



UPPER, CENTRAL AND LOWER HUME SUB-REGIONS
FOOD OPPORTUNITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN
2015-2018

VOLUME 3: ACTION PLAN

1 Introduction

This document is **Volume 3** of three reports prepared by McKINNA *et al* in the course of developing the Upper, Central and Lower Hume Sub-Region's Food Opportunity Strategy and Action Plan. The three volumes are:

Volume 1: Industry Mapping and Situation Analysis

Volume 2: Strategy

Volume 3: Action Plan

This document, **Volume 3: Action Plan**, outlines the actions and tasks required to deliver the three-year strategic plan for the region's food sector. It references existing plans, identifies gaps and nominates the agencies that could contribute to driving change. By design, a number of tasks in this plan complement the Northern Victorian Food Opportunity Strategy so some synergies may be possible in program delivery.

Hume RDA and all levels of government will collaborate with industry and other regional bodies to implement this plan.

This document is designed to function as a checklist for managing progress on the plan, as such, it is a live document that will be amended and adapted over the lifetime of the plan. A priority action for this document will be nominating a lead agency to 'champion' each of the actions in this checklist and overseeing its delivery.

FOOD OPPORTUNITY STRATEGY 2015 - 2018

Mission: To leverage the point of difference that is Upper, Central and Lower Hume Sub-Region's diversity of agrifood enterprises to greater economic advantage.

1	MAXIMISE WORKFORCE OUTCOMES	▶	<i>Develop a flexible, motivated and suitably skilled workforce that improves both output and regional employment</i>
2	CHAMPION AGRIBUSINESS EXCELLENCE	▶	<i>Improve global competitiveness through innovation, process improvement, professional skill development and knowledge transfer</i>
3	DRIVE INVESTMENT AND TRANSITION	▶	<i>Attract investment and manage the transition required to drive further development of the agrifood sector</i>
4	NURTURE EMERGING INDUSTRIES	▶	<i>Capture the economic potential of the emerging gourmet food and beverage sector, to drive regional growth whilst enhancing liveability</i>
5	IMPROVE MARKET CONNECTIONS	▶	<i>Achieve better access to customers and markets through improved logistics and digital connectivity</i>
6	ENSURE SERVICES HAVE GROWTH CAPACITY	▶	<i>Ensure agrifood producers have better access to affordable and suitable energy, waste and other services that meet future growth plans</i>
7	BUILD THE AGRI-TOURISM CHANNEL	▶	<i>Build a tourism channel to market that maximises local sales of food and beverage and grows the profile of each district</i>

PRIORITY ACTIONS

The following have been nominated as priority actions for each strategy platform:

STRATEGY PLATFORM	PRIORITY ACTION
1 MAXIMISE WORKFORCE OUTCOMES	1.4 <i>Support development of employment clusters that will create career pathways and on-the-job training opportunities.</i>
2 CHAMPION AGRIBUSINESS EXCELLENCE	2.2 <i>Improve skill levels of SMEs in business and risk management.</i>
3 DRIVE INVESTMENT AND TRANSITION	3.3 <i>Raise awareness of alternative small farm business models that could improve profitability and assist industry transition.</i>
4 NURTURE EMERGING INDUSTRIES	4.1 <i>Establish regional gourmet networking and industry development forums, engaging industry champions to lead them.</i>
5 IMPROVE MARKET CONNECTIONS	5.5 <i>Support the region's digital economy through addressing broadband capacity and mobile connectivity.</i>
6 ENSURE SERVICES HAVE GROWTH CAPACITY	6.7 <i>Facilitate better industry engagement with all utility providers.</i>

1 PLATFORM: MAXIMISE WORKFORCE OUTCOMES

Aspirational Targets

1. Improved understanding of agrifood career pathways
2. Improved uptake of agrifood training and education
3. Reduced youth unemployment across the region
4. Hume Region is the 'posting of choice' for senior management
5. A reliable network of skilled and respected seasonal workers

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS	
1.1	Promote the critical importance of labour policy reform that recognises the 24/7, temporary and seasonal nature of agrifood	Industry sponsored 'Paddock to Plate' reform agenda.	1.1.1	Support actions recommended in the AFGC Paddock to Plate Report (2014) relating to labour reforms.
			1.1.2	Advocate for efficient visa systems for skilled/semi-skilled seasonal workers and working holiday tourists.
1.2	Improve connections between the region's education and training offer and the needs of agrifood businesses	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	1.2.1	Establish a forum for an ongoing dialogue and improved connections between education institutions, RTOs and industry.
			1.2.2	Promote existing training and education products available across Hume Region (e.g. CSU, Dookie) to industry.
			1.2.3	Facilitate greater uptake of existing workplace training programs.
			1.2.4	Ensure workers in agrifood are informed about available study pathways that enhance their career opportunities.
1.3	Change the image of the agrifood sector and promote career opportunities	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	1.3.1	Establish a program for school career advisors to inform them of the career opportunities within the regional agrifood sector.
			1.3.2	Work with youth agencies to identify opportunities to address youth unemployment in collaboration with industry.
1.4	Support development of employment clusters that will create career pathways and on-the-job training opportunities	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	1.4.1	Scope out the prospect of rolling out localised vocational education programs based on successful models at Mansfield High School and Tyrell College Sea Lake.
			1.4.2	Explore early agricultural learning programs such as Timboon P12 program.
			1.4.3	Consult with industry about the feasibility of forming an employer cluster aimed at guiding career pathways through workplace training internships and apprenticeships.
1.5	Develop training and information programs for employers to build leadership and mentoring skills	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	1.5.1	Seek out existing programs that educate agribusiness owners and managers in leadership and employer skills and sponsor delivery of these in the region.
			1.5.2	Support programs that encourage agribusinesses to invest in leadership up-skilling.

1.6	Promote the liveability of the Hume Region to both permanent and short term workers	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	<p>1.6.1 Continue to participate in state government programs that encourage regional living with a focus on promoting regional careers in agrifood.</p> <p>1.6.2 Scope out activity that reaches out to seasonal workers and holiday-makers, encouraging them to live permanently in the region.</p> <p>1.6.3 Explore options for broader support mechanisms to encourage relocation.</p>
1.7	Develop an integrated, regional approach to engaging with seasonal workers	Hume Workforce Development Plan 2015-18	<p>1.7.1 Build awareness of the harvest trail initiative amongst local employers and unemployed workers.</p> <p>1.7.2 Explore initiatives that promote seasonal working holidays (e.g. gap years and holiday work) to Australian youth.</p> <p>1.7.3 Take a leadership position in highlighting unethical treatment and exploitation of seasonal workers in order to effect cultural change and encourage more skilled seasonal workers to the region.</p>
1.8	Engage senior management of large agrifood businesses in the region		<p>1.8.1 Establish an annual networking event with senior management of large businesses to improve local connections.</p> <p>1.8.2 Take a leadership role in inviting newly arrived senior management to participate in industry activity and lend their expertise to local boards and associations.</p>

2

PLATFORM: CHAMPION AGRIBUSINESS EXCELLENCE

Aspirational Targets

1. Sustained improvement in on-farm/manufacturing productivity
2. Increased value-adding through innovation and new product development
3. A high level of professionalism across the sector
4. Sound understanding of market signals

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS
2.1	Support on-farm and factory process improvement initiatives that enable productivity gains		2.1.1 Build awareness of current government and industry RD&E activity. 2.1.2 Develop demonstration case studies to highlight the impact of new approaches. 2.1.3 Celebrate and promote the research success stories to transfer knowledge across industries. 2.1.4 Assist in providing linkages between research institutions and industry in the region. 2.1.5 Ensure that the productivity discussion stays on the agenda in all regional economic development activity.
2.2	Improve skill levels of SMEs in business and risk management		2.2.1 Develop a tailored program that supports growth of knowledge in all fundamental business skills in SMEs. 2.2.2 Help facilitate mentoring and networks for SMEs and start-ups. 2.2.3 Work with industry bodies to ensure that management capability building activity is on their agenda. 2.2.4 Partner with RD&E agencies to run sector-specific risk management training, covering climate, agricultural, market and financial risk.
2.3	Help industry to be better informed about their markets by improving access to data and developing the skills to interpret it		2.3.1 Develop a program to assist emerging industries in sourcing market intelligence or collaborating to commission it. 2.3.2 Improve quality and access to data data, market research and information, particularly for sectors outside the mainstream commodities. 2.3.3 Develop a mechanism for transferring knowledge from publicly available reports to industry. 2.3.4 Take on the role of “explainer” in sponsoring forums and events that communicate the big picture forces of change impacting Hume Region agribusiness. 2.3.5 Facilitate training programs for SMEs in how to access and interpret available data.

2.4	Promote the critical importance of innovation in the processing sector		2.4.1 Organise a series of regular innovation workshops. 2.4.2 Explore funding sources to implement a food processing mentoring program for smaller players to learn about innovation from larger businesses.
2.5	Develop customised, user-friendly grants and support programs for local agrifood businesses		2.5.1 Further develop processes that assist local agrifood businesses to navigate available grant schemes. 2.5.2 Raise awareness of the importance of strategic planning and availability of the state government's 'Grow your Business Program' to SMEs in the region.
2.6	Support industry cluster groups that facilitate knowledge sharing, benchmarking and mentoring to drive cultural change		2.6.1 Establish a register of existing agrifood industry bodies in the Hume Region to coordinate inter-industry communication. 2.6.2 Tap into existing sector organisations or local networks to facilitate knowledge sharing. 2.6.3 Assist players in new and emerging industries to form clusters and collaborate.
2.7	Drive reform in national, state and local legislation to remove red tape and administrative inefficiencies		2.7.1 Work with industry to engage with the Red Tape Commissioner on regulation burdens and blockers. 2.7.2 Support actions relating to the AFGC Paddock to Plate Report 2014, relating to general compliance and cross border inefficiencies..
2.8	Build business capability in quality assurance and product integrity systems		2.8.1 Promote the importance of food safety and accreditation to SMEs considering export or value-adding. 2.8.2 Support businesses in the uptake of ISO and other quality assurance and accreditation schemes. 2.8.3 Support initiatives that continue to raise awareness with producers about the importance of maintaining the region's image in respect to food quality and safety.
2.9	Better understand the impact of climate change on the sustainability of agrifood businesses	Climate Smart Agriculture Development in the Goulburn Broken Project	2.9.1 Support existing climate change initiatives and develop new activities to build better understanding of impacts.

3

PLATFORM: DRIVE INVESTMENT AND TRANSITION

Aspirational Targets

1. Attraction of new business to the region that enhances current activity
2. Adoption of new-age business models and alliances
3. Improved sustainability of existing businesses

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS
3.1	Build awareness of Hume Region's food and beverage proposition with potential investors		3.1.1 Commission research in order to develop an understanding of blockers to regional investment. 3.1.2 Develop a prospectus to promote investment across the Hume Region. 3.1.3 Promote the underutilised water capacity in Alpine Valley/Upper Goulburn catchment as drivers for investment. 3.1.4 Leverage Australia's robust agrifood governance system in promoting the regions agrifood exports.
3.2	Help businesses to become investment-ready		3.2.1 Support the development of a 'how to' kit for becoming investment-ready.
3.3	Raise awareness of alternative small farm business models that could improve profitability and assist industry transition		3.3.1 Raise awareness with businesses about the myriad of models available for raising investment to grow through case studies and educational forums delivered at industry events, field days and other gatherings. 3.3.2 Encourage the development of regional business alliances (or clusters), collaborative marketing and new-age marketing cooperatives.
3.4	Promote innovative business models that support succession planning		3.4.1 Partner with regional business providers to promote the importance of investment in expert advice and strategic planning. 3.4.2 Commission a series of case studies on successful family business transition models, capturing the learnings from industries that have been leaders in this. 3.4.3 Run pilot program on alternative farming models for SME farms.
3.5	Foster better alignment between economic development objectives and planning scheme objectives to give greater certainty to business.		3.5.1 Raise awareness with LGAs about perceived blockages to investment in agrifood businesses. 3.5.2 Work with LGAs to improve interaction between planning and economic development activity.

3.6	Help connect external investors with capital to local producers with know-how		<p>3.6.1 Assist LGAs to develop skill sets in investment attraction.</p> <p>3.6.2 Assist LGAs to host investor missions into the region.</p> <p>3.6.3 Promote the importance of encouraging foreign investment and neutralise community concerns about this.</p> <p>3.6.4 Assist investors that are new to the region to form local supplier/other networks to assist with growth.</p>
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PLATFORM: NURTURE EMERGING INDUSTRIES

Aspirational Target

1. Economic growth
2. Evidence of greater collaboration
3. Greater pride in local food and beverage

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS
4.1	Establish regional gourmet networking and industry development forums, engaging industry champions to lead them		<p>4.1.1 Facilitate the development of regional food groups and clusters by firstly identifying one existing group as a case study (e.g. Mansfield Food Group) and securing funding assistance to devise an action plan for growth. Roll this trial model out with groups in other LGAs/sub regional areas.</p> <p>4.1.2 Assist each group to compile a regional food directory portal such as North East Producers Guide with funding for upkeep.</p> <p>4.1.3 Identify and celebrate local business champions to promote innovation and inspire new entrants.</p>
4.2	Support capability-building activities in business fundamentals		<p>4.2.1 Build upon existing industry initiatives to continually improve product quality and integrity.</p> <p>4.2.2 Promote within industry the need for investment to produce premium quality agrifood products as Hume Region's point of competitive advantage.</p> <p>4.2.3 Mediate to balance the need for food safety regulation against excessive bureaucracy.</p> <p>4.2.4 Facilitate capability building across all business skill sets, with particular focus on online, market research and marketing skills.</p>
4.3	Support capability building activities in small farm fundamentals		<p>4.3.1 Work with primary industries team to develop a program of biosecurity awareness for small farms (e.g. weekend seminars, internet resources).</p> <p>4.3.2 Encourage a local organisation to run an annual event comparable to Mudgee Small Farm Field Days.</p> <p>4.3.3 Seek funding for research into the drift towards small lifestyle farms and implications and capability building needs of this cohort.</p>
4.4	Facilitate better access to commercial processing facilities and pilot plants for SMEs		<p>4.4.1 Establish a directory of short run registered kitchens and processing facilities available for daily/seasonal hire in consultation with regional institutions.</p>

4.5	Encourage collaborative and cross-marketing efforts		<p>4.5.1 Assess opportunities for collective marketing and cross marketing such as shared online platforms.</p> <p>4.5.2 Encourage local retailers and wineries to stock and support regional food.</p> <p>4.5.3 Encourage efforts to improve the provenance branding and brand identity of the many sub-regions across Hume.</p>
4.6	Foster local pride in produce from the region		<p>4.6.1 Ensure local producers are profiled, recognised and celebrated in local media and events.</p> <p>4.6.2 Encourage the growth and promotion of regional farmers markets across Hume Region for both their social and economic benefits.</p> <p>4.6.3 Promote the fact that produce from the region is underpinned by sound food safety systems and is of premium quality.</p>

5

PLATFORM: IMPROVE MARKET CONNECTIONS

Aspirational Targets

1. An adequate transport and logistics network
2. A cost effective means of delivering online orders
3. Improved broadband and mobile connectivity and coverage

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS	
5.1	Assess feasibility of forming a transport cluster, focused on freight consolidation and central collection points		5.1.1	Consult with food and beverage groups in the region to review previous attempts and assess practicality of this.
			5.1.2	Explore opportunities for developing a back loading portal across sub-regions of the Hume Region.
			5.1.3	Explore solutions for local small volume delivery runs that are cost effective.
5.2	Map the supply chain of key categories to inform transport infrastructure planning		5.2.1	Work with local government and industry to map supply chain routes for key industry sectors.
			5.2.2	Prioritise investment that supports increased freight efficiency, including first and last mile considerations.
5.3	Advocate for improved efficiency on regional freight, rail and road networks		5.3.1	Work with industry and local government to plan, develop and maintain upgrades on the Principal Freight Network, including first and last mile local road and rail capacity upgrades.
			5.3.2	Implement the roll out of cubic HPFVs and identify future priorities for heavier “mass” HPFV access.
			5.3.3	Upgrade and maintain key supply chains to support higher productivity freight vehicles.
			5.3.4	Work with all levels of government to prioritise and fund infrastructure improvements to the rail network to support increased rail efficiency (e.g. increased axle loadings).
			5.3.5	Support efforts to improve connections to Wodonga Logic centre and Ettamogoah intermodal facility.
5.4	Support continued reform of state and national road transport policy		5.4.1	Support local government applications for Commonwealth and State funding to support improved freight efficiency.
			5.4.2	Support all levels of government and industry to trial new measures to deliver

			<p>new and/or upgraded infrastructure to support the use of more productive freight vehicles.</p> <p>5.4.3 Work collaboratively with interstate road and rail agencies and local government to improve consistency and continuity of cross border policy.</p>
5.5	Support the region's digital economy through addressing broadband capacity and mobile connectivity	Digital Hume Strategy	5.5.1 Develop a communications/industry briefing message for use in advocating to federal government.

6

PLATFORM: ENSURE SERVICES HAVE GROWTH CAPACITY

Aspirational Targets

1. Access to energy does not become a blocker to business growth
2. The cost of energy does not impinge the global competitiveness of agrifood businesses
3. Growth of services infrastructure keeps pace with industry growth
4. Optimum economic value derived from water

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS
6.1	Promote the importance and development of reliable, cost effective energy for the region		6.1.1 Undertake a study to identify priority areas where lack of power connectivity is restricting investment. 6.1.2 Determine highest priorities and options to addressing shortcomings and advocate for support. 6.1.3 Highlight examples where energy pricing policies are negatively impacting businesses, as a basis for advocating for change. 6.1.4 Raise awareness of the need to assure fuel security and price stability in order to sustain the agrifood sector long term.
6.2	Engage with local governments to identify the blockers to implementing renewable energy with respect to planning		6.2.1 Convene a discussion session with LGAs, impacted land owners and energy companies to identify the blockers to adoption of renewable energy.
6.3	Work with industry and energy providers to raise awareness of how to maximise the use of off-peak energy options		6.3.1 Engage with Murray Dairy to learn from their experience with this issue.
6.4	Actively encourage increased adoption of renewable energy		6.4.1 Work with relevant agencies to remove obstacles to the increased adoption of renewable energy. 6.4.2 Support LGA initiatives to attract investment in renewable energy. 6.4.3 Continue to promote opportunities for all renewable energy solutions. 6.4.4 Investigate cluster models for renewable energy. 6.4.5 Raise awareness of available funding sources for renewable energy.
6.5	Ensure industry has access to cost effective water treatment with capacity for growth		6.5.1 Survey industry and local government to determine areas where water treatment is a blocker to growth. 6.5.2 Work with water authorities, environmental authorities and industry stakeholder groups to identify system improvement opportunities. 6.5.3 Engage with environmental groups such as Sustainability Victoria in the water discussion.

6.6	Raise awareness of the available water resources in the region to encourage investment in higher value agriculture		6.6.1 Explore feasibility to utilise water close to the source, especially in the upper Goulburn catchment. 6.6.2 Work with land owners to better understand the business case for adopting irrigated farming models, where under utilised water resources exist (e.g. Alpine Valleys).
6.7	Facilitate better industry engagement with all utility providers		6.7.1 Partner with energy providers to develop information programs.

7 PLATFORM: BUILD THE AGRICULTURE TOURISM CHANNEL

Aspirational Target

1. Increased tourist visitation
2. Enhanced visitor experience
3. Increased investment in new and existing agri tourism products

STRATEGIC ACTIONS		EXISTING ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES	TASKS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS
7.1	Establish a series of regional agri tourism forums to coordinate food and beverage related activities in each geographic district		7.1.1 Work with the tourism authorities to identify the logical food and beverage districts that could sustain an agri tourism working group. 7.1.2 Develop an action plan for each working group based on the identified blockers and opportunities. 7.1.3 Encourage each group to create a calendar of events and capability building exercises for that district.
7.2	Clarify brand and identity in respect to food and beverage provenance at a regional and local level		7.2.1 Work with food and beverage forums to clarify the local provenance story and brand for agri tourism promotion. 7.2.2 Develop a marketing proposition for the region's food and beverage products based on authenticity and 'meet the maker' experiences. 7.2.3 Facilitate better access to market research for the region's agri tourism sector so that the drivers of visitation in relation to food and beverage may be better understood.
7.3	Foster greater cross-marketing and collaboration with all regional tourism groups		7.3.1 Engage with the three regional tourism bodies to coordinate high level strategies and key messages to the food and beverage sector. 7.3.2 Increase collaboration on connecting agri-food touring routes. 7.3.3 Scope out the prospect of developing a stronger story around the Hume Highway as a food and wine touring route. 7.3.4 Coordinate food events and festivals between regions to minimise cross over.
7.4	Develop tourism operator capability and professionalism in order to enhance the visitor experience		7.4.1 Work with the regional tourism authorities and Tourism Victoria to increase participation in business excellence programs and other training opportunities. 7.4.2 Celebrate and promote tourism business success stories and award winners. 7.4.3 Assist tourism operators to adapt their products to meet needs of the growing Chinese tourism segment for whom food and

			7.4.4 beverage is a focus. Build capability in online marketing and communications.
7.5	Attract strategic investment in agri tourism within the region		7.5.1 Ensure the tourism story has a high profile in the proposed investment prospectus for the region.
7.6	Build the profile of the region's food and beverage capabilities		7.6.1 Encourage local produce guides at a district level. 7.6.2 Celebrate and profile success stories of agri tourism businesses. 7.6.3 Build e-commerce capability to complement existing sales models.
7.7	Promote the importance of a strong food and beverage offering to tourism operators engaged in sporting, cultural or nature-based activity		7.7.1 Utilise the proposed regional food group clusters to champion the food story at a local level.

2 Implementation

As already noted, the intention is that this action plan be delivered through collaboration between the Hume RDA, three tiers of government, and industry with a lead agency nominated to champion each strategy program.

Suggested steps to support implementation of this action plan are:

1. Development of an agreed implementation framework taking into account geographic locations and existing structures.
2. Determine if establishment of an overarching advisory committee is feasible with representation from all levels of government and key industries, i.e. dairy, horticulture, grains and red meat.
3. Identify champion/lead organisations or agencies to oversee the relevant strategy platform and associated actions and initiatives, recognising the lead on key work already underway or about to commence.
4. Determine the level of resourcing support required from relevant champion/lead organisations.
5. Creation of a performance tracking framework and process that involves lead agencies and a simple monitoring process.

3 Acronyms

AFGC	Australian Food and Grocery Council
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DET	Department of Education and Training
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
HRDA	Hume Regional Development Australia
HRTG	Hume Region Transport Group
HPFV	Higher productivity freight vehicles
HPV	Health Purchasing Victoria
HWDC	Hume Workforce Development Committee
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LGA	Local Government Area
NBN	National Broadband Network
NHVR	National Heavy Vehicle Regulator
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
RMS	Road & Maritime Services
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SME	Small to medium sized enterprise
SV	Sustainability Victoria