infrastructure commensurate with need

### Key agencies

Department of Social Services

### Proposal

Food relief is critical national infrastructure, yet it is severely underfunded. The food relief sector feeds one million people each month, underpins the broader charity and social sector, acts as a gateway to essential services such as housing and healthcare and plays a major role in addressing food waste.<sup>1</sup> It is by far the most cost-effective method of dealing with immediate food insecurity.

Despite this, food relief charities collectively can meet only 31% of the need for relief, leaving over two million Australian households without reliable access to food.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, one-third of all food grown in Australia is still going to waste,<sup>3</sup> representing a lost opportunity to reduce emissions and advance circular economy goals.

The National Food Relief Sector's aim - OzHarvest, Foodbank and Secondbite | FareShare - is that by 2030, all Australians seeking food relief can receive it. We are asking for the government to support this basic need by funding 30% of total costs associated with everyday ongoing food relief. This involves \$10 million in first-year funding for the sector to strengthen existing national food relief capability, and a staged expansion of this funding to ensure the sector can evolve so that all Australians seeking food relief can rely on a legitimate and effective safety net by 2030.<sup>4</sup> This investment will allow the sector to scale procurement, improve collection and distribution efficiency and stabilise supply to frontline charities at a time of unprecedented demand.<sup>5</sup>

### Benefits and impact

- Guarantees access to nutritious food for vulnerable Australians, reducing long-term health, social and economic impacts of food insecurity.
- Cost-effective utilisation of nutritious food that would otherwise go to landfill (avoids reliance on private market mechanisms, which would impose full costs of labour, logistics, and infrastructure).
- Every tonne of food rescued is one tonne of greenhouse gas emissions reduction.
- For every \$1 invested in food rescue, there is a \$12 return in social, health, and economic benefits.<sup>6</sup>

### Delivery partner

The associated below costs relate to funding the National Food Relief Sector:

Item	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	FY 28-29	FY 29-30	Total
<b>Strengthen sector's food relief capability</b>	10m	18.8m	27.4m	34.3m	<b>90.5m</b>
<b>% total food relief need met</b>	31%	55%	80%	100%	
<b>% funding covered by government</b>	30%	30%	30%	30%	

## 1.2. Develop incentives for farmers to donate surplus food, prioritising the use of rescued food, to address food insecurity

### Key agencies

Treasury

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

### Proposal

Food rescue is a proven, low-cost solution that reduces waste, cuts emissions, and strengthens food security. However, primary producers face real costs in donating surplus food, including labour, transport, and storage. These costs often exceed disposal costs, creating a strong disincentive to donate surplus food. Despite the clear environmental and social benefits, only 0.2% of Australia's surplus food is donated,<sup>8</sup> wasting resources, while millions of households face food insecurity. The National Food Relief Sector – OzHarvest, Foodbank and Secondbite | FareShare – is calling for the government to invest in incentives for farmers to donate their surplus food. Unlocking farmgate donations is simple, cost-effective and widely supported across industry and the charity sector.

### Benefits and impact

- Redirects millions of meals currently wasted on farms and across the supply chain to food relief, meeting up to 10% of Australia's 2030 food waste reduction target.<sup>9</sup>
- Improves food security for vulnerable Australians, reducing hunger and cost-of-living pressures.
- Cuts emissions by avoiding organics to landfill and advancing circular economy goals.

## 1.3. Support regional and remote communities facing food insecurity through OzHarvest's innovative new food rescue platform: HarvestLink

### Key agencies

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Department of Social Services

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

### Proposal

Regional and remote communities face significant barriers to accessing food relief. Funding and infrastructure gaps mean current relief models are concentrated in metropolitan areas. Without efficient systems to connect local charities with food businesses, surplus food in regional areas often goes to waste, while local families experience higher rates of food insecurity (35% of regional households are food insecure, compared to 32% across the general population).<sup>10</sup> Coupled with a much lower penetration of charities delivering food relief in regional areas, many regional households are left without a safety net. Existing ad hoc arrangements lack consistency, safety, data visibility, and scalability.

OzHarvest seeks support to implement HarvestLink - an innovative platform designed to solve these challenges by directly connecting local charities with supermarkets and food businesses. Built on OzHarvest's proven operating procedures and with reference to global best practice, HarvestLink will ensure safe and efficient food redistribution while providing tools for safety, scheduling, impact tracking, and feedback loops to maintain transparency and accountability. Government investment in further technological development and support staff for HarvestLink would foster stronger relationships between local food businesses and community organisations, creating a sustainable, scalable solution to reduce waste and improve food security in regional Australia, and enabling new tranches of volunteer contributions in regional Australia.

With federal investment, HarvestLink is projected to;

- Rescue up to 5,000 tonnes of surplus food annually from regional supermarkets and food businesses.
- Provide an additional 10 million meals per year to Australians experiencing food insecurity in regional and remote areas.

### **Benefits and impact**

- Increases the volume of safe, nutritious food available for relief in underserved regions.
- Strengthens local resilience by building community capacity and reducing reliance on external, emergency interventions.
- Maximises the value of existing resources through tech-driven efficiency.
- Helps cut emissions; every tonne of food rescued is one tonne of greenhouse gas emissions reduction.
- With a solid tech foundation and OzHarvest's food rescue expertise, HarvestLink can expand nationally, delivering long-term systemic benefits.

## 1.4. Improve access to national disaster funding for preparedness and response

### Key agencies

Department of Home Affairs – National Emergency Management Agency

Department of Social Services

### Proposal

Resilient food supply chains are critical to community preparedness, mitigation and recovery. The National Food Relief Sector - OzHarvest, Foodbank and Secondbite | FareShare - is calling for the establishment of a \$20 million per annum, rapidly disbursable standby fund for emergency food relief, enabling the sector to scale operations immediately in the aftermath of a crisis or natural disaster. This funding would allow providers to draw on reserves, deploy national networks at speed, and maintain everyday services without diversion or depletion.

### Benefits and impact

- Dedicated disaster funding ensures rapid mobilisation of essential food relief during crises, preventing vulnerable communities from going without food and reducing reliance on ad-hoc donations.
- Investment in preparedness allows food relief organisations to maintain contingency stock, secure logistics, and coordinate with local producers, minimising disruption and food waste during disasters.
- Proactive funding for disaster response mitigates health and wellbeing impacts, supports recovery for affected communities, and lowers government expenditure on emergency interventions by acting early.<sup>11</sup>

### Delivery partner

The associated below costs relate to funding the National Food Relief Sector:

Item	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	FY 28-29	FY 29-30	Total
Emergency food relief standby fund	20m	20m	20m	20m	80m

## 2. IMPROVE EDUCATION AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES WITHIN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

### 2.1. Invest in proven food literacy & nutrition education programs for long-term food security

#### Key agencies

Department of Social Services

Department of Health

Department of Education

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

#### Proposal

Research consistently shows that low levels of food literacy, such as limited cooking and nutrition skills, are strongly associated with food insecurity. Without targeted education, households can struggle to make the most of available food resources, leading to higher waste, poor dietary choices, and increased health risks. Young Australians, in particular, often lack the confidence and knowledge to prepare healthy meals, contributing to long-term health challenges and rising chronic disease rates. OzHarvest's education programs directly address this gap by tackling the 'utilisation' dimension of food insecurity.<sup>12</sup> These programs are evidence-based, peer-reviewed, and scalable, ensuring measurable impact across diverse communities. We are seeking government investment in the following OzHarvest programs to ensure they can continue supporting vulnerable and young Australians:

- NEST (Nutrition Education and Skills Training): A practical six-week program delivered in partnership with local community groups, equipping adults with essential cooking skills, budgeting techniques, and strategies for healthy eating.
- FEAST (Food Education and Sustainability Training): A curriculum-aligned program for primary and secondary students, teaching nutrition, food systems, sustainability, food waste prevention to build lifelong healthy habits.

Government investment in NEST could help deliver 250 programs a year while investment in FEAST could help OzHarvest reach 200 primary and 300 high schools, and ensure 600 low-SES schools can continue to do the program.

#### Benefits and impact

- Addresses food security by improving food utilisation knowledge for children, households and communities.
- Improves long-term nutrition and reduces chronic disease risk through improved food literacy.
- Lowers long-term costs to health and social systems by addressing root causes of food insecurity.
- Equips households and communities to minimise waste, supporting Australia's 2030 food waste halving target and further supporting households to save money through saving food.

## 2.2. Expand and replicate proven school meal programs nationally

### Key agencies

Department of Education

Department of Social Services

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

### Proposal

Access to nutritious food is fundamental for children's learning, health and wellbeing. School meal programs are internationally recognised as one of the most effective interventions for improving nutrition, enhancing educational outcomes, supporting families and stimulating local food economies.<sup>13</sup> Australia remains one of the few high-income countries without a school meal program.<sup>14</sup>

Proven school meal models operating in Australia demonstrate that place-based, collaborative approaches are delivering effective school meal programs while strengthening local food systems, supporting workforce participation, and establishing long-term healthy food habits. A leading example is Tasmania's School Food Matters, delivered in partnership with Loaves and Fishes Tasmania and as at Feb 2026, operating across 60 schools, where students receive regular, nutritious, culturally appropriate meals embedded within the school day. This program is delivered through local procurement and regional supply chains that are already supporting Tasmanian producers and creating meaningful jobs and training opportunities in food preparation, logistics, and coordination, as confirmed by independent evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

Recent Parliamentary Budget Office costings estimate school meals would cost approximately \$10 per student per meal,<sup>16</sup> consistent with international benchmarks, where annual per student investment averages around USD \$900. Cost benefit analyses internationally indicate returns of up to 1.7 times the initial investment,<sup>17</sup> driven by improved health and long-term educational outcomes.

OzHarvest urges the government to prioritise the expansion and replication of school meal programs nationally to address food insecurity and improve learning outcomes.

### Benefits and impact

- School meal programs lead to better attendance, cognitive performance and long-term educational attainment.
- Universal programs ensure children experiencing food insecurity can access nutritious meals in an inclusive environment.
- Regular access to nutritious food improves long-term health outcomes, easing pressure on the health system.
- Families experience reduced food costs, while communities benefit from local procurement and job creation in food preparation and services.
- Supports local farmers and food systems. Programs can prioritise local, seasonal produce, strengthening regional economies.

## 3. ACCELERATE THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY TRANSITION BY REDUCING FOOD WASTE

### 3.1. Update and establish national measurement and reporting infrastructure to measure and track food waste

#### Key agencies

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

#### Proposal

Accurate, contemporary measurement of food waste is essential national data infrastructure. Australia's current food waste dataset (published in 2021 using 2019 data) is outdated and no longer supports effective policy, economic modelling, emissions reporting, or Australia's SDG 12.3 obligations. The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water was expected to release an updated baseline in 2024, but this has not occurred, leaving a \$36.6 billion variable missing from Treasury's policy and productivity analysis.

Globally, food waste reduction delivers strong returns, with international evidence showing a \$14 benefit for every \$1 invested.<sup>18</sup> In Australia, the absence of consistent measurement undermines progress toward halving food waste by 2030, weakens national climate and circular economy reporting, and increases the risk of inefficient or misdirected expenditure.

OzHarvest supports End Food Waste Australia's (EFWA) pre-budget submission ask to rebuild and maintain Australia's food waste measurement system. EFWA is the custodian of the original national food waste dataset and methodology and has existing governance, analytical capability, and stakeholder relationships to deliver this program efficiently.

#### Benefits and impact

- Supports evidence-based policy and industry action to meet Australia's food waste target and SDG 12.3 obligations.
- Unlocks cost savings and innovation opportunities by identifying inefficiencies at specific points across the supply chain.
- Strengthen emissions reporting and mitigation strategies by tracking food waste comprehensively, supporting the National Circular Economy Framework.
- Positions Australia as a leader in circularity and net zero reporting.

#### Delivery partner

The associated below costs relate to funding End Food Waste Australia:

Item	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	FY 28-29	FY 29-30	Total
<b>Food waste measurement</b>	967,600	1,124,990	1,337,628	1,745,519	<b>5,175,737</b>

## 3.2. Sustain and scale up national consumer food waste education to achieve measurable behaviour change

### Key agencies

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

### Proposal

Households are the biggest contributor to Australia's 7.6 million tonnes of annual food waste,<sup>19</sup> costing families thousands per year<sup>20</sup> and driving emissions. OzHarvest research, conducted with BehaviourWorks Australia, found that households can and will change behaviours if given the right tools, prompts and education.<sup>21</sup> But these shifts only occur at scale when reinforced through sustained, well-resourced consumer education.

We welcome and appreciate the Government's existing investment in consumer behaviour-change initiatives, and seek continued and expanded investment to ensure Australia can maintain momentum and meaningfully reduce household food waste. This investment could build on proven, evidence-based national initiatives to address the major barriers to reduce food waste such as confusion around date labels, forgetting what food households have, not knowing how to store food properly and cooking more than needed.

With food waste costing the economy over \$36.6 billion annually, even small percentage reductions translate to very large national returns. Given the size of the problem and the savings potential, a national investment of \$3.67m annually is modest relative to projected economic benefits.

### Benefits and impacts

- Delivers measurable reductions in household food waste by targeting the most impactful and achievable behaviours.
- A longer-term, evidence-based program would help reduce cost-of-living pressures, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and advance Australia's target to halve food waste by 2030.

### Delivery partner

The associated below costs relate to funding relevant national organisations engaging on food waste:

Item	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	FY 28-29	FY 29-30	Total
Food waste education	3.67m	3.67m	3.67m	3.67m	14.68m

### 3.3. Fund the continued national rollout of Use It Up Tape, a proven household food waste solution

#### Key agencies

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

#### Proposal

OzHarvest invests substantial resources into driving the changes needed to cut household food waste through initiatives and practical tools that make it easy for households to waste less. OzHarvest research has found that a significant portion of household food waste occurs because consumers overlook food in their fridges and pantries.<sup>22</sup> Our national Use It Up™ campaign, developed from Australian-first behavioural research, helps people use the food they already have through simple, proven actions like the Use It Up Tape™, a free visual reminder that has been shown to reduce household food waste by up to 40%.<sup>23</sup>

To date over 180,000 households have accessed the tape through OzHarvest's channels, alongside recipes and tips that reinforce the need to reduce food waste. Despite proven impact, further distribution of the tape is limited by production costs, as OzHarvest is committed to offering the product for free to households. OzHarvest is seeking a modest investment by the Government to allow distribution of 45,000 Use It Up Tapes to schools, community groups, local governments and the general public to help reduce food waste in the home.

#### Benefits and impacts

- Helps households save money by reducing the amount of food being thrown out.
- Helps households reduce food waste, thereby cutting methane emissions from landfill and supporting Australia's net-zero targets.
- Maximises the value of food already in the system, reducing pressure on supply chains.

## **4. ADDRESS THE CORE DRIVERS OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY**

### **4.1. Establish national food insecurity monitoring, targets and a coordinated root-cause response**

#### **Key agencies**

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Department of Social Services

#### **Proposal**

OzHarvest believes that the root causes of hunger and food insecurity are complex and require a comprehensive and coordinated approach. We are supportive of efforts to better understand the root causes and develop multi-pronged plans to address them.

We also believe that robust measurement and transparent tracking of food insecurity will be essential, especially for delivering the Government's Feeding Australia Strategy. Alongside prominent national food security researchers, OzHarvest recommends the establishment of a consistent, triennial national survey to monitor the extent and severity of food insecurity in Australia, with results publicly reported via dashboards. Using this data, the government should set a clear national household food security reduction target, such as an annual percentage reduction in moderate and severe food insecurity, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger by 2030. This should be supported by disaggregated sub-targets for regional, remote, and priority cohorts to ensure equity. By embedding these measures, the government can ensure targeted action, monitor progress, and deliver meaningful improvements for households experiencing food insecurity across Australia.

#### **Benefits and impact**

- Regular, robust measurement of food insecurity provides clear data to identify priority communities and cohorts most at risk, ensuring resources and interventions are directed where they are needed most.
- Creates transparency, motivates cross-sector collaboration, and holds government and partners accountable for delivering meaningful improvements.

### **4.2. Lift income support payments to parity with pensions and index payments to wages as well as prices**

#### **Key agencies**

Department of Social Services  
Treasury

#### **Proposal**

OzHarvest supports ACOSS's call to substantially lift base rates of JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy, Special Benefit, Parenting Payment and Crisis Payment in the 2026 budget and brought up to the same level as the pension plus pension supplement (currently \$589 per week for a single person).

Food insecurity cannot be solved without addressing its root causes; poverty, inequality, and rising essential costs.<sup>24</sup> Currently, 91% of households experiencing food insecurity cite cost-of-living pressures as the primary driver.<sup>25</sup> Low incomes, insecure housing, and systemic inequality leave millions unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>26</sup> These structural issues undermine health, workforce participation, and national productivity.

Australia's income support system should provide enough to cover basic goods and services and allow people to engage in their communities. However, social security payments such as JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment remain grossly inadequate against all benchmarks and leave people in a state of deprivation. JobSeeker is less than half the minimum wage (42%) and falls below all benchmarks of adequacy including the poverty line.

### **Benefits and impact**

- Lifting income support to pension parity ensures households can afford essential goods and services, reducing the need to skip meals or rely on emergency food relief.
- Adequate income enables access to nutritious food, housing, and healthcare, reducing chronic illness and mental health stress.
- Indexing payments to wages and prices prevents people from falling further behind, enabling job seekers to meet basic needs while looking for work. This strengthens labour market engagement and reduces barriers to employment.

## **4.3. Review investor tax breaks and rebuild public and community housing**

### **Key agencies**

Department of Social Services  
Treasury

### **Proposal**

OzHarvest supports Everybody's Home advocacy and recommends:

1. A review of negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount to reduce speculative investment in housing and redirect public resources to meet genuine housing need.
2. Setting and fully funding a national target for public and community housing to reach 6% of housing stock over the next decade, and 10% of housing stock by 2045.

Housing affordability is a critical driver of food insecurity. When housing consumes most of a household's income, food becomes the first expense to cut, leading to severe health, education, and employment impacts.<sup>27</sup> Addressing this structural pressure is essential to increasing food security. Reviewing investor tax breaks such as negative gearing and the capital gains discount, which cost the budget around \$20 billion annually, could free up resources to invest in public and community housing. Redirecting these savings could fund more than half a million social homes, providing secure, affordable housing and easing cost-of-living pressures that underpin food insecurity.

### **Benefits and impact**

- Lowers long-term pressure on health and social systems by addressing structural drivers of hardship.
- Supports vulnerable groups, single parents, First Nations communities, renters, and people on income support, ensuring fair access to basic needs.
- Advances cost-of-living relief and productivity goals while meeting Australia's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## About OzHarvest

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Founded in 2004, OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation. Our national operations include 75 vans that rescue otherwise-wasted food from over 2,500 retail and hospitality sites and deliver it free of charge to over 1,500 charities, schools, and service providers - with 1,300 more on our waitlist. Each week, we rescue over 350 tonnes, and alongside the food relief sector, feed a million people every month. OzHarvest also operates our own free rescued food supermarkets.

In addition to food relief, OzHarvest creates positive change and makes meaningful impact on individuals' lives through three education programs:

- FEAST – a curriculum-aligned program where students learn about the issue and impact of food waste on our environment, and how to plan, prepare and cook healthy and nutritious recipes and reduce household food waste.
- NEST – a 6 week, evidence-based public health initiative that teaches essential food literacy skills and improves long-term household food security.
- Nourish - a holistic approach to a Certificate II Cookery qualification and life skills training with pathways to employment for priority youth who face barriers to traditional education.

OzHarvest is committed to addressing the root causes of food waste and food insecurity, as well as supporting those experiencing hunger today. We advocate for policy solutions to reduce food waste, achieve circular economy outcomes, address food insecurity and boost national productivity.

## Contact

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