

# THE CAMPASPE FOOD-EPI+ PROJECT

## Rationale

Effective government policies are essential for strengthening the health-promoting aspects of local food environments, thereby influencing food and beverage choices and contributing to improved health and wellbeing in local communities.

Created by the Institute for Health Transformation at Deakin University, the Local Food-EPI+ tool, is designed for local governments to self-assess their performance against recommended policies and prioritise areas for policy action. The tool helps to benchmark and provide a framework for guiding actions to create healthy, equitable and environmentally sustainable food systems.

Healthy Food Systems is a priority in the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2025-2029. The Local Food-EPI+ project is a key action within the objective of collaboration due to the opportunities it presented to strengthen alignment with local government municipal health and wellbeing requirements.

Campaspe Shire Council, a partner of the Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) initiative, approached the LMPHU for assistance to implement the Food-EPI+ tool demonstrating readiness and capacity to be the pilot site for LMPHUs involvement in this project.

## At A Glance

- **42/100** baseline Food-EPI+ assessment score
- **6** areas of good progress identified
- **5** priority policy recommendations developed
- Regional implementation LMPHU support model **established**

## Objectives

The LMPHU and Campaspe Shire Council partnered to implement the Local Food-EPI+ tool as a way to:

- Build staff knowledge of best practice
- Develop staff skills and capacity in assessing food policies
- Establish a baseline of current strengths and identify priority areas for action
- Monitor policy progress through a clear framework
- Strengthen organisational efforts to increase accountability for change.



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## What We Did

Following the Local Food-EPI+ implementation guide, the project was delivered in five phases:

### 1. Project Initiation

Established a joint LMPHU–Campaspe Shire advisory group (Oct 2025) to tailor the tool to the local policy context.

**2. Audit and Data Gathering**  
Collected and summarised council policies and programs relevant to local food environments.

**3. Assessment against Benchmarks**  
A cross-sector panel assessed current policy implementation across 10 domains via survey and a facilitated workshop (Dec 2025).

**4. Develop Recommendations**  
Developed and prioritised evidence-informed actions, including 'quick wins' to support feasible implementation.

**5. Communicate Outcomes**  
Produced a final report (Feb 2026) with scores, findings, and recommendations aligned to municipal health and wellbeing priorities.

## Outcomes

The Local Food-EPI+ final report assessed Campaspe Shire Council's implementation of best practice policies for healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems and provided recommendations for action.

Six areas of strong progress were identified: leadership, strategies and plans, collaboration, monitoring and reporting, food promotion, and food provision. The Council received an overall score of 42/100, which did not fully reflect existing activity due to limited formal policy support, highlighting a need for policy development.

Recommendations focused on goals and targets, funding and resources, and healthy food procurement and provision. 'Quick win' actions included developing policies for healthy facilities, community gardens or nature strips, healthy catering, and a Healthy Sports Rewards program.

The assessment provides a benchmark of the current food environment and identifies opportunities within local government to drive positive change and strengthen healthy food systems.

## Lessons learned

A key lesson was the importance of a strong collaborative partnership in implementing the Local Food-EPI+ tool. Commitment from both LMPHU and Campaspe Shire Council to

dedicate staff time was critical to driving the project. Aligning the work with regional initiatives, such as the Healthy Loddon Campaspe partnership, strengthened the enabling environment and supported a more coordinated, policy-focused approach. Previous implementations in neighbouring councils (City of Greater Bendigo and Mount Alexander Shire) also provided valuable comparison data and shared learning.

The whole-of-organisation nature of the tool highlighted challenges in engaging multiple departments, particularly those not traditionally involved in health and wellbeing, and coordinating staff availability. This reinforced the need for dedicated project leadership, clear governance, and strong management endorsement to prioritise the work alongside competing responsibilities and legislative requirements.

The process also demonstrated the value of LMPHU's regional support role, enabling coordination across councils, sharing of learnings, and building capacity. Embedding collaboration within Prevention and Population Health implementation plans was identified as key to supporting scalability and sustained impact across the region.

## Next Steps

The Local Food-EPI+ tool will be considered for further roll-out across the Loddon Mallee region with preliminary discussions being held with local governments. This project will continue to be a focus for implementation within the LMPHU Healthy Food Systems team 2026-2027 activities.

The LMPHU would like to acknowledge the commitment and time from everyone involved in the project at Campaspe Shire Council, including the project team, panel of assessors, and workshop participants.



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