

CBRLocalFood: *mapping and quantifying home and community food production*

Progress Report November 2023

Emerging results from our Backyard Food Study tell us that people all over Canberra are working hard and creatively in their gardens. This study is different from other studies that have asked people in the ACT (and Australia) to estimate how much they grew in a year (by dollar value or by weight) by collecting actual weights or volumes and varieties each week. This is citizen science and represents challenges, but we are developing a fascinating picture of Canberra’s urban food production.

Most of our respondents to date (n=122) are aged between 50-80, female, in full or part time work rather than being unemployed or retired. Most have had 10 or more years’ experience growing food in CBR. Our study has captured some of the multicultural richness of CBR with heritage reported from most regions of the world represented and 16% of our respondents identified as CALD. We have had responses from across the ACT (see Figure 1).

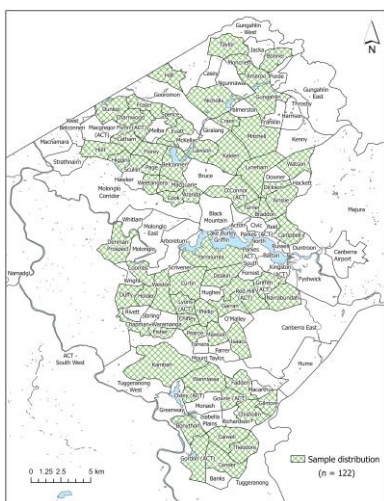


Fig 1. Distribution of respondents

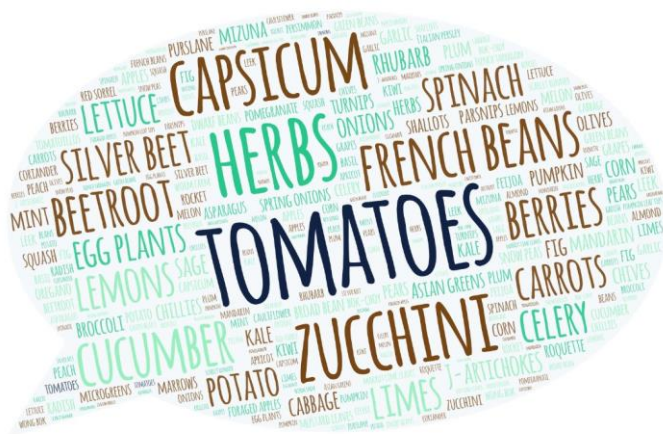


Fig 2. Frequency of varieties reported in weekly produce uploads

People report growing food primarily for relaxation, wellbeing and because they value the taste and variety of fresh and seasonal home grown produce, including varieties that are culturally important but hard to purchase. While a good number of people said they grew food to save money, very few people were not purchasing inputs (straw, soil additives, manure, compost, seeds and seedlings) for their garden, and most from a national chain rather than local businesses or community groups. Another precious input, water, was predominantly straight from the tap (as opposed to using recycled water). In our Bush Capital the biggest challenge to producing food was wildlife (possums, rabbits, cockies etc.) but remember that these can be caged out. Poor aspect and shade from buildings and trees were the next biggest challenges – these are design issues.

The variety of produce grown is diverse (see Figure 2) but seasonal. The nutritional differences between vegetables and fruit grown in different methods (i.e. from backyard or supermarket) is contested in the literature - but other health giving properties such as flavonoids (these act as antioxidants) are greater in fresh, seasonal vegetables. Freshness isn't everything as tomatoes are one vegetable that's nutritional value improves with preservation. Knowing what has been applied or added to your food (because you are the one who would have added chemicals or not) also gives peace of mind. However, many people described the difficult soil, refuse and rock substrate they had to deal with to create their gardens so its worth thinking about what was there to begin with.

VEGE SAFE is another citizen science project that will analyse your soil for heavy metals and other pollutants: <https://www.360dustanalysis.com/pages/vegesafe-about>

Respondents easily grow enough for 5 serves of veg a day until mid winter and in late summer-autumn some reported fruit or veg harvests of 50-70kg of produce a week. We still need more data year round to get annual yield estimates. Some participants estimate they may grow as much as 20kg/m² pa. This is possible as other studies tell us that urban production can be 15 x more productive than rural holdings.

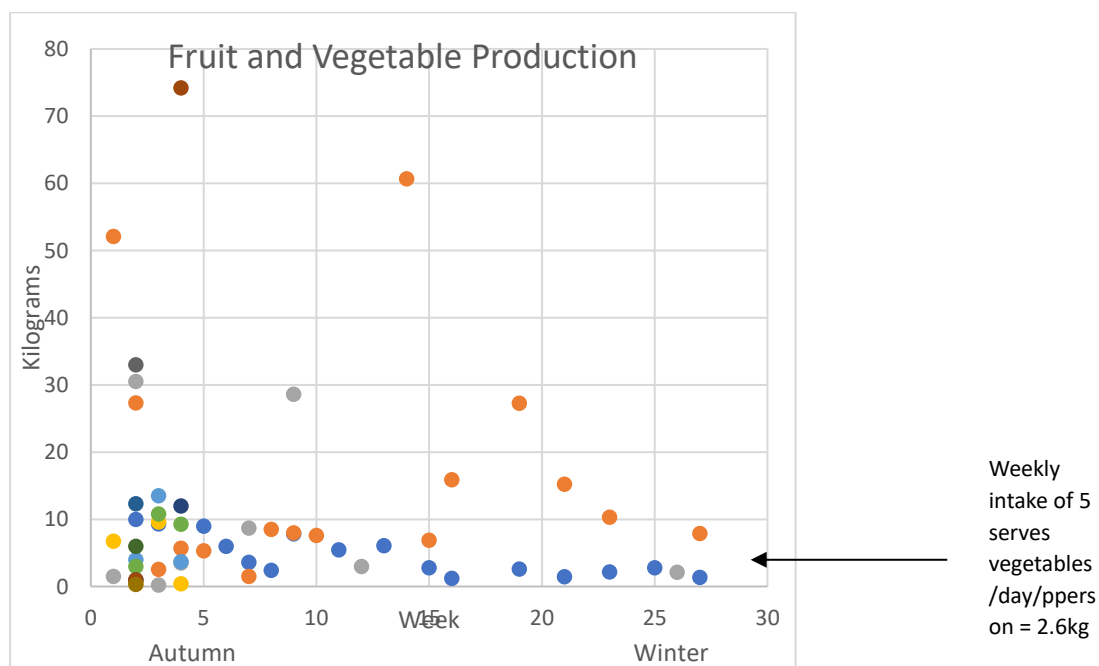


Figure 3 Combined harvest weekly production

We now we are heading back to dry times as well as hotter times and would love to see some more data collected over summer.

Other studies have suggested gardeners have greater environmental awareness and are above average in their motivation to notice and respond to climatic and environmental pressures.

When do we start conserving water or do more with grey water?

We would also like to dig a bit deeper into our obsession with tomatoes which are our biggest crop....how early can people harvest them, what varieties do best in our conditions, how big a crop do people commit to or is it just pursuit of few but perfect flavour? This is also a dee dive into yield calculations.

We look forward to telling you more but we would really love contributions over summer to help us tell the story of our most bounteous season. We are offering \$50 local food vouchers for the ten most complete data entries.

To do this and to enable us to send reminders or updates we are asking people to use emails as usernames. If you previously used an anonymous username we would love you to send us an email to say what your anonymous user name is and we will link previous and ongoing data.

See the updated flyer



Registration Survey (once only)



Production Survey (repeat entries)

Many thanks

CBRLocal Food team