



FRRR/ABC Revive and Thrive Gloucester Project Food Bowl Initiative Project

Purpose of the Grant:

Expand the Tucker Garden Patch site by establishing an orchard as a demonstration plot. To provide information sessions and workshops to the community. Undertake research for further expansion of the program.

Objectives:

Are to increase community members knowledge and interest of food production by establishing commercial scale demonstration plots which will also encourage diversity of production for the region as a means of adapting to climate change.

Report:

The Stroud-Gloucester Valley, and adjoining areas, has been a significant foodbowl for over a century with dairy and beef being its major products. Historically Gloucester-Stroud was also known for its citrus growing but changing populations and growing areas saw the majority of citrus growing move to the irrigation areas. Gloucester also currently has a number of small boutique industries such as viticulture, herbs, apiaries and organic products. The Gloucester Project has been encouraging and promoting horticulture as a viable and sustainable industry for the region for over 3 years. The region is climate advantaged, close to major population centres, has a stable population base and increasing numbers of small acre farmers interested in finding suitable development for their land. A number of highly motivated and dedicated individuals have been producing and developing organic and commercial market garden properties and have joined TGP to help promote this new industry for Gloucester. Food, land and water security have become major issues world wide. Australia is now a net importer of fruit and vegetables which makes us very vulnerable to food poverty - there is an urgent need to develop viable market gardens if Australia is to maintain food security for it's communities. Food producing land is also under major threat from urban expansion, mining and effects of climate changes. Globally, the role of community scale action as a key element in making the transition to a less energy-dependent societal economy is being widely accepted as an idea whose time has come. The local movement acquired a formal structure in June 2008 with the incorporation of The Gloucester Project Inc as a non-profit community association, and TGP moved immediately to publicise its philosophy and objectives. Membership grew rapidly, and we were fortunate in attracting a number of grants. A number of local property owners offered land for TGP use. We accepted the offer of a plot of land at Hillview Herb Farm because of its close proximity to Gloucester township and the support from Hillview's owners. It provided an opportunity to quickly develop an experimental and demonstration garden and orchard, and, with the support of many enthusiastic volunteers, "The Tucker Garden Patch" (The Patch) was soon in production.

The Patch had a number of goals. Firstly it was to provide tangible evidence that the community was behind the concepts being promoted by TGP and the number of voluntary hours, donations and ongoing support has proven this. The Patch was to be an education facility to provide a showcase for locals and visitors to gain their attention and then increase their interest to grow. It was clear from our surveys and discussion with various community groups and individuals that we have a generation or two who have lost the skills and confidence in growing vegetables and fruit. The Patch has been an outstanding success in garnering interest at all levels of the community

and very much from small property owners.

Part of the grant allowed TGP to purchase sufficient fruit trees and berries to establish a small demonstration orchard. We were able to show how to improve and create soil suitable for deciduous and citrus trees and trial various varieties of berries. Raised beds were built to show methods of growing deep and shallow rooting species. Sustainable practices were used and documented with course notes being made available to interested growers through workshops and the Patches website (www.tuckergardenpatch.com). Pest exclusion methods are currently being trialled and as the trees mature pruning and tree management will be demonstrated. A substantial shade house and potting area have been constructed which will provide an area for seed germination, propagation and plant development. A watering system was designed and established which demonstrated low water use. It included a pump, small water tank, timers, soaker hoses, underground water pipes and in conjunction with water saving techniques such as soil biology to improve soil water retention and mulching we were able to show growers how to grow using less water (up to 80% water saving compared to conventional irrigation methods).

To date TGP has held over 20 workshops at The Patch. They included How to Grow Berries, How to Grow Garlic (3 workshops, Propagation (4 workshops), Seed Saving, Water and Dam Health, How to Grow Vegetables (2 workshops), Soil improvement and creation, Organic Methods of Growing Nutritious Food, Sustainable Growing, Growing Vegetables organised specially for Gloucester Primary school children, How to build a Pizza Oven for your property. The workshops have been a great success with much positive feedback and requests for further sessions. The workshops have also led to the establishment of a garlic cluster with over 15 properties involved in a garlic growing trialling 6+ varieties of garlic. It is anticipated that this will become one of a number of viable commercial crops for the region. The workshops run for the local school have led to a small vegetable garden being established which is known as "Dirty Fingers" and run by school staff and students with help from interested parents. TGP has been able to establish an official Seed Saving Group registered with the International seed saving network with a small but growing number of members saving seed. An active seed saving group is recommended if we are to promote viable sustainable vegetable growing in the region. More work needs to be done in promoting seed saving.

Overall the workshops attracted over 150 participants and many attendees are now growing vegetables and implementing many of the skills learned at the workshops. The attendance at TGP workshops, information days and working bees demonstrates continually growing interest. Shop owners are providing their excess paper and cardboard for recycling, people are providing seed and seedlings for growing and constant requests are being received for the running of more workshops related to growing. TGP will also be featured as a major workshop at the international Women's Gathering (WG) in October 2011. We now have sufficient growers to be growing the seasonal produce for the Women's Gathering. Members of TGP, WG Committee, CWA and catering businesses have discussed what is required. The Patch has led to the establishment of a growers network in Gloucester and surrounds. The Patch has also gained much publicity and allowed TGP to spread its message to many outside our own community. Features in printed and other media such as The Land, Newcastle and Sydney Heralds, Town and Country, ABC radio etc have attracted much interest from other communities and interested individuals about our growing methods and goals, even as far away as Iraq.

Another goal of The Patch was to bring people together who are interested in commercial growing. The first step was to get people growing for themselves. This has been achieved with new growers coming onboard all the time. The community stall at the Farmer's market has a regular number of growers providing produce for sale with new growers showing up each market. The Patch has grown and supplied delicious and nutritious vegetables for sale at the community stall. These included potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, garlic, lettuce, pumpkins, corn, galangal,

Peruvian apples, onions, broccoli, cabbages, beans, peas and much more. Through the Patch we have been able to provide a number of market outlets for growers. For instance we have formed a cooperation with a direct to buyer veg-box distributor at Nabiac who will take as much produce as we can produce. There is also a Gloucester box distribution system currently being planned and we have been approached to provide produce for a distribution system in Sydney. After holding a number of workshops a garlic cluster has been formed with over 15 properties currently participating in a garlic growing trial. We are aiming to have at least 10 properties involved in a horticulture/market garden network during the next 12 months. The Patch has also provided demonstration of how to develop gardens to attract pollinators and insect eating predators. As part of TGP research we trialled different plants to see how hardy they were and how effective in bringing in birds, lizards, bees and other insects. Over the 12 months we have seen a significant increase in reptiles, insect pollinators (bees, wasps etc) and an increase in pollination rates of cucurbits, brassicas etc. We have also seen a reduction in snails and slugs. Information gained from these trials has been published on The Tucker Patch website. Incorporated into the pollinator gardens was a pond, breezeway and gravel path which demonstrated 3 methods of frost control and mitigation. The tree screen and wind breaks were also demonstrating instant no-dig garden method and sheet mulching. These areas trialled different native and exotic species to see how they performed in exposed and extreme conditions of wind, dry, wet, poor soil, varying degrees of mulching, no fertilising and low maintenance.

The Tucker Garden Patch website has played an integral role in the success of The Patch. Our voluntary website managers have kept the site up to date with user friendly information, notices and articles of importance for media and interested people. All workshop information and literature was published for public access and photos regularly posted to show how The Patch has progressed. It is important to note that many media representatives visited the website prior to contacting us for interviews and articles.

Soil production and improvement has also been a major area of research and trials. When we moved to The Patch we were told it was “rubbish land” and “one of the worst sites in the valley for growing vegetables”. This opinion is often expressed about land in the valley and although from a horticultural perspective we knew this to be incorrect, we had to prove our assertion that the land and soil could be productive. Initial tests showed the ‘soil’ to be sulphur based clay, with pH of 4.5-5.0, low worm count, low phosphate, calcium poor, minerals and trace elements locked up due to low pH, top soil was 2cm deep from unimproved native and introduced grass species. Biodiversity was poor and soil biology low. The land had been previously used for low level grazing of cattle and was unimproved. Using a variety of organic and permaculture methods over 12 months the soil is now testing pH 5.9-6.1, high worm count in beds and increased beneficial organisms (still low on paths and unimproved areas), calcium and nutrient uptake in plants increased (e.g. no more blossom end rot, quality of vegetation leaf etc), soil depth up to 40cm depth in growing areas. A number of different bed designs were built and comparative growth rates, quantitative and qualitative products were observed and maintenance requirements compared. All methods proved to be successful with the raised beds being the most water efficient and productive. The keyhole garden was productive but as expected required more water as did the open row beds. Substantial mulching reduced maintenance and water use. A Temperature Mapping (Tmap) site was also established and data is still being gathered. Once the trial period is completed the data will be downloaded and analysed. Trials of berries and orchard fruit have commenced but are in their early stages. The raised beds have so far been successful for stone fruit and citrus. Different varieties of berries were trialled with a significant number of blueberry varieties found to be unsuitable to the humid Gloucester climate. It was found that raspberries, loganberries, strawberries, blackberries and boysenberries are suitable and viable crops for the area but predator exclusion is a real problem for berries and fruit growing - further study is required. A number of varieties of subtropical and tropical edible plants are being trialled.

It became clear very early in the formation of The Patch that a social aspect to The Patch was critical to the development and sustainability of volunteers to maintain what we were trying to achieve. Friends of the Tucker Patch was formed. A number of critical factors have been achieved through this group's activities. It has fostered a feeling of ownership and camaraderie between volunteers and supporters. It managed, planned and ran all workshops. It invited and introduced new people to TGP and its goals. It promoted The Patch and TGP's overall goals through media, local groups and internet.

The open air gallery aspect of The Patch has also been a success and contributed to spreading the word about sustainable growing. The art workshops attracted people who otherwise may not show an interest in vegetable growing. We were able to demonstrate that growing can also be an artform. From the 3 workshops we attracted new members to TGP, some participants returned for workshops on how to grow vegetables and propagating courses and we demonstrated that growing can be creative, beautiful and fulfilling and not just prosaic. We have gained interest from Council with these workshops as well as the broader art community who are also interested in sustainability. TGP's entry in Waste 2 Art (which TGP's entry won locally and runner-up regionally) created contact with Forster and Taree who are promoting sustainable living and recycling. They have since referred a number of growers from their area who have visited the Patch and a number of our grower's properties. TGP keeps ongoing contact with these people via email and our newsletters.

The Mandala garden although not yet completed was designed to demonstrate how to turn a small area (e.g. backyard) into a fully attractive and productive food producing area including vegetables and fruit to feed a family of six.

The Patch has been a vehicle to encourage and show how to use recycled materials to create beds, growing pots, growing frames, soil, mulching and more. Course participants and visitors have been fascinated with the number of inexpensive and sustainable ways paper and cardboard can be reused both at home and on a commercial farm. We have received many reports on people implementing the ideas on their properties. The Patch has only been possible due to the outstanding efforts of all its volunteers and supporters. The FRRR/ABC grant was a major contribution. The number of hours our community has donated to this project has been well rewarded. Now that we have raised awareness of horticulture as a viable industry, have property owners growing more, attracted interest from government agencies, provided initial market outlets etc, it is time to move into the next stage of the 'foodbowl' project. TGP committee is suggesting a number of possible ways we can move forward and closer to our overall goal to develop a commercial market garden industry in the region and promote the concept of preserving our region and its land and water for future sustainable food production and expansion.

TGP is applying for funding from a number of sources with 3 possible projects in mind....

a) a community demonstration market garden. This commercial farm would not rely on volunteers. Sufficient funding would need to cover the salary of a full time farm manager and part time farm hand, inputs and machinery hire etc. TGP has submitted an application to Community Builders for this project. If the application is successful the Patch will be relocated to this site on public land.

b) a study involving at least 5 farms with different microclimates and types of land. Each property will demonstrate a specific sustainable growing method/s. Budget farm crop plans will be developed and published. Each property will be available for field days and workshops. TGP is applying to CMA and Caring for Country for funding of this project.

c) TGP is also aiming to establish a network of 10 properties who are interested in commercial market gardening. This will involve the co-operation of the property owners in trialling different methods that suit their farms and providing opportunities for interested persons to visit the operations. Marketing strategies for selling produce will be discussed and developed. TGP will be seeking funding to assist property owners.



COW PADDOCK



FIRST WEEKS



PROPAGATING



POTATO BED



WATER TESTING



DIRTY FINGERS



FIRST PLANTINGS - WINDBREAK



VEGETABLES



STRAWBERRY BED



BIRDS & BEES



ORCHARD



**THE GLOUCESTER PROJECT
TUCKER GARDEN PATCH**

Summary

The FRRR/ABC grant provided a marvellous opportunity for The Gloucester Project (TGP) to make significant progress with the first stage of TGP's Food Bowl Initiative. All stated goals, and beyond, have been achieved. The Tucker Garden Patch (The Patch) demonstration site has completed research in relation to organic and sustainable methods of soil creation, improvement and management. An orchard was planted trialling a wide variety of citrus, stone fruit and berries. Efficient watering systems were designed to deliver water to the vegetable garden beds and orchard in conjunction with low-water use techniques. Data has been collected regarding suitable vegetable crops for personal and commercial growing in the Gloucester region. Soil pH, soil biota, pest management, biodiversity, dam water health, organic growing methods and marketing of produce have all been studied. Information from these studies has been, and is continuing to be made available through TGP's 2 websites, reports, workshops, demonstration and field days. The Patch (& volunteers) assisted our local public school start a vegetable garden and over 20 workshops were run with excellent feedback and requests for more. We now have over 50 properties trialling vegetable growing for personal and/or commercial growing. The achievements of our members and the demonstration site has been pivotal in TGP receiving a Community Builders Grant (over a quarter million dollars) to commence the next stage of the Food Bowl Initiative. For continuity The Patch is being amalgamated with the new site. All resources and development will be moved to the new, larger, market garden site. This is an extremely exciting and important time for The Food Bowl Project and we would like to take this opportunity to thank FRRR/ABC for the support you gave to our project...not just the money but also the vote of confidence in what our community is trying to achieve. We trust that we can continue our association with FRRR in some form and would like to keep you informed about the ongoing progress of the project.