

VERSION 1 (JULY 2026)



Growing a Social Farm

LEARNINGS FROM
NORTH FREMANTLE



North Fremantle Social Farm (NFSF) is an urban micro-farm located in Walyalup, nestled between Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River) and Warden (the sea) on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja. We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we farm, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise and honour the enduring strength, resilience, and care of the Noongar people on this land for over 45,000 years.

This document was made for people who want to start a social farm, fund, support, or partner with one — such as councils who can partner by providing land. It has been developed collaboratively by Anglicare WA's ShiftLab and NFSF to share how this innovative urban social farm model works and what makes it possible.

Through shared workshops and conversations, we have explored the principles, conditions, tensions, and supports that help the Farm flourish. We offer these insights in the spirit of learning, reflection, and celebration.





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WHY Social Farms Matter

Many people living in urban areas lack space to grow food, feel disconnected from neighbours, and don't have easy pathways to learn the practical, hands-on skills of earlier generations.

At the same time, rising food costs and unfamiliarity with fresh produce can leave people feeling less confident, more isolated, and less connected to the food on their plate. Social farms respond by creating shared, welcoming spaces where people come together around the growing of food.

In urban settings, this kind of work often depends on being woven into everyday places. In our case, a former bowling green at 10 Thompson Road, North Fremantle. Here, community members (re)build connection, confidence, and a sense of shared purpose through doing something real, side-by-side with like-minded folk.

While community farms, care farms, and urban agriculture projects exist across Australia and internationally, NFSF sits at a particular intersection.

We are proud to share learnings from our Farm, where food production, community participation, and care are held within clear limits that protect relationships and place.





Over time, we've found that **what makes our social farm social is the morning tea break.** More than just a pause from physical work, this is where the true magic of NFSF takes root. Whether you're a volunteer, member or just passing by, everyone is welcome to join us for a cuppa. Over a hot drink, knowledge is shared, new friendships are made, and many of our community initiatives are born. It's a valued opportunity to simply sit down, connect with each other, and perhaps solve a world problem or two in the process.





GROW + LEARN + CONNECT



Our Place & Purpose

The Farm is a seasonal, people-powered place that exists to reconnect people to food and one another through the shared work of growing and learning together.

The site was first developed in 2016 through the Growing Change project, transforming a disused bowling green at the North Fremantle Bowling Club into an urban micro-farm. While this initial phase demonstrated the social potential of the site, its resource-intensive nature eventually led to a pause in operations.

In 2019, with new governance and strong community involvement, the site was relaunched as North Fremantle Social Farm with a more community-centred, membership-based approach. Since then, the operating model has taken shape gradually through the care, effort, and commitment of its local community.

Guided by a skilled Volunteer & Farm Manager, NFSF creates the conditions for meaningful participation, practical learning, and strong community connections. The result is a calm, inclusive place where people from all backgrounds feel welcome, valued, and able to contribute. Situated within a broader community precinct alongside the bowling club, community centre, local park, and walking routes, the Farm has become a valuable part of everyday community life in the area.





Grow



Learn



Connect



WHAT WE DO!

URBAN FARMING

Unlike community gardens, volunteers at NFSF are guided by our Farm and Volunteer Manager using biointensive, organic, and regenerative practices to cultivate high-yield harvests for our 200 paying members.

Our members enjoy unlimited access to the Farm, harvesting produce based on the time-honoured system of need and trust. Volunteers can also harvest a fair share to take home after their shift.

We serve the community by offering fresh, organic veggies accessed through our unique 'pick your own' membership system — rather than traditional market stalls or veggie box deliveries.

GROW KNOWLEDGE

Reconnecting urban residents to traditional, hands-on skills through hosting workshops, and practical learning experiences.

GROW COMMUNITY

Cultivate a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive environment through volunteer coordination, hands-on training, seasonal celebrations, and open-farm events that foster local connections.

ENRICH OUR SPACE

Creative site and infrastructure stewardship has transformed underutilised council land into a vibrant community hub.

FUND THE BASICS

To keep the space thriving, memberships, and sponsorships provide ongoing income that covers all our basic operational costs, including wages.

Our Guiding Principles

ABUNDANCE BRINGS COMMUNITY

Our original focus was to grow food — lots of it! Soon after, people arrived, eager to be involved.

At that point, our focus expanded to equally nurturing our skills, our soil, and our people.

GROWING TOGETHER

Using shared food growing to reconnect people, skills, soil, and generations.

SKILLED STEWARDSHIP

Actively looking after our community and farm with consistency, kindness, and clear boundaries.

HARMONIOUS SHARING

Produce is shared through trust, fairness, and clear expectations.

SIMPLICITY IN GROWING

We grow simply and seasonally so the work stays manageable, welcoming, and easy for anyone to step into.

PRACTICALITY OVER PERFECTION

Choose realism and adaptability over perfect outcomes in a cultivated, living system.



On page 20 is an **Impact Model** that shows how the Farm's inputs and activities connect to longer-term outcomes and impacts. This document shares what sits behind that logic, from how the work is practiced to what helps it stay grounded in place.



"As a newcomer to the area, I have found it a vital link to the local community. It builds connections, friendships, and a welcoming, inclusive community — so vital in this day and age. The effects of the inclusion spread far beyond the community farm and I feel so lucky to be a part of it."

NFSF Volunteer





Conditions



When we talk about enabling conditions, we mean the underlying factors—centered around core pillars like trust, rhythm, leadership, and limits—that make the Farm work. The insights shared reflect what has supported NFSF to flourish, and are offered as a resource for shared learning. Some conditions have proven essential to hold, while others have evolved through local interpretation. For clarity, we distinguish between **conditions that must be held** and **conditions shaped by place**.

In our experience at North Fremantle, these conditions have been essential to holding the work well:

SECURE LAND

Long-term access to land (at least $\frac{1}{4}$ acre) is essential for the investment in soil, relationships, and culture to yield results.

SKILLED STEWARDSHIP

A capable Volunteer & Farm Manager is central. This should be someone who can guide people with care and clarity, hold boundaries, and grow food.

REALISTIC MEMBERSHIP CAPACITY

Limits protect both people and place. The number of participants must match the land's capacity and the Volunteer & Farm Manager's ability to hold relationships. There is a strong adherence to low membership fees to keep the Farm accessible to all.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

NFSF is unique in that our 200 picking memberships directly fund our paid Volunteer & Farm Manager role. The Farm then relies on sponsorships and grants to fund infrastructure upgrades and special projects.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Locating the space within a community hub and actively creating opportunities to engage with the wider community are essential to building long-term resilience and sustainability.

OBTAINING A YIELD

Growing food for our members is essential to the financial model — as are Volunteers. Members provide the financial foundation through their annual fees, while volunteers provide the energy to cultivate the crops. We quite literally can't grow one without the other.

How the following conditions show up has been shaped by place and community:

HOW TRUST & SAFETY ARE BUILT

Trust and psychological safety have been essential. The specific practices that support this (such as how people are welcomed, supported, and guided) have emerged and evolved over time.

HOW CULTURE IS EXPRESSED

Values like care, contribution, and respect guide how the Farm works. They are lived out through everyday behaviour, decisions, and relationships that shape the culture of the Farm.

GROWING METHODS & FOCUS

Keeping growing simple and seasonal has helped the Farm stay accessible and manageable. Local conditions and tastes guide what is grown.

RHYTHM & ROUTINE

Regular rhythms (such as familiar days, tasks, and patterns) have helped people feel grounded and included.





Stewarding & produce

The culture and consistency of the Farm are carried primarily through this role.

NFSF is well known as a productive, joyful, and kind place to be — where grace is given freely and people from all backgrounds rub shoulders in the dirt as equals.

The Volunteer & Farm Manager plays a central role in holding this culture through skilled volunteer coordination, community building, and wider community engagement.

In practice, this role has been key to how the Farm's culture is created and sustained. While growing skill matters, the relational skill required has proven to be even more important.





"I volunteer here because it's one of those rare places where you can see the impact of community in action. The Farm has a unique ability to bring together people from all walks of life — whether they're long-time locals, newcomers finding their feet, or people who simply need a welcoming space."

NFSF Volunteer





When the basics are well-established and people feel safe, supported, and part of something steady, more than just food begins to grow. At NFSF, we've observed this manifesting in various aspects of people's lives.

Growing more than food

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

Our shared work gives individuals a meaningful reason to show up, contribute, and feel part of something greater.

FRIENDSHIPS THAT LAST

Relationships formed at the Farm extend well beyond its boundaries. People who have met here continue to support one another through challenging times.

THE CONFIDENCE TO PARTICIPATE WIDELY

NFSF is a safe place to try new things. Some of our volunteers run workshops and take on broader community roles. Plus, many volunteers start growing vegetables and herbs at home, using the gardening skills they've acquired at the Farm.

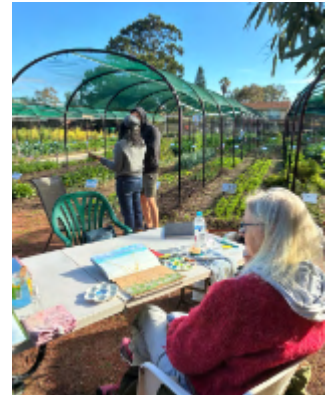
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Ensuring nothing goes to waste, surplus produce is transformed by a dedicated group of volunteers into a delicious range of chutneys, preserves, sauces, herbal teas, and dried edible flowers through 'Little Pantry'. This wonderful, **volunteer-run micro-enterprise** sells its wares at the Farm on the first Saturday of each month, donating all money raised straight back into supporting NFSF.





Making space for

The Farm has learned that keeping things simple allows ideas and activities to sometimes grow beyond what was planned.

BEING EMBEDDED IN A COMMUNITY PRECINCT

The Farm isn't a standalone project. It's intricately woven into a broader community through its location next to the bowling club, community centre, local park, and popular walking routes. Being part of everyday community life makes it easier for ideas and relationships to flow.

SIMPLE OPERATING SYSTEMS

Low-complexity structures keep administration lighter, allowing time and energy to focus on people and the land.

SPACE FOR EMERGENCE

Additional activities evolve over time from relationships and shared interests, such as the monthly 'Little Pantry' stall, regular workshops, an art group, the annual community olive oil pick and press, a Containers for Change recycling initiative, and almost weekly vegetable and herb donations to the local homelessness support centre.

offshoots





In a short time, our two biggest annual events—the **Easter Egg Hunt** (above) and **Christmas Fair** (below)—have grown into major community highlights, drawing hundreds of local residents. However, these events simply couldn't run without the generous support of community-minded sponsors like local North Fremantle realtor Sarah Bourke.



KEY

Considerations

While social farming is joyful, meaningful work — it's also real work that requires practical, relational, and financial care. If you're thinking about starting a Social Farm, or supporting one, these are the considerations worth knowing before diving in.

None of them are reasons not to try. They're just the honest terrain.

The land won't always cooperate — yields fluctuate, crops sometimes fail, and seasonal lulls are simply part of the rhythm. Intensive vegetable growing requires consistent water and care, meaning the picking experience will naturally vary across the year. Being upfront with members about this from the start—reminding them that this is a living system, not a supermarket—is what keeps trust intact.

The waitlist is a sign of success, but needs careful handling — when demand outstrips capacity, a long waitlist can make the Farm feel like a closed door. Communicating clearly and warmly about why the cap exists—to protect the land, the culture, and the people—turns a potential frustration into a demonstration of values.

The people holding the work are the work — the Volunteer & Farm Manager role is not a gardening job with some admin attached. It's a deeply relational, community-building role that happens to involve growing vegetables. The Board carries significant operational load too. These aren't incidental — they're the engine. Investing in the right people, and supporting them well, is as important as investing in soil and seeds.

Financial and land security take longer than expected — a new site takes time to become productive enough to generate meaningful membership revenue. Securing long-term land tenure early, and being realistic about the upfront investment required, gives the model a fighting chance. Financial sustainability is built gradually, and depends on consistent harvests, reliable labour, and a membership community that trusts the model.

Clear communication is a form of care — members and volunteers thrive when expectations are set honestly. Vegetables vary with weather. Volunteers are co-stewards, not staff. Things will sometimes not go to plan, and that's okay — by design, this is a safe-to-fail environment for people and plants alike. Saying this plainly, and often, is what makes the culture feel safe rather than anxious.







ABOUT OUR

Impact Model

An **Impact Model** (also called a Program Logic or Logic Model) is a tool for learning and shared understanding. It helps make the reasoning behind an initiative visible by showing the intended pathways to impact.

The Impact Model diagram on the next page sets out how we hope the work of the Social Farm will lead to change over time. It maps out the links between what goes in, what happens in practice, and the social outcomes the work is intended to support.

The diagram is included as a reference point for funders, partners, and others who want to see the underlying assumptions and causal thinking laid out clearly. It sits alongside this document, which describes how the work is actually held in place through principles, conditions, stewardship, and lived experience.

The Impact Model does not capture everything that matters (particularly the relational, cultural, and place-based elements described in the body of this document), but it does help to explain how change is understood to occur.

HOW TO READ THE IMPACT MODEL

Read the Impact Model diagram from left to right.

Inputs describe the core resources and conditions that make the work possible (such as land, stewardship, volunteers, and infrastructure).

Activities show the key things that happen through the life of the Farm.

Outputs capture what is produced or delivered in the short term.

Outcomes reflect the changes that occur for people, community, and place.

Longer-term impacts describe the broader effects the work is intended to contribute to over time.

Read this diagram from **left to right**, it shows how the Social Farm's ...



NORTH FREMANTLE SOCIAL FARM IMPACT MODEL

... inputs & outputs lead to community level outcomes & longer-term impacts.

— THE CHALLENGE —

Urban life leaves many people without space to grow food, disconnected from neighbours, and missing hands-on skills once passed between generations. Rising food costs and reduced familiarity with fresh produce weaken community resilience. People need inclusive, welcoming places to reconnect, learn practical skills, share purpose, and experience the joy and meaning of growing and harvesting together.

— THE SOLUTION —

North Fremantle Social Farm responds by offering a welcoming, inclusive community farm where people can **grow** food, **learn** practical skills, and **connect** through shared, hands-on activity. Through growing, learning, and working side-by-side, people rebuild confidence, ease loneliness, strengthen mental health, and improve food security, in a calm, respectful space where everyone feels valued, equal, and able to contribute.

INPUTS

Urban micro-farm site (1/2 acre)
Infrastructure & equipment
1 x paid Farm & Volunteer Manager (part-time)
Volunteer Board, providing governance & operations support
60+ active farm volunteers
200+ paying members
Funding via grants, sponsorships & donations
Little Pantry sales of preserves & jams
Community Partnerships

ACTIVITIES

Organic & regenerative vegetable production
Seasonal planning & planting
Site stewardship
Infrastructure upgrades

OUTPUTS

Volume of vegetables harvested
Infrastructure improvements completed

OUTCOMES

Reliable access to fresh produce
Increased community food security
Stable yields & less waste

IMPACTS

People experience better mental, emotional & physical wellbeing through access to fresh food, meaningful participation, social connection & time spent at the Farm.
More localised pathways to fresh food, reducing vulnerability to price pressures.
A more connected local community where relationships, trust & neighbourliness grow through regular shared activity & inclusive, welcoming culture.

LEARN

Hands-on workshops
Guidance during farm shifts
Planting guides & signage
Informal knowledge sharing



Workshops delivered
Participation rates
Updated learning materials



Increased gardening confidence
More independent garden engagement
Practical food growing skills



CONNECT

Volunteer coordination, induction & culture
Seasonal community events & workshops
Little Pantry operations
Donations to a local community support centre



Volunteer hours & retention
Event attendance
Little Pantry revenue
Produce donations



Increased belonging & social inclusion
Stronger community cohesion
Harmonious, respectful culture



Come Say Hello!

Interested in learning more or getting involved? North Fremantle Social Farm welcomes volunteers, funders, and community members to connect with the Farm, attend an event, or come visit us on-site any **Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday morning for a cuppa and a chat.**

We're always happy to share what we've learned, host conversations, and explore how this people-powered model might grow, here or elsewhere.

Please contact us, to start a conversation:
hello@northfreosocialfarm.org

www.northfreosocialfarm.org



[northfreosocialfarm](https://www.instagram.com/northfreosocialfarm)

The seed for this document was planted during a farm tour on a sunny day in Bunuru. The bindi bindi (butterflies) were flying around the veggies, the vollies were boiling the kettle and the magic that is North Fremantle Social Farm wormed its way into the heart of Anglicare WA's ShiftLab innovation team.

We are grateful to Amy and the North Fremantle Social Farm Board for giving us the time to explore how the social farm operates and to capture the learnings here for others.

Tarsha and Kira, May 2026



We are deeply grateful to Tarsha, Kira, and Anglicare WA's ShiftLab innovation team for stepping into our world, sitting down for a cuppa, and listening so intently to the stories that helped grow our wonderful urban micro-farm in North Freo.

This document is the result of our shared conversations and collaboration. You weaved the joyful essence and community magic of North Fremantle Social Farm into these pages with immense care, clarity, and insight.

We all thank you for helping us tell our story so that others might find the inspiration to grow a social farm of their own.

Amy and the NFSF Board, June 2026