

Leader's Report

2021 was another year made strange by the pandemic. Plans were upset and changed as we made adjustments to events and kept each other safe by staying home. Our fundraising events were most impacted by Covid precautions however the Tocal Field Days went ahead and bolstered our finances, enabling us to continue with many of the activities that support our community to access good, clean and fair food.

Communication

In 2021 Cecily Lenton kept the Facebook page alive with information and updates about our work, supported by Helen with her regular Meatless Monday posts. Information that had been developed during 2020 to support us all during lockdown was updated and posted on the SFHV page with many people appreciating this support during extended periods at home again this year. Garden posts were also very well received as our followers headed back into their gardens for connection and peace. Many thanks to Cecily for her many volunteer hours and dedication to this important communication tool that we know is the only source of information for our many followers.

This year we welcomed Kylie Wiblen who managed the Earth Market Facebook page, taking over from Jen Hunt early in the year. We acknowledge the great work that Jen did for us, establishing the page and building a schedule. Kylie has brought a real energy and style to all the posts. Most information and promotion for the Earth Market came from this page, keeping all our dedicated patrons informed of what was happening during those tricky early spring months when the virus was about in the Hunter.

Twenty-three SFHV Mailchimp emails have been produced for members and friends with around 680 people receiving them twice monthly. Our Mailchimp updates members and friends about activities happening across all of our projects and promotes the Earth Market. I thank Helen for her skill and artistic flair in publishing our Mailchimp email.

Liz Griffiths has kept our [SFHV website](#) up to date and looking fresh and it is linked to the new [Slow Food Australia website](#) which has information from all Slow Food convivia and communities across Australia. Thank you to Liz for all

her time and expertise and to Amorelle Dempster who has been a driving force behind uniting all Slow Food groups on the Slow Food Australia website.

We have had a healthy increase in membership over the last 12 months and many thanks must go to Ruth Adams who is our very active membership secretary.

Biodiversity

The **Slow Food Earth Market Maitland** continued to offer quality, variety and a real shopping alternative for our community in 2021. With a month out in early spring, as we monitored the impact of Covid locally, the team delivered 20 markets in central Maitland. We welcomed a number of new producers and volunteers, and rolled out our beautiful, new red marquees. The now mature market has a dedicated and growing customer base and a really warm and friendly buzz as customers and producers chat, and connections and networks are formed. There were two free breakfasts celebrating the seasons, put together by Maitland Rotary Sunrise this year and a number of our producers participated in the Christmas Mini Market. We are so fortunate to have this beautiful and authentic producers' market in Maitland. The Earth Market is in the early stages of producing a **market cookbook** which will feature the biodiversity of the produce, our amazing producers and volunteers, and the beauty of the Hunter Valley. Thanks to Amorelle, Reesa, Marcus, Kylie and Crissy who have managed the Earth Market this year and to the fabulous infrastructure team who put it all up and all down again each market day.

Work was finished on the **two native food gardens** for which we received grants in 2020. We are still to officially handover these wonderful gardens and plan to do that in early autumn this year. We were able to take part in Maitland Heritage Fest in June in the native food garden at the Guide Hall, working in partnership with the Maitland Guides. We sold heritage sausages while chatting to patrons about the native garden.

Maitland Show was cancelled but the produce display went ahead and we worked hard to get a wonderful display of biodiversity on show. We had a record 180 entries and we are looking forward to another record-breaking display in February when the public will again be at the show.

Education

While we said goodbye to Johnny Wilson, the Seed Library Leader and super chef, the **Maitland Seed Library** continued to develop with a strong volunteer group meeting regularly and some new council staff joining us to provide resources and support for our locals to get growing. Jacqui invited us to her home and we learnt a lot about the importance of seed saving while doing some seed harvesting. Jacqui also flew the Slow Food flag at Taste Deconstructed with a talk about seed saving on a very cold and windy afternoon. We had lots of interesting seed donated over the year and we are using the Earth Market as our fifth access point for obtaining seed. Thanks Kendall for managing this. The council have constructed some fabulous seed racks for people to help themselves to seed in the four libraries, making the seed accessible to all. There are a number of other creative ideas being developed and 2022 looks like an exciting year for this young project. The Maitland Sprout, which is published seasonally, is a collaboration between Slow Food and the Council and provides great information on growing food. We also delivered the first Perpetual Food Bowl kits, aimed at providing an easy to grow starter kit for those who would like to have a go at growing food in pots or a very small patch. We have modified the original kit for children to support some children's holiday library activities. Thanks to Ruth Neave who is behind this initiative.

We just squeezed in a great trip before lockdown to the **Tilligerry Habitat** where we learnt about respecting and raising seed.

Our **Community Gardens** work involved a collaboration with Hume Housing, refreshing a shared garden. We made some plans with the residents of the housing complex and will continue the project this year.

We kicked off our **Market to Earth tours**, with a trip to Reesa's stunning natural pond and the Anderson's olive grove. Another planned Market to Earth adventure was struck off by Covid.

Advocacy

Through Slow Food Hunter Valley we advocate for a cleaner, fairer food in all that we do. Our advocacy is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the wonderful and recently renamed Food Rescue Kitchen, which has pumped out around 10,000 meals this year, taking up the slack from other charities who did not operate over lockdown. Oz Harvest and our local producers have donated the bulk of the ingredients for this huge number of meals and our marvellous

volunteers worked right through the lockdown – with a few extra bodies with a little time on their hands helping out - with the need being so great.

During lockdown our producers also supported those facing hunger by supplying fresh fruit and vegetables over 8 weeks. This produce, along with donations of home baked biscuits from friends and the CWA, and dry goods and personal care items from Kiwanis, saw around 480 Fresh Food Bags put together by our volunteers for distribution by 5 charities across the city. This work was supported by donations of around \$4,000 from wonderful, local people and another \$2,500 from our own funds.

Our advocacy was also demonstrated by supporting another Garden in Africa, number 5.

Along with many other groups fighting for the health of our planet we supported Slow Food International in raising the profile of COP26 through our Farm to Plate campaign and our weekly Meatless Monday posts.

Amorelle also worked with a group of lower Hunter water users to protect the water rights of many of our local producers.

Final Thanks

Special thanks must go to Cecily Lenton who is stepping back from her role as SFHV Facebook and Instagram main person. Cecily's impact on raising our profile and supporting our community has been amazing and we will miss her skill and passion. Many thanks also to Ian Clarke who is also stepping away from his Slow Food commitments. Ian has been involved in all our work over recent years and his loyalty, commitment and productivity has benefitted projects like the native food gardens, our conference, the Hume Housing project, the Seed Library and the Watarrka project and our fundraising activities. He vacates the roles of Assistant Leader and Ark of Taste. Thank you for everything you have done for Slow Food Ian and Katie.

Best wishes to Jocelyn and Richard Colleran who are leaving the area to be closer to family. Thank you for your support and contributions over the years.

Thank you to all our sponsors and donors, Pitcher Partners, Starr Partners and Anne Wonders, Maitland City Council, Maitland Rotary Sunrise, the Readers Cafe and all our donors. We appreciate the help and support that you give us so generously.

Many thanks to the executive and the project teams. These wonderful people bring a huge range of talents and skills to their roles. They keep everything flowing, solve problems as circumstances change and are always gracious and generous. And a special mention to Amorelle, the heart and soul behind many of the things that we do. Her passion, hutzpah, compassion and positivity encourage us all to go the extra mile.

Thank you to all our volunteers, everything we do is done by volunteers, everything. The communities and friendships that develop within the different projects is very special. You are all amazing, quietly getting in there and doing what you can to support our community, our health and the health of our place. You are all making a difference, connecting us to a more grounded life where community and values matter.

Anne Kelly February 2022