

Project Summary

‘Cultivating the Capacity of Food Businesses to Reduce and Transform Food Waste’

KEY POINTS

1. **Practical Training Framework:** Developed a regionally focused "train the facilitator" model, advancing education in food waste management and building capacity for circular economy practices.
2. **Collaboration and Community Engagement:** Emphasised collaborative frameworks and shared learning, enhancing community engagement and creating a replicable ripple effect across regions.
3. **Targeted Regional Impact:** Focused on strengthening regional economies by tailoring training to local needs, driving both economic and environmental sustainability.



Figure 1. Kelly Johnson, Woodlane Orchard.

THE CHALLENGE

Our project addressed the significant challenge of engaging small, regional food businesses in adopting circular economy practices to reduce and transform food waste. Many of these businesses face barriers such as limited resources, lack of awareness, and the absence of collaborative frameworks to guide them.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The project aimed to overcome these obstacles by developing a practical, regionally-focused "train the facilitator" model that empowers local leaders to work closely with businesses, fostering a community-driven approach to sustainability. This model not only addresses the immediate

need for effective food waste management but also creates a replicable framework for long-term economic and environmental resilience in regional communities.

OUR RESEARCH

Literature Review: The first stage involved an extensive review of existing literature to establish the current understanding of food waste management and circular economy principles within small regional businesses. This review identified gaps in knowledge, highlighted challenges specific to regional SMEs, and provided a theoretical framework that guided the subsequent stages of the research.

In-Depth Interviews: Building on insights from the literature review, the research team conducted qualitative interviews with 15 small food business owners and operators in the Murraylands and Riverland regions. These interviews were designed to gather firsthand perspectives on the challenges and opportunities related to food waste management and circular economy adoption. The interviews provided critical insights into the practical realities faced by businesses, shaping the development of a relevant and impactful training framework.

Reference Group Engagement: The final stage involved forming a Reference Group consisting of industry experts, academics, and local leaders. This group played a crucial role in validating the research findings and ensuring that the proposed training framework was aligned with the real-world needs of regional businesses. The Reference Group's feedback was instrumental in refining the framework and confirming the approach of the "train the trainer" model, which emphasises community-driven collaboration and leadership in addressing food waste challenges.



Figure 2. Dave and Heidi Setchell Black Sheep Produce

OUTCOMES

The outcomes of our research have significantly advanced the understanding of how small regional food businesses can adopt circular economy practices to reduce food waste. The research revealed that traditional training approaches were insufficient to meet the unique needs of these businesses. Instead, a community-driven, collaborative approach was identified as more effective. This led to the development of the "train the facilitator" model, which focuses on empowering local leaders and influencers to guide businesses within their regions.

The current status of knowledge now recognizes the importance of tailored, region-specific training frameworks that foster collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. This approach not only addresses the immediate challenges of food waste management but also creates a supportive ecosystem where businesses can share best practices and innovate together. The validated training framework and the fully developed Module 1 of the Food Waste Transformers Program represent practical tools that can be scaled and replicated across various regions, ensuring the widespread adoption of sustainable practices in the food industry.

IMPACT

The "Cultivating the Capacity of Food Businesses to Reduce and Transform Food Waste - Phase 1" project is anticipated to deliver significant impacts across several critical areas, aligning with the seven CRC impact areas:

- **Food Waste Reduced:** By training facilitators who can guide businesses in adopting these practices, the project aims to create a measurable decrease in food waste across participating regions.
- **Industry Profitability Gained:** The Food Waste Transformers Program equips businesses with the tools to identify cost-saving opportunities and develop value-added products from waste materials, ultimately improving their bottom line.
- **Rescued Food Distributed:** The project encourages businesses to repurpose and redistribute food that would otherwise go to waste. This not only reduces waste but also supports food security by making more food available for consumption.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emission Savings:** By minimising waste, the project helps decrease the carbon footprint associated with food production, transportation, and disposal.

- **Circular Economy Jobs Created:** The project fosters the development of new roles within the circular economy, particularly through the creation of facilitator positions.
- **Industry People Trained:** Through the "train the facilitator" model, the project will train a significant number of industry professionals. These trained facilitators will then educate others in their communities, creating a ripple effect of knowledge and skills across the region.

NEXT STEPS

Option 4 (National Rollout) offers the best approach to achieving long term and sustainable impacts. Through localised validation in new regions, the development of targeted training modules, and an ambitious integrated expansion for a national rollout, this pathway will deliver transformative benefits at a national scale for small businesses. The potential for national impact is significant, with the chance to foster a culture of sustainability, innovation, and collaboration throughout regional Australia.

However, some uncertainties remain, such as the varying levels of readiness and resource availability among different regions. To address these uncertainties, pilot programs could be conducted in a few selected regions with different characteristics to refine the training materials and approaches before a broader rollout. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will be essential to adapt the program to meet the specific needs of each region, ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.

PROJECT TEAM

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Figure 3. Project Team

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS



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