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Cultivating Community is Key to Regional Food Security

Community food systems expert, Andrew Woods, steps into an exciting role with the Northern Rivers Food Links Project. Andrew is one of the Northern Rivers Food Links Project Team members, and has been appointed as the Local Government Project Officer.

The Northern Rivers Food Links Project is a council cooperation initiative of the 7 Northern Rivers Councils and Rous Water who have established a collaborative partnership to work together to secure a sustainable food future for the region. Andrew will be facilitating a number of projects that have been identified for the region as part of this \$2 million project over the next two years.

“It’s an exciting and challenging brief and one that I am looking forward to. The last ten years of my life have been dedicated to creating, establishing and developing a diverse array of sustainable community food system projects in Melbourne,” said Andrew.

Andrew worked extensively for a not-for-profit community development organisation based in the inner city of Melbourne. His role was to design, build and manage community gardens on public housing estates. In addition, he co-ordinated and taught a number of curriculum-based school gardening programs.

“One of my career highlights was centred around convening a community gardening tertiary education course with the Royal Botanical Gardens, and developing Food Security initiatives with the CERES Environment Centre & the Department of Human Services, to design & build intensive Urban Agriculture systems” Andrew said.

Andrew has managed community garden projects in the ABC Open Garden Scheme, and the Melbourne Fringe Festival where his “Happy New Life Community Garden” project won both Best Event & Community Cultural Development Award in 2008.

“It’s been a fascinating time to be working with food systems”, says Andrew, “people used to visit the gardens and ask general questions about gardening, but over the last two years these enquiries changed. People are asking not just how to garden anymore, but how to garden **together** – the interest in community gardening, urban agriculture and food security really is blossoming!”

He now joins the Northern Rivers Food Links project to support local communities to embrace the opportunities for the region to address food security. This will be done through supporting community based, not-for-profit organisations with a total of \$350,000 financial

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support to get innovative projects moving in the recognition of how important it is to grow, process, eat & recycle food as close as possible to it's origins.

“Our carbon footprint for food is huge”, Andrew remarks, “with issues of climate change & peak oil becoming significant factors in our ability to produce, process & transport our food, we must look to invent, or reinvent, ways and means of producing as much of our fresh food as close as possible to where we live, to reduce the massive impacts on our environment, and ensure our sustainability & food security for future generations. Increasing the resilience of our local Northern Rivers regional food system is a logical, practical and a delicious way forward!”

“The communal nature of food is such a beautiful way to bring people together – everybody has something to offer from their own garden plot to the common cooking pot! In the garden, barriers like language, culture, age, gender & background are overcome – tending the earth & sharing the harvest are ageless, communal, joyful and delicious things! These kinds of projects are the community hearth of the future – collaborative rather than competitive, communal rather than corporate, creative, active, healthy, simple & peaceful,” said Andrew.

“This region could lead the way in terms of localising the food system – and this is where the ‘Village Showcase Projects’ can be implemented as real sustainable community food systems. We could see the rebirth of the small farm & the growth of cityfarms & community food hubs, happier, healthier people and an improved environment – delicious!”

This project has been assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust gardens, more jobs and education in smaller, intensive food production systems, community food hubs, happier, healthier people and an improved environment – delicious!”

Expressions of Interest for “Village Showcase Projects” open on the 30th April. Community based organisation who are interesting in applying for funding of up to \$50,000 in each of the seven participating Northern Rivers Local Government Areas are encouraged to seek an information kit by either phoning 02 6686 3972, or emailing info@northernriversfoodlinks.com.au

The Northern Rivers Food Links Project is funded by the Department of Environment & Climate Change, through the Urban Sustainability Program, within the NSW Environment Trust.

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