

Policy Briefing

Growing Country

National Indigenous Food Resilience Initiative

Building Australia's Indigenous Food Future

Growing Country is a national Indigenous food resilience initiative designed to strengthen local food production, improve community resilience and support climate-adapted food systems across remote Australia.

The initiative responds to increasing concern surrounding remote food insecurity, fragile supply chains, rising freight costs and climate-related disruption affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Growing Country proposes a practical and scalable national pilot focused on rebuilding local food capability through community-led ecological food systems, regenerative orchards, food forests, mobile horticultural support and long-term skills development.

The National Challenge

Australia is one of the world's largest food-producing nations, yet many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remain highly vulnerable to food insecurity.

Remote communities sit at the most exposed end of Australia's food system, where supply chain disruption, fuel volatility, freight costs and climate impacts are experienced first and hardest.

Australia's food system has been optimised for efficiency rather than resilience.

Climate change, extreme weather events, rising transport costs and ongoing reliance on imported food continue to expose vulnerabilities across remote Australia.

Growing Country has been developed to strengthen local resilience within this increasingly fragile environment by rebuilding the systems that support community-scale food production.

The Growing Country Model

Growing Country supports the development of community-scale ecological food systems designed specifically for remote Australian conditions.

Rather than focusing solely on annual food production, the initiative combines regenerative orchards, food forests, community growing systems, seed infrastructure and climate-adapted land management to build long-term food resilience.

Regenerative Orchard and Food Forest Systems

Long-term perennial food production systems incorporating fruit trees, bush foods, medicinal plants, pollinator habitat and shade infrastructure.

These systems improve nutrition, biodiversity, microclimate regulation and community resilience while creating productive landscapes capable of supporting future generations.

Community Growing Networks

Locally designed food production areas supporting access to fresh produce while creating opportunities for community participation, intergenerational learning and local leadership.

Mobile Growing Country Units

Mobile horticultural support vehicles delivering technical assistance, training, infrastructure development and on-country mentoring across participating communities.

These units provide practical support for establishing and maintaining growing systems in remote regions.

Seed Systems and Propagation

Community seed banks, nurseries and propagation systems supporting local food production, climate adaptation and long-term planting programs.

These systems help communities maintain local planting stock while strengthening knowledge transfer and local capability.

Soil Health and Biological Systems

Programs supporting composting, soil biology, beneficial insects, water harvesting and regenerative growing practices that reduce reliance on external inputs while improving productivity and resilience.

Healthy soils, functioning ecosystems and biological diversity are recognised as critical foundations of long-term food security.

Training, Employment and Enterprise Development

Practical pathways supporting ranger programs, youth engagement, horticultural skills, community enterprises and Indigenous-led food production initiatives.

Strategic Outcomes

Growing Country supports:

- Improved remote food security
- Reduced reliance on fragile supply chains
- Better nutrition and health outcomes
- Climate adaptation and resilience
- Indigenous economic participation
- Community-led development
- Local training and employment pathways
- Cultural knowledge transfer
- Biodiversity enhancement
- Soil and ecosystem restoration
- Increased community capability

Policy Alignment

Growing Country aligns strongly with:

- Closing the Gap priorities
- National food security discussions
- Climate adaptation and resilience strategies
- Regional development frameworks
- Indigenous economic participation priorities
- Community health and wellbeing initiatives
- Environmental restoration and biodiversity objectives
- Indigenous-led development approaches

The initiative also supports broader national priorities across health, agriculture, climate adaptation and regional development by strengthening local food production, improving nutrition outcomes and building resilient community infrastructure.

Pilot Proposal

Growing Country proposes an initial four-year pilot program across approximately twelve remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The pilot is designed as a practical and scalable model that allows government, philanthropic organisations and partners to test long-term approaches to Indigenous-led food resilience and local production systems.

Indicative pilot components include:

- Regenerative orchards and food forests
- Community-scale food production systems
- Mobile Growing Country support units
- Shade houses and climate-adapted growing infrastructure
- Water harvesting and irrigation systems
- Community seed banks and nurseries
- Composting and soil improvement programs
- Training and employment pathways
- Ranger-supported food resilience projects
- Community food resilience planning

Why This Matters

Food security is not simply a supply chain issue.

It is a resilience issue.

Remote communities experience the impacts of freight disruption, rising costs, extreme weather events and climate change earlier and more intensely than most Australians.

Strengthening local food production capacity creates a buffer against these disruptions while building community capability and self-determination.

Growing Country recognises that resilient food systems depend upon healthy soils, reliable water, diverse food production systems and local knowledge.

By investing in regenerative orchards, food forests, seed systems, soil biology and community-led growing initiatives, Australia can support a new generation of climate-resilient food infrastructure across remote regions.

The benefits extend beyond nutrition. These systems support biodiversity, cooling landscapes, cultural knowledge transfer, youth engagement, local employment and stronger connections between people, food and Country.

Growing Country is not simply about growing food.

It is about rebuilding local capability, strengthening community resilience and restoring relationships between people, food and Country.

About William Martin

William Martin has spent many years living and working alongside remote Aboriginal communities across Australia.

His work has included community agriculture, native seed systems, ecological restoration, seed saving, ranger support programs and remote food production initiatives.

With support from the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, William helped establish greenhouses, seed banks and community garden initiatives across remote communities in the Northern Territory.

His work combines practical experience in remote community development, ecological restoration, Indigenous land management and climate resilience.

Partnership Opportunities

Growing Country welcomes discussions with:

- Government agencies
- Indigenous organisations
- Philanthropic foundations
- Climate adaptation programs
- Research institutions
- Agricultural and horticultural partners
- Regional development organisations
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
- Environmental and restoration programs

Contact

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