



**ASSOCIATION**

# *Growing Local & Regional Produce Communities*



## **WHAT'S IN THE BOX ?**

*An essential guide to Southern Harvest Produce Boxes, solidarity economies and what to do with too much rhubarb.*

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## WHAT AND WHO IS SOUTHERN HARVEST ASSOCIATION?

[Southern Harvest Association \(SHA\)](#) is a farmer and volunteer led not-for-profit organisation working to foster the sustainable growth and availability of local produce within the Southern Harvest region.

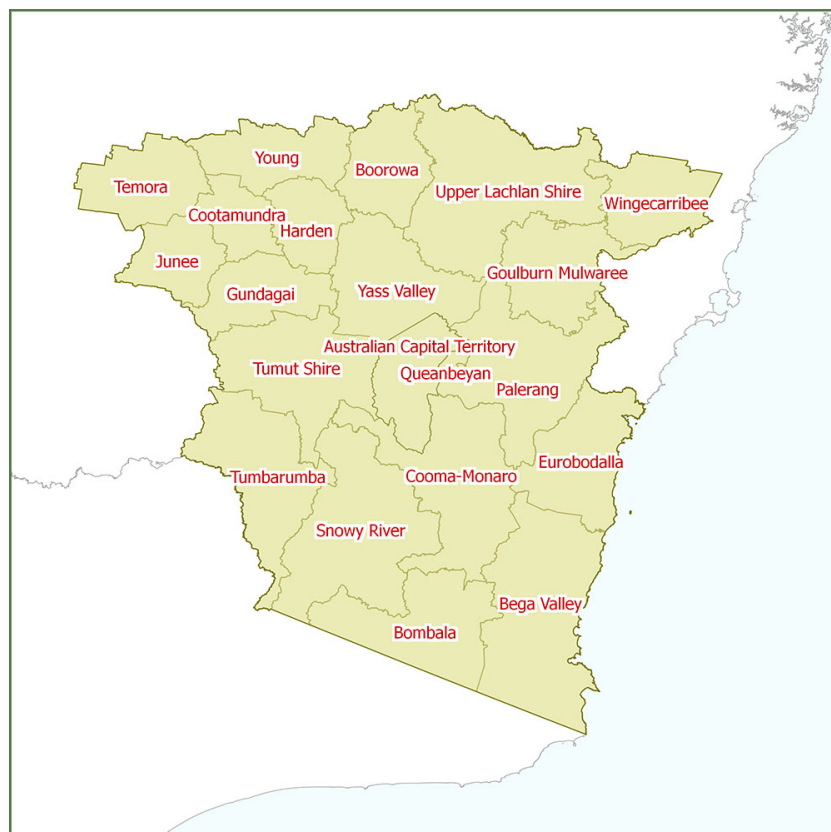
Southern Harvest's activities include:

- [Bungendore Harvest Festival](#), which showcases the region's food, wine, fibre and farming enterprises, in April each year. After the highly successful first event in 2017, which attracted between 3000-8000 visitors, this festival has continued to have a positive impact on stallholders and the local business community each year.
- [Southern Harvest Farmers' Market in Bungendore](#), which is a truly authentic regional farmers' market, with all market produce sold being grown or made by the stallholders.
- [Southern Harvest Multi-Farm Produce Box Scheme](#), which connects local farmers with local eaters via a solidarity-based subscription scheme.
- [Southern Harvest Education](#), which aims to facilitate access to education that supports the sustainable growth of local food and agricultural systems.

**The Southern Harvest region** is a vibrant bio-region supplying a rich diversity of seasonal produce. It incorporates the following local government areas (listed from North to South):

Upper Lachlan, Boorowa, Young, Temora, Wingecarribee, Cootamundra, Harden, Junee, Yass Valley, Goulburn Mulwaree, Gundagai, Tumut, Australian Capital Territory, Queanbeyan, Palerang, Eurobodalla, Cooma Monaro, Tumbarumba, Snowy River, Bega Valley, Bombala.

The Southern Harvest Association continues to grow and adapt to the demands of supporting our local food industry. We cannot do this without the support of our region's food producers, suppliers and, of course, eaters.



# Southern Harvest Association Multi-farm Produce Box



## **ABOUT SHA MULTI-FARM PRODUCE BOXES**

The SHA produce box scheme is a solidarity economy designed to better connect farmers and eaters in the region. It facilitates access to nutritious produce, supports regenerative agriculture, and reduces food waste.

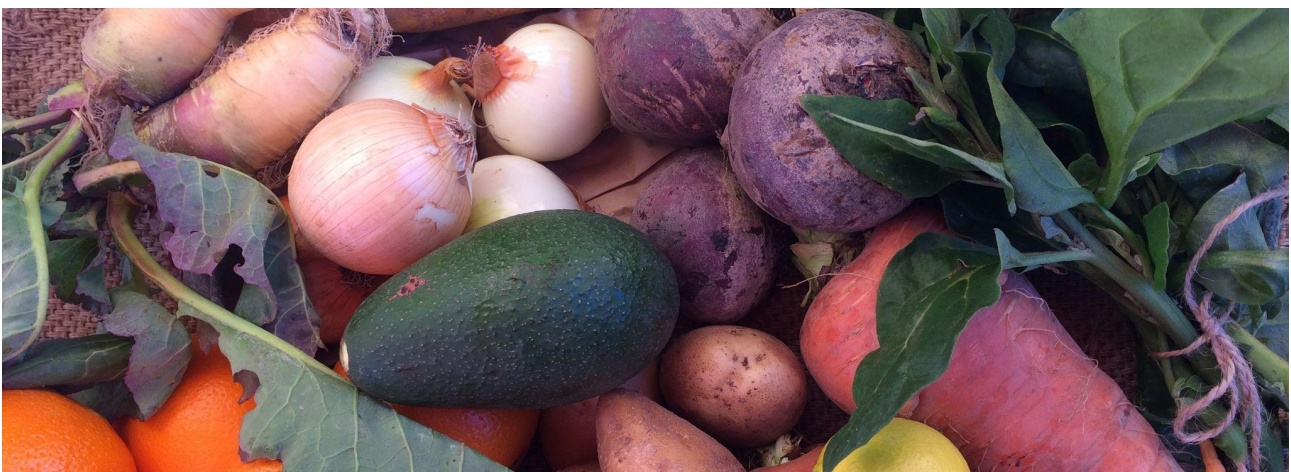
SHA's produce box scheme aggregates produce from a collective of many small farms in the region, and distributes it weekly to subscribers who commit in advance to a whole season of 13-weeks. The participation of multiple farms helps provide a greater variety than one single farm could sustain, and spreads the risk across multiple locations in the region, while expanding market opportunities for small farmers and ensuring they receive fair retail prices for their food. By committing to the whole season in advance, subscribers are also ensuring a regular and reliable income for the group of farmers.

## **WHAT IS A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?**

A solidarity economy is a values-based approach to production and distribution of goods and services, in which the welfare of people and the planet are prioritised over profit and growth. There are many forms of solidarity economies, however they generally emphasise relationships, mutual support, reciprocity, and holistic conceptions of benefits, as opposed to financial transactions.

The design of the SHA produce box scheme draws on principles of community-supported agriculture (CSA), which is a form of solidarity economy. There are a variety of CSA structures, however the overarching characteristics are a direct relationship of mutual support between a farmer and eaters, who agree to share the risks and rewards of farming over an extended period. The farmer commits to providing food on a regular basis throughout the season or agreed period, and usually eaters pay upfront. CSA gives farmers greater financial security and control over their own supply chain, while giving eaters priority access to fresh healthy food grown in their community.

To facilitate this, subscribers are encouraged to pay the full season upfront. However, we understand that this is not always possible and we like to make it as accessible as possible for all financial positions. Therefore we ask that subscribers pay at least the last three weeks of the season up front, as a deposit, and this is nonrefundable. Then each week should be paid prior to collection of the produce.





## **Teikei Principles**

The Japanese Teikei movement of the 1970s developed ten guiding principles, referred to as Teikei Principles, which have been adopted internationally by the CSA movement. You can read about them here: <https://urgenci.net/principles-of-teikei/>. The SHA multi-farm produce box scheme endeavours to apply a number of the principles in the following ways.

### **Principle of mutual assistance**

Community underpins this model - it only works when we help each other. For example: the effects of COVID-19 have been widespread throughout the food system with issues in transport, demand and supply. In this scheme the ongoing commitment of SHA members meant that producers could keep producing, confident that they had the support of the community. In turn, produce box subscribers benefited from knowing they would still receive produce during this period when others faced shortages from bare supermarket shelves or closed farmers' markets.

### **Principle of accepting the produce**

An abundance of choice at the supermarket has led to a crisis of waste. Accepting what is grown and given, and learning how to utilise sometimes new and unusual products or a glut of a particular item, helps to reduce food waste. In this way, subscribers show gratitude to the farmers who worked hard to grow the produce. This is the essence of risk and reward sharing, and helps better connect eaters to the realities of farming and the regional landscape. While this can be a considerable shift for some eaters, after an initial transition period many people significantly value their new knowledge, skills, awareness of seasonality, and the sense of connection this brings.

### **Principle of mutual concession in the price decision**

A fair price is fair for everyone. SHA is transparent about how much of the cost of your produce box goes directly to the farmer, and how much we need for administrative costs. The current pricing system was developed over a number of years and included input from subscribers and farmers. Details of the current pricing structure are available on the SHA website and in the Finances section of this document.

### **Principle of deepening friendly relationships**

We encourage subscribers and producers to form meaningful relationships through our regular social media updates from our farmers, group discussions through our facebook group and in person events (look for more of these as COVID restrictions ease). While COVID restrictions have changed the nature of box collection, many subscribers have enjoyed the regular social interactions that happen between fellow subscribers and with volunteers and SHA staff during produce collection.

### **Principle of self-distribution**

Farmers, volunteer subscribers, and SHA staff collaborate to transport, pack, and distribute the produce. Wherever possible, distribution of packed produce is done by volunteer subscribers within the scheme. Details can be found below in the section on Collection, Transport, Packing and Distribution of Produce. Mini-hubs are a way for people who live close to each other to form communities and help to reduce transport costs and emissions.

### **Principle of democratic management**

We are a committee-based organisation and all members are welcome and encouraged to contribute.

### **Principle of learning among each group**

We rely on feedback from all involved to continue to learn, improve and innovate. Everything from members sharing recipes for grapefruit or tips for when to harvest garlic, to producers learning more about how to best transport and bundle fresh produce so that it gets to the eater in the best possible condition and remains that way as long as possible.

### **Principle of maintaining the appropriate group scale**

We stay small so we can eat local produce, and meaningfully support each other. The scheme has grown slowly and only when there is energy, space and produce available for it to do so.

### **Principle of steady development**

We're always learning and developing how we do things. Thanks to subscribers we have been able to put infrastructure in place to keep produce cool in the hot summer months, and protect our staff and volunteers from the weather. We're developing better, more efficient systems and we're grateful to subscribers and producers for supporting us and each other through this journey.



## ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

SHA is a **farmer led, volunteer run, not-for-profit** organisation that is committed to transparency in all areas. The first years of the scheme saw many changes in the pricing structure, until we got it right.

The farmers are paid first. We believe that farmers should be paid the true cost of their food and be supported to bring us fresh, nutritious produce while caring for themselves and the land they farm. Southern Harvest farmers set their own produce costs and do not have these dictated to them.

Administration costs are then added to the cost of produce and contribute to boxes for volunteers, packaging, staff, insurance etc. For the last few years, this cost has been 30% of the produce costs. However, with the rising costs we have seen through 2022, we needed to increase it to 35% for this Summer 22-23 season.

For every 15 subscriptions we can provide a standard size produce box to a volunteer. Any subscriber who can volunteer for 2-2.5 hours of packing and/or distribution, can then choose to get credited the cost of a standard box that week. The contribution of volunteers allows us to keep costs low, and also encourages people to connect directly with our food community.

### Cool-room levy

*From Summer 2019 all subscribers were asked to pay a **one-off** cool-room levy.*

*In the past, we struggled to cover the costs of cool-room storage through the increasingly hot summers. With the proceeds of this levy, we have completed several stages of building our own facility at Canberra City Farm (CCF). We ask that all participants of the Produce Box Scheme help us to continue to finance this project, and future projects that contribute to regional food security.*

*Stage 1 of the facility was ready for Autumn 2020. Our first container cool-room was up and running and provided the capacity to open two new pickup locations. The price restructure for Winter 2020 led to the levy amounts being reduced.*

*The stage 2 container was moved on to site during the Winter 2020 season and supplied a dry store for items such as potatoes and pumpkins. Having this facility at CCF was also integral to our ability to continue to function safely with the added COVID hygiene requirements of the past years.*

*Stage 3 occurred through Summer 2020-21 and saw the two containers levelled and covered with a roof. This gives our volunteers and workers some much appreciated protection from the elements.*

*We hope soon to finish with a small water tank to collect water from the roof and feed into a wash station, permanent internal shelving and dividers, a small office space at the back of the dry store and outdoor steps and gravel/paving.*

*The levy payment includes a year's Southern Harvest Individual [Membership](#) and varies according to box size.*

## **COLLECTION, TRANSPORT, PACKING AND DISTRIBUTION OF PRODUCE**

### **Where does the produce come from?**

SHA boxes are made up of produce from many local farms around the region (see P2) as well as a few home gardens. Home gardeners, often subscribers, can swap the excess they grow into the scheme for produce credits. This helps add diversity to the scheme and reduce what may have otherwise been wasted. Each produce box comes with a packing slip that lists where each item of produce has come from (see packing slip info on P10).

We have produce from SHA member farmers such as (alphabetical order): Ainslie Urban Farm, Badja Forest Farm, Blue Shed Veggies, Brightside Produce, Braidwood Garlic Co-op, Brogo Permaculture, Canberra City Farm, From the Paddock, Greenhill Farm, Hazelwood Farm, High Valley Farm, Homesoil, Jerrabatt Gully, Mamma Rita's, Manyways Urban Farm, Nanny G's Garlic, Parker's Patch, Prana Produce, Patchwork Urban Farm, Queen St. Growers, Tanbella Orchard, Tanglewood, Scrumpers Garden, Shoalhaven Gourmet Mushrooms and many more that come and go as the seasons progress.

### **How does the produce travel?**

Wherever possible, produce is aggregated for transport. Producers within close proximity will often share the burden of transport so that only one of them needs to do it each week. For those on the coastal side of Bungendore, they can all deliver to a SHA staff member in Bungendore, who then transports it all together to the central storage and packing space in Fyshwick. Producers closer to Canberra can deliver direct to Fyshwick at any time and produce can be stored at the appropriate temperatures until needed.

As of winter season 2022 we will be storing and packing produce near Braidwood at Prana Produce for the Braidwood box distribution.

### **How is produce purchased and allocated?**

Farmers have the opportunity to offer produce into the scheme throughout the week. SHA staff can then input what is available into a spreadsheet where it is allocated to subscribers.

If there is a glut of lettuces and we cannot take all that are on offer (because most people don't want more than 1 lettuce in their box) we have a system to work through the farmer's priorities. For example, if a farmer has suffered crop losses and has nothing to offer other than lettuces, then we would prioritise lettuces from them so that they continue to have income that week. Or if a farmer tells us that they have to harvest their lettuces this week or they will bolt to seed then we would prioritise their lettuces. If all farmers had multiple items on offer, and no one has expressed any special needs, we would take the maximum number of lettuces we could, and try to split evenly between the producers.

Once all the produce is offered and ordered, it is allocated to subscribers. This is done anonymously, in a spreadsheet that shows preferences for each subscriber. There are rows for all the vegetables available and an 'X' in the subscribers' columns who don't like/want those vegetables. Groups of produce are allocated together, everyone's fruit is allocated, then everyone's allium, then salad etc. We try to alternate people's produce where available so that you get a different allium or cooking green to the one you got last week. We also want everyone to get a chance to try everything, and have something new each week.

### **Home gardens**

We are also very happy to swap excess produce, of saleable quality, that you have growing in your garden for produce that goes in your produce box.

### **Storage - Fyshwick, Bungendore & Braidwood**

Our cool-room and storage facility at CCF (see P5) was built utilising the financial contributions of subscribers and producers, making it a truly community owned space. It was built with repurposed materials and utilises technology to make it as energy efficient as possible. It allows for temperature controlled and vermin proof storage of produce and equipment, as well as a safe and comfortable space in which our staff and volunteers can work. This facility is also available for use by member producers who have no such space of their own.

Market goods that are sold through the online shop are mostly stored in Bungendore with our market equipment on hand for Saturday markets. We have a wonderful working relationship with the Anglican Church which rents us space for the markets and storage. They also operate a food hub for people experiencing hard times where we can donate excess produce to the community.

At Braidwood, Prana Produce provides a space for us to work in their coolroom and packing space on a Thursday afternoon when it is not otherwise being used. Other nearby producers are able to drop off produce here and subscribers have a space to collect.

### **Hubs - Fyshwick, Bungendore, Braidwood**

Produce boxes are distributed at hubs and mini hubs. Hubs are normally managed by one or two volunteers who collect produce from Fyshwick, Bungendore or Braidwood and then transport it to and distribute within their community, often from a community space or their home, at designated times each week. These volunteers can choose to receive the equivalent of a standard box credit each week for this service.

### **Mini hubs - Queanbeyan, Holt, O'Connor, Calwell, Kambah, Hacket, Higgins.**

Mini hubs are made up of groups of up to 10 people who live near each other, and share responsibility for picking up the produce and taking it to the hub. The hub is usually the home of one of the subscribers where the produce can be left for pickup in a safe and protected location.

### **Deliveries**

We commenced free deliveries for subscribers in need when COVID quarantines and lockdowns initially occurred. We then expanded this service, when we could fit it into an existing transport route, to any subscriber requesting it, for an extra \$5 on top of the cost of their box. Deliveries are usually done by volunteers on their way to hubs or mini hubs or other subscribers who live nearby. This \$5 goes towards staff wages and volunteer credits.





## **Volunteering - who, what, where, when, why**

Volunteers are an important part of the SHA system. Having volunteers assists to keep costs low, and also provides members with an important opportunity to get involved in their food community.

A few examples of volunteer roles:

**Box packing** - The staff team at Canberra City Farm has some assistance from volunteers who weigh, pack and distribute produce. These volunteers get a 'behind the scenes' glimpse of the packing and storage systems and they also get a better sense of the scale of our project. Anyone is welcome to come along and see how things run :-)

**Hub Host** - Our hub hosts provide the physical location for their community to pick up their produce boxes. Some hub hosts also commit to collecting all the produce boxes for their community, but most share that role among the other members of their hub, who take turns collecting from City Farm and taking to the hub.

**Deliveries** - We aim to buddy people who need deliveries with those that live nearby. This way people who are driving anyway to collect their produce can do so for one or two others also.

## **Staff**

In addition to volunteers, SHA employs a number of people within our communities. We seek out people with knowledge about, and passion for, local food and ethical regenerative farming, seasonal eating, cooking and community.

You can read more about our staff and volunteers [here](#) on our website.



## EXTRAS AND THE ONLINE SHOP

Extras are available for order separately through our online grocery shop. These include fruit and vegetables, meat, eggs, bread, milk, cheese, pickles and preserves, honey, muesli, pasta, chai, handmade soap and shampoo bars, herbal teas, olive oil, vinegar, fresh herbs and spices, nuts, drinks, coffee, seeds, plants and manure for the garden. These get packed with fresh produce boxes and are ready with regular collections.

NOTE: Availability of some products may vary with pick-up locations due to storage and food handling constraints.

Our online shop for extras utilises the [Open Food Network](#) (OFN) platform. OFN is an open source platform for local producers to sell online via:

*“an online marketplace that levels the playing field. It’s transparent, so it creates real relationships. It’s open source, so it’s owned by everyone. It scales to regions and nations, so people start versions across the world”.*

Subscribers, and indeed all SHA members, can utilise the Southern Harvest Association Community Stall online shop; it is not visible to non-members. Products in the shop are sold to members at, or very close to, wholesale cost and fees for administration (e.g. platform and card fees) are added to the order at the end. Members/subscribers create an account using the email address supplied when signing up. They can log into OFN at any time, however the SHA store is only visible when it is open. The link to the store is [here](#). In order for us to provide discounted prices for our members, YOU NEED TO LOG INTO OFN BEFORE GOING TO THE SHOP. You can search for Southern Harvest Community Stall or put the shop link into your url bar in the browser.

The grocery store is open:

- Monday from about 8am till Tuesday 8am (for Tuesday orders)
- Tuesday from about 8am till Wednesday 8am (for Wednesday orders)
- Wednesday from about 8am till Thursday 8am (for Thursday orders)

Bakery items are a little different because the bakery needs more lead time as they bake to order. Bakery store is open:

- Saturday 8am-4pm (for Tuesday orders)
- Saturday 4pm-8am Sunday (for Wednesday orders)
- Sunday 8am-4pm (for Thursday orders).

Members/subscribers can set up standing orders, e.g. a weekly loaf of bread or fortnightly tray of eggs, by adding a credit/debit card to their OFN account and 'authorising' it for use by Southern Harvest Community Stall. SHA staff can then set up a recurring order. These orders can be edited while the shop is open, paused or stopped at any time.

Subscribers receive a weekly email when the grocery shop opens. At this time they can text or email staff to find out what has been allocated to their produce box, so as to have a better idea of what they may need from the shop.



## DAY TO DAY, WEEK TO WEEK

### Unpacking a Packing Slip

Every produce box comes with an attached packing slip. This is a list of everything that has gone into your box, who grew it and what its monetary value is. It's important to check your packing slips when you receive your produce box because occasionally mistakes can happen (we're only human after all!). Double checking your produce box matches your packing slip means that you can make sure you have received all your items, and we haven't accidentally given you part of someone else's order. It is *especially* important to double check your extras slip: some hubs will need to retrieve their cold extras from a communal cold box, and CCF pickups will need a staff member to grab things from the fridge for them.

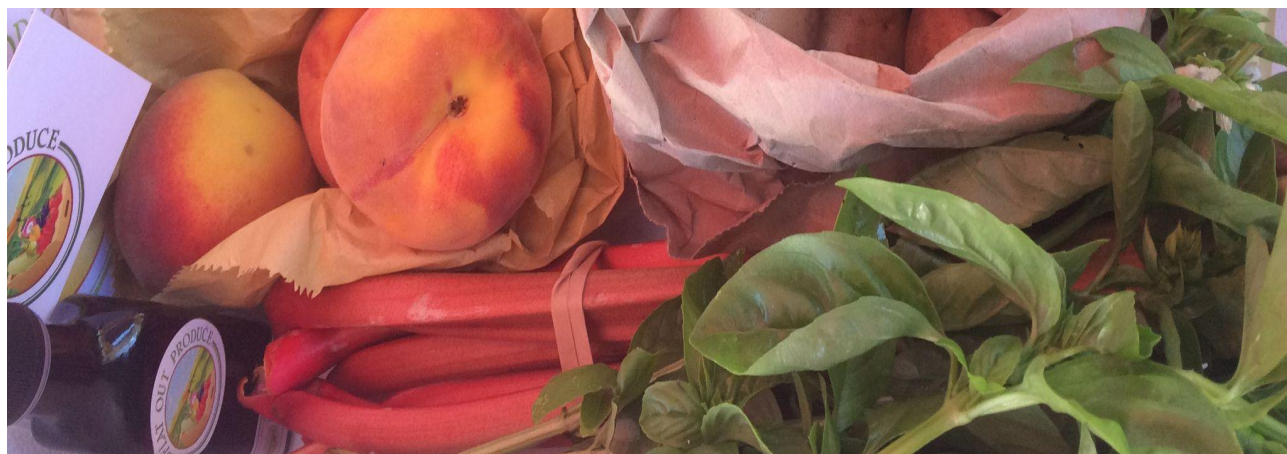
Your packing slip will look something like this:

Summer	
Week 1, 27/11/21-3/12/21	
BUNG	
1. Sam Rhubarb (8)	
Ainslie Urban Farm - Rad Microgreens	1
Greenhill - Cauliflower	1.5
Hazlewood - Chives	1
Joy's Organic Potatoes - Sebago potatoes	0.5
Mamma Rita's - Broad beans	1
Prana Produce - Cucumbers	1
Shoalhaven Mushrooms - whites	1
The Lost Plot & Friends - Grapefruit	1

This example is for a standard box, which has a produce value of \$32, or 8 x \$4 units. Each '1' in the right hand column = \$4. Therefore a '1.5' = \$6 and a '0.5' = \$2.

This most often occurs when produce can not easily be portioned into \$4 units. For example, a whole cauliflower might be worth \$6, and in that case you would see cauliflower = 1.5 on your packing slip. You'd also then likely have a 0.5 unit, like a half bunch of herbs, or half unit of potatoes.

Weights for items such as potatoes and grapefruit are based on what the producer is selling them for. Eg if something is \$8/kg, you will receive 500g in a unit.





## **What's in a box?**

The contents of the boxes change weekly depending on the fresh harvest from the farms, and in this way subscribers are able to appreciate a full variety of seasonal flavours. We try to alternate produce so that subscribers do not receive the same thing week after week and make sure to let everyone try everything at least once.

Although this may vary with seasonal availability and some items fit into more than 1 category, a standard box, with 8 units of produce will generally contain:

- 1 unit fruit or nuts - apples, pears, quinces, citrus, feijoas, stone fruit, berries, rhubarb (not technically a fruit but sometimes it's all we have), hazelnuts, persimmons;
- 1 unit alliums - garlic or scapes, onions, leeks, spring onions, chives;
- 1 unit leafy greens for cooking - chard, kale, mustard greens, cabbage, stir fry mix, warrigal, spinach;
- 1 unit salad leaves - lettuce, sorrel, rocket, parsley, mint, coriander, mustard greens, mizuna, sprouts, salad mix;
- 1 unit herbs (not every week) - thyme, sage, tarragon, oregano, microgreens, mint, coriander, parsley, chives;
- 1-2 units hard/cooking veg - potatoes, carrots, turnip, parsnip, daikon, cauliflower, broccoli, zucchini, eggplant;
- 1-2 units of soft/salad veg - mushrooms, radish, peas, beans, cabbage, broccoli, asparagus, tomatoes, capsicum, cucumber, rhubarb.

A half box (4 units) alternates roughly between fruit, salad green, and 2 veg one week, then allium, cooking green and 2 veg the next.

An extended variety box has 1 item extra fruit and one veg; an extended fruit box has 2 extra fruit items; and an extended veg box has 2 extra veg items.

A double box can be a variety or bulk. Eg you can choose 2 of everything or 16 different items (if available).

## **Substitutions, lean seasons and ch-ch-ch-changes**

Over the course of the year there may be times when our farmers are a little short on diversity of fresh produce. This might be caused by weather, pests, or simply a gap between different vegetables being ready to harvest. When this happens, we will often substitute one or two items in your produce box with preserved fruits and vegetables. This might be a bottle of 100% apple juice, dehydrated fruit, dried or pickled garlic, brined olives, dehydrated mushrooms, bottled tomato or passata, frozen berries, or bottled peaches. This is part of the consumer's commitment to supporting farmers through the season and sharing the ups and downs of food production. All products will be shelf stable unless stated otherwise.

Throughout history people have developed preserving techniques to make fresh produce last longer, or to ensure food through a long winter or hard season. So substituting fresh apples with dried apple slices is simply a continuation of a time-honoured tradition! All dehydrated products can be eaten as is or rehydrated in water to soften. Fruit juice can be used in small amounts to flavour cooking and frozen berries are an amazing addition to cereal, porridge or yoghurt. Pickled vegetables can brighten up a Winter salad or give your mashed potatoes a little kick.

## Packaging

Wherever possible we attempt to minimise the waste we generate, by cleaning and reusing packaging, or purchasing reusable packaging, and recycling/composting everything we can.

Insulated (styrofoam) boxes are used by many of our producers to transport their vegetables and by the packing team for produce box delivery. These boxes are an appallingly bad environmental problem and an end waste stream product. For this reason, we would **never** purchase new ones and only salvage second hand from grocers and the like, who would otherwise be throwing them out. The boxes are reused week after week, are repaired when they break, and when they are no longer usable as a box they become part of a dividing structure in our cool-room. This 'wall' saves energy use as we can keep the front sections of the space at a much colder temperature than the back, which can then be used for storing things like root vegetables and apples.

When packing people's produce in individual packages, we rely on reusable/washable shopping bags. Also, when preparing to pack boxes, our packing team weighs out produce like potatoes, mushrooms and citrus into fabric produce bags which are handmade with recycled fabric. Some produce such as mushrooms are left in their bag to keep them fresh and we do appreciate your prompt return of these clean, empty bags for reuse.

We are happy to reuse/recycle all packaging that you receive in your boxes. You can return this each week and leave with your hub volunteer, staff or inside your empty collection box at mini hubs. This includes: plastic bags, rubber bands, fruit nets, punnets, jars and bottles, paper bags (please not ones that have had bread, biscuits or cakes), and egg cartons. During the COVID19 pandemic, we have developed heightened hygiene procedures for quarantining and/or sterilising reuse items for everyone's safety. If you would like to know more about these please let us know.





## Communication is key....

Help us make it right for you. If you find something isn't working for you, let us know! At the start of each season you'll have the opportunity to let Ruth know your preferences. This is the time to tell us things like "I hate celery" or "I already have lots of herbs growing in my garden at home". We want our produce boxes to fit in your life, and we definitely don't want things going sad and soggy in the bottom of the fridge!

Please also inform us if you have an allergy. As we often reuse packaging and boxes, it is essential for us to know of people's allergies in order for us to take this into consideration and keep possible allergens away from people who they may trigger.

During the season you might find that you simply cannot STAND another eggplant.

First, consider if there's a new recipe to try, or a way to preserve the produce. Can you dehydrate, turn it into chutney, or make bulk baba ganoush? The SHA facebook group is a good place to ask for advice, and you'll often see recipe ideas posted by members of the community who are getting exactly the same seasonal produce as you. You can also ask one of our staff for advice/ideas.

If you're still struggling, think about your community: you may have a neighbour who might like to swap you for some lemons from their tree, a family member who could make use of it, or perhaps there will be someone on your local buy nothing group who loves eggplant. If it's still too much eggplant, then by all means, let us know and we will stop giving you eggplant.

Share with your producers and fellow subscribers.

We have a closed **Facebook group** called "Southern Harvest Produce Boxes", where farmers, producers and subscribers can share information, recipes, photos and more. If your FB profile name is different to your actual name, just flick us a note letting us know when you request to join.





## **PRODUCE PECULIARITIES** **and ideas for coping with a glut**

### **STEP 1 Get the most out of your veggies by storing them with care.**

The produce we receive from our producers is extremely fresh, and was definitely picked more recently than anything you'd get in a supermarket! To get the best out of your fresh fruit and veg, it's important to store things correctly.

**Leafy greens** will keep well in a sealed container in the fridge, or wrapped in a damp towel inside a plastic bag in your vegetable crisper.

**Root vegetables** grow in the dark and the cool of the earth, and they remain happiest in this kind of environment. Exposing root vegetables to light and warmth will cause discolouration and accelerated sprouting or decay.

**Leafy herbs**, with or without roots, will often do best standing in a glass of water. In warmer weather you may also like to put them like this in the fridge.

**Zucchini, cucumbers and tomatoes**, contrary to popular belief, prefer to be stored at room temperature. In the fridge they are prone to go slimy and tasteless.

**Fruit** usually does well at room temperature, out of direct sunlight or, as in the case of berries (if you don't eat them on your way home) in the fridge.

**Berries** need to be eaten asap or frozen. Unlike what you might get in the supermarket, these are grown outside and picked when ripe. They are untreated and will not last long.

**Cut flowers** (which won't be in your produce box but can sometimes be ordered through the shop) also prefer to stay out of direct sun, and adding a teaspoon of sugar dissolved in the water will help keep them fresh for longer.

### **STEP 2 Free yourself from the shackles of the ingredient list and substitute**

The world is your oyster mushroom when you embrace substitution. **Grapefruit** (or any citrus) can be used instead of orange in a cake; use **rhubarb** in place of celery (cooked or fresh); all **herbs** add flavour; when there's no lettuce, **parsley** makes an amazing salad; be colour blind and use **beetroot** or **parsnip** instead of carrot; making a **turnip** cake instead of carrot; and use **zucchini** in everything!

### **STEP 3 When there's just too much - preserve your produce**

Sometimes there's more veg than we have time to use fresh, so learning a few preservation techniques is a great way to keep those flavours for later in the year. Learning to preserve fruit and vegetables is incredibly satisfying!

#### **Jams, Chutneys, Pickles and Preserves**

Seasonal gluts are the perfect time to make things like zucchini relish, tomato chutney, pickled daikon, rhubarb and ginger jam.

#### **Dehydrating**

Does not need special equipment (although if you are going to do a lot, then a dehydrator is a great investment), it can be done in a regular home oven at 40-60C with the door left ajar a little to let the moisture out. You could also use a cake rack in a sunny window. You want to have everything a uniform size so it dries evenly, and not too large as you might trap a little moisture in the centre that could go moldy later.

Fruit - lots of (if not all) fruit can be dehydrated and used later. There definitely are gaps and gluts in the fruit available in this climate and dried fruit is almost as good as fresh.

Dried fruits can be rehydrated for use, eaten dry for snacks, added to a cheeseboard or crushed and used as super tasty sprinkles on desserts and cereals.

Vegetables can also be fantastic when dehydrated! Dehydrated mushrooms can add depth of flavour to stocks, soups, or risotto. Dehydrated carrots, onions and celery make a great

base for stock or addition to homemade crackers. You might like to try dehydrated cubed zucchini, capsicum and onions mixed with couscous, spices and dried herbs for a delicious (and easy!) camping meal.

## Stock

Vegetable stock is a great staple to have in the kitchen to add extra flavour to your dishes. Soup, risotto, and stews all benefit from a good stock base.

A traditional stock uses onion, carrot, and celery with bay leaves, thyme and peppercorns. However, you can also add garlic, fennel, leek, and woody herbs for more flavour. Leafy greens may make the stock bitter, although many people use the stems of kale or parsley for extra flavour. You can make a delicious stock entirely out of veggie scraps! Onion peel, carrot tops, leek greens, herb stems, and fibrous fennel stalks can all go into a stock. Corn cobs and husks also make a great stock: grill them first to release extra flavour.

Mushrooms make an amazing earthy stock that your mushroom risotto can't live without. Start your stock by covering the vegetables with cold water and bringing up to a simmer. Boiling may bring out bitter flavours and make your stock cloudy. Simmer for about 20 minutes then strain. If you want to use roasted bones to add extra meaty flavour use the same method, but simmer for longer. Chicken bones need a couple of hours at a simmer, and beef or lamb bones can go for 8+ hours (overnight is great!). You could also use a slow cooker and not have to keep such a close eye on it.

If you want to save storage space, once you've strained the stock you can return it to the stove and continue simmering to reduce the liquid. Reducing the volume by 10 to will make a thick 'jus' that will set like jelly in the fridge for meat stocks.

Stock freezes well for later use.



## **A word about.....**

### **Herbs**

Pesto - it's not just about basil! Try making a parsley, sage and walnut pesto, or a coriander, mint and garlic pesto. Anything green can go in your pesto, carrot tops, kale, celery leaves, fennel, the list goes on. Add some bite with garlic scapes, chives, leek greens or shallots. Freeze in small glass or plastic containers with a little extra oil on top. Freeze - chop delicate herbs, mix them with olive oil and freeze them in an ice-cube tray. Pop out a cube for some extra fresh flavour in your dishes!

Dried - most woody herbs, like thyme, sage, rosemary and oregano, retain a lot of flavour when dried. Hang them upside down in a dry place and wait till crispy. Then rub from the stems with your fingertips and store in an airtight jar or container.

Finishing vinegars - Pop clean herbs, on the stems, in good quality vinegar and leave to steep for 3-6 months. These lovely aromatic vinegars are great for salad dressings and sauces, aioli and more.

### **Avocados**

Are an amazing fruit however, grown in our area you may have to be very patient in waiting for them to ripen. We like to think of this as a wondrous delayed gratification. They can sit there on the bench, tempting you for up to two weeks in their rock hard state before suddenly softening up and being ready to spread on hot buttered toast with a squeeze of lemon and a little black pepper.

### **Daikon**

A daikon has many faces, and many people pull faces when they are mentioned. However, they grow amazingly in this climate and are quite versatile. Did you know you can also eat the leaves as a spicy little stir fry or salad green? Daikon roots can be eaten fresh, baked, boiled, steamed, fried and stewed. They make a charming little fritter, a tasty salad or sandwich ingredient and a punchy quick pickle.

### **Microgreens**

No, this is not a pot plant. No, they are not seedlings. Don't plant them in your garden (I mean, you caaaaaan but they probably won't thrive and you've kind of missed the point). Microgreens are a tasty little snack you can add to garnish a dish with extra flavour. They also pack a nutritional punch with a lot of good stuff crammed into these little sprouts. Simply cut them with scissors or a sharp knife and sprinkle them over your scrambled eggs, add them to a fresh salad, or sprinkle over a finished dish for an extra kick of flavour. Store them at room temperature out of direct sunlight and give them a little water as needed.

**Persimmons** - wtf do you do with a persimmon? Leave till gooey and squeeze on to your breakfast. Makes great fruit leather. Chutney, cake, drinks..... Just remember to check if you've got the astringent or non-astringent ones :-)

### **Rhubarb**

Ahhhh rhubarb. We love a crumble, but not all the time, right? Here at Southern Harvest we have been learning to broaden our minds and consider rhubarb as a *savoury* ingredient (cue exploding heads). Try sauté-ing rhubarb with onion and serving with sausages, or using it as a substitution for celery. Stewed rhubarb also freezes well, and you can also dehydrate it. You could also squirrel up all your rhubarb, chopped and frozen, until you have enough for a batch of rhubarb champagne.





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