

OUR **IMPACT** 2026

A series of **case studies** that capture the unique impact of the Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub



SOUTHERN NSW
Innovation Hub

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE,
LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES



Growing food connections: From local gardens to regional networks

For Sarah Davison, strengthening local food systems is about more than growing produce. As a volunteer with Growing Together South Coast, she is passionate about helping communities understand where their food comes from, creating opportunities for young people, and building stronger connections between growers and consumers.

BACKGROUND

What began as a conversation with Southern NSW Innovation Hub's Bega Circular Valley Knowledge Broker Chloe Wilson has since evolved into a regional collaboration spanning community organisations, schools, youth programs and grower networks.

CONNECTING LOCAL GROUPS AROUND A SHARED VISION

After becoming involved with the Growing Together South Coast community market garden in Milton, Sarah approached Chloe Wilson with an idea to engage more people with local food production and raise awareness of regional food systems.

Drawing on her regional networks, Chloe connected community groups and stakeholders with shared interests, helping create new opportunities for collaboration.

The relationships developed through this process contributed to the Think Regionally, Act Locally: Youth in Horticulture project, a partnership involving Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla (SAGE), Grow the Future, the Office of Regional Youth and Growing Together South Coast. The Hub helped build strategic connections and identify funding opportunities.

It created a network where groups could learn from each other and build a community across the region.

SARAH DAVISON
VOLUNTEER

GROWING TOGETHER SOUTH COAST



BUILDING WELLBEING THROUGH FOOD & COMMUNITY

The project expanded to include a region-wide youth farm field day at the SAGE Community Garden and visits to local producers. These activities helped participants understand how local projects contribute to a broader regional food network.

Sarah said the activities reinforced the project's core message.

"It provided an opportunity to gather feedback on what the program meant to them and what future programs should look like. It also helped connect local actions in their respective towns to the broader region, reinforcing the 'Think Regionally, Act Locally' concept."

Program evaluations identified positive outcomes, including improved wellbeing, increased awareness of food production and stronger connections to local agriculture.

COLLABORATION CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Partnerships formed through the youth project laid the groundwork for further initiatives. One of the most significant has been the Growers' Resilience Network, a peer-to-peer group focused on climate adaptation, drought resilience and grower wellbeing.

The network is preparing workshops that will draw on the expertise of partner organisations to support producers across the region. Sarah believes the network's value extends beyond technical knowledge.

By connecting farmers and fostering community resilience, individuals can support each other through shared hardships.

SARAH DAVISON

VOLUNTEER | GROWING TOGETHER SOUTH COAST

Collaboration has continued with Bega Circular Valley Knowledge Broker Luke Peel, including funding applications for workshops that help producers connect directly with consumers and strengthen local supply chains.

"Our role now is linking the local supply chain, our local growers, to the community of buyers that we are advocating for. We are trying to bring these two groups together to create a cohesive local food system," Sarah said.

CREATING PATHWAYS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The Youth in Horticulture project worked with partners including Vincentia High School and TAFE to provide practical learning opportunities for young people across the Shoalhaven region.

Through horticulture "Taster Days" at the Growing Together market garden, participants gained hands-on experience in food production while exploring career pathways in the industry.

"As part of this local food system, the underlying idea is that we need people trained to grow food. The youth program is about creating pathways to employment, particularly in the face of disasters," Sarah said.

Participants could also undertake further learning in areas including permaculture and small animal production, broadening their understanding of the sector.

GROWING LONG-TERM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

For Sarah, one of the most valuable aspects of working with the Southern NSW Innovation Hub has been access to trusted support, strategic guidance and regional connections that help turn ideas into lasting initiatives.

"The support from the Hub has been key for networking with relevant organisations, assisting with program design, and guiding grant applications. Having that institutional support prevents us from operating as an isolated 'island' as the South Coast and strengthens our organisational capacity," she said.



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This project is funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund