

CCF Community Gardens Redevelopment (CCFCGR) Consultation Project: Report Summary

The Collingwood Children's Farm (CCF) is a Crown land reserve managed on behalf of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) by an elected Committee of Management (CoM). The CoM is appointed by the Minister for the Environment of the Victorian State Government. The CoM manages the Farm in accordance with CCF's mission and Public Benevolent Institution status.

CCF Mission

To improve the lives of children, the disadvantaged, disabled, unemployed and marginalised persons within the Victorian community (Children and Disadvantaged Persons) by providing inclusive services and support to build independence and quality of life for Children and Disadvantaged Persons.

Community Gardens Redevelopment

As part of the Community Gardens redevelopment process, CCF commissioned a community and stakeholder consultation. The consultation aimed to better understand the community's needs, desires and expectations in the design of a rejuvenated, productive community garden. The consultation is an important part of ensuring the redeveloped Community Gardens meet DEECA's requirement that Crown land reserves provide environmental and social benefits, while aligning with community expectations and supporting the Farm's mission. The area for redevelopment makes up 3.5% of the Farm's land.

Approach

The approach taken to the consultations engaged a wide range of CCF community members. This ensured participants were diverse in age, abilities and connection to the Farm. Twelve separate consultation sessions were held with 75 individuals participating, including staff, volunteers, students, people with a disability, previous Community Gardeners, community groups, partner organisations, members and visitors. Participants could contribute their ideas in various ways, including through text, drawings and photographs. The sessions were adapted to ensure the accessibility and safety needs of participants were met.

In the consultation sessions, participants were asked the following:

- o What would a productive garden at the CCF look like, in which all the Farm's community could enjoy? (What would it look like? Features, fixtures and amenities).
- o What opportunities and experiences could the Farm's community enjoy there? (What would people do there? Learning, social connection and activities).
- o How would it work? (Management and sharing of space/produce).

The community's input generated many ideas and directions for the future use of the Community Gardens area. The ideas align strongly with the CCF's mission, aims and objectives, as well as government policies and strategies for access to green space and protecting public land for future generations.

Community and Stakeholder Insights

The consultation revealed that a productive garden located at the CCF has a broader meaning for people who use and visit the Farm regularly:

- o There was a desire to experience and learn from a diverse food production space that is beautiful, but also innovative and educational.
- o There was a strong interest in how to grow food sustainably, especially related to climate change adaptation strategies.
- o A productive garden that demonstrates food production and offers training could encourage people to start growing food at home or with their families and communities.
- o There is also a high interest in learning about First Nations food plants, Indigenous farming methods and caring for the land.

The definition of a '**CCF community garden**' varies between community members.

For the majority of stakeholders who participated in the consultation, it means:

- o A facilitated productive garden where food, flowers and biodiversity are integrated into the design.
- o A space that supports a range of programs that help CCF's broader community to learn and connect with the area and the people in it.
- o The gardens and the gardening practice meet community development, urban green space and food production goals.

For previous Community Gardeners, it means:

- o Individual or shared plots for gardening by people allocated plots indefinitely to grow food.
- o The produce is to be shared at their discretion, without oversight or management by Farm staff.

Ideas from the Community

The ideas produced by consultation participants were consolidated and synthesised into **six principles, three themes and forty-five ideas** to guide the rejuvenation of the Community Gardens.

Six Principles

- o *Recognise History* (First Nations, Abbotsford Convent Heritage and migrant plot gardeners)
- o *Protect the land for future generations* (biodiverse, regenerative and climate resilient)
- o *Create a sanctuary* (a place of beauty to rest and awaken the eight senses)
- o *Reflect the Farm's aesthetic* (rustic and natural materials, e.g. wood/stone)
- o *Accessible for all* (for people with disabilities in all areas of the Community Gardens)
- o *Prioritise sharing* (of space, land, produce and learning).

Three Themes

- o *A place to grow*: Participants broadly recognised that as a farm, at its core it is a place for growing—food, plants, animals—giving children and people of all ages the opportunity to participate in growing, harvesting and sharing food.
- o *A place to learn*: The CCF, and its staff, are recognised and admired as a place where children and people learn in a highly supportive, empathetic, patient and expert environment. There is admiration for the CCF's ability to conduct learning and development in a way that allows members of the community to learn by doing and by making mistakes, and lead their own projects to build their confidence and agency.
- o *A place to connect*: With nature, with the river, with people in a place of quiet activity to improve people's health and wellbeing. Also, to connect with the whole Farm and its staff and volunteers.

Summary of Community Insights and Ideas

- o The [majority of stakeholders who participated in the consultation] broader Farm community expect the new Community Gardens to be overseen by a CCF manager/co-ordinator who will support community members to join in the garden's activities.
- o All participants expressed the importance of First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities being engaged in the Community Gardens to grow, learn, teach and connect with the Farm's broader community.
- o The Community Gardens is expected to be a safe, beautiful, rustic but tidy, productive place for people to enjoy both learning and relaxing experiences.
- o There is a high level of interest in the Community Gardens providing support for people who are disadvantaged and need access to food by participating and sharing in the growing of food.
- o There must be a focus on universal access; people with a disability should be able to access all areas of the Community Gardens rather than be allocated a section of the garden that would represent segregation rather than a fully inclusive environment.
- o The needs of people with physical and/or neurodiverse disabilities should be considered when designing the new Community Gardens.
- o There was a low level of interest for schools or groups to be allocated and self-manage their own plots, but they would willingly share a communal plot and enjoy the benefits of working with others.
- o Partner organisations would embrace the opportunity to self-manage their own plot to help support CALD participants to grow food and train young people in horticulture.
- o If the traditional allotment model is retained, the expectation is that disadvantaged people are prioritised to be allocated communal plots and that the Farm would support their use of the plot.
- o Universally, there was a high level of support for CCF's role as an urban farm that shows city residents how biodiversity and agriculture can be integrated through regenerative farming practices.

- o New Community Gardens could help train people in sustainable food production and gain an appreciation of the importance of urban food production, especially in the event of a climate emergency when rural food production and supply chains are interrupted by fire, flood and drought.