

## **Agricultural sectors and primary school students find a common ground with building a resilient Local Food System in rural Tasmania**

**Sandra Murray<sup>1</sup>, Debra Reid<sup>2</sup>, Alison Ward<sup>2</sup>, Gretchen Long<sup>2</sup>, Stuart Auckland<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Rural Health, TAS; <sup>2</sup>Tasmanian Health Organisation—North

This project is predominantly linked to Local Food Systems (LFS), partnerships within the broad agricultural sector and student pathways to future agricultural careers.

The concept of LFS is discussed, highlighting the opportunities that LFS provide for communities to reconnect to their food, people and natural environment. The findings from two separate Tasmanian projects, namely Healthy Food Access Tasmania (HFAT) and Mulching Munchkins (MM) have identified critical factors needed to establish resilient LFS in Tasmania. The HFAT project in this context aims to improve access and availability to local fruit and vegetables across Tasmania by mapping local food systems already in existence, identifying strengths, weaknesses, potential and risks. MM is an agricultural primary school program and is an example of a LFS initiative established in two rural towns in the Dorset Local Government Area, North-East Tasmania. MM provides a comprehensive practical and theoretical program linking with the Australian curriculum in which the connection between food, agriculture, health and the environment is explored.

Collaboration and partnerships with the broader community was essential as the complexity of LFS makes it impossible for one sector alone to address. Collaboration and interviews occurred with food producers, wholesalers, peak bodies, local government staff and councillors. Partnerships were formed with the agriculture sector, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Natural Resource Management and the broader health sector.

At an age when career pathways are being considered students were exposed to potential career fields within the agriculture sector. Learning occurred in school grounds and farms where LFS were viewed from food production through to the retail sector. Additionally participation of university staff, primary health care coordinator and community dietician introduced health as a social concept.

Outcomes to-date highlight the importance of collaboration and partnerships to project development. Linking school curricula with the agricultural sector provides a rich source of learning beyond the capacity of the classroom. Outcomes also suggest current and future generations are reconnecting with food origins with interest in LFS and agriculture reignited. The findings from both projects support a policy framework based on LFS, inclusive of the natural resources and the people, on which, it—and we—depend. The findings also suggest that if complimentary activities and redistribution mechanisms relating to LFS were enacted through policy, social inequities would reduce contributing to better population health as well as sustainable and viable production of fruit and vegetables.