

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Improving access to community-based food systems: Comparing perspectives of low socioeconomic individuals and food system representatives

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Community-based food systems (CFSs) have proliferated recently following growing interest in local, sustainably produced food.¹ CFSs include market-based initiatives like farmers' markets (FMs), community-supported agriculture schemes (CSAs), and non-market enterprises like community gardens.² These initiatives offer an alternative to the conventional food system for accessing fresh food.

In Australia and other developed countries, a clear social gradient of disease exists where those of low socioeconomic status (SES) experience higher rates of diet-related diseases including obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular

disease^{3,4} with low fruit and vegetable intake identified as a key risk factor.⁵ Low SES populations are shown to consume fewer fruits and vegetables compared to higher SES populations.^{6,7} Access and affordability of fresh produce are identified as potential barriers to consumption,^{6,8} hence improving access to CFSs may increase consumption as indicated in previous research^{9,10} and ameliorate some chronic diseases.

However, market-based CFSs like FMs and CSAs have been criticised for passively excluding disadvantaged groups. Customer surveys indicate the majority are white, educated and have middle to high incomes.^{11,12} While some CFS providers are committed to addressing this issue,^{9,13–15} some remain inactive.¹⁶ Allen notes that inaction on inequity within CFSs risks forming a 'two-tiered food system' where the rich enjoy the social, economic and health benefits of CFSs while those less fortunate are limited to the conventional food supply (p. 159).¹⁷ The conventional food supply arguably compounds health problems of disadvantaged communities in which processed foods are sometimes cheaper than staple foods¹⁸ and supermarkets are further from residents' homes¹⁹ or difficult to access without private transport.²⁰ Consequently, CFSs may assist in ensuring

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equitable access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all while bringing additional social and economic benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Previous research explored enablers and barriers to accessing CFSs with low SES groups in North America^{21–24} and Australia^{25,26} and identified solutions to improve access.^{21,22,26} Others investigated CFS providers' perspectives and actions regarding improving access for low SES groups.^{13,16} A logical progression is comparing perspectives of these stakeholders to identify solutions that meet both groups' needs.

This paper examines access to CFSs for low SES groups in one Australian city from the perspectives of low SES individuals and representatives of FMs, a CSA, and a commercial fruit and vegetable box scheme with the aims of comparing views about barriers and enablers to accessing CFSs for low SES groups and identifying strategies to improve access that meet both groups' needs.

Methods

Ethical approval for the present study was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. A market research company recruited low SES individuals from an existing database. Participants were adults residing in a capital city who were the primary household food procurer. All were unemployed or had low-paying, low-skilled occupations and had not completed high school. Because of limited numbers of FMs and CSAs in the study area, the capital city remains anonymous to preserve anonymity. FMs and CSAs were identified from websites, local councils and telephone listings. Potential representatives were telephoned and invited to participate and all consented prior to participation. A commercial franchised fruit and vegetable box scheme was also recruited to supplement the single CSA. Interviews were conducted with managers; however, a company representative of the box scheme was interviewed due to manager unavailability. Interviewees are henceforth referred to collectively as 'food system representatives'.

Twenty-four low SES individuals participated in one of three focus groups conducted by the research team from June to July 2012. Short videos, photos and written summaries were presented to participants to illustrate key operational aspects of FMs and CSAs. Participants were also encouraged to recall personal experiences using these initiatives. Focus group questions were based on the study objectives and sought to explore participants' perspectives regarding enablers and barriers to using CFSs and potential strategies to improve them.

Semistructured interviews were conducted in person or via telephone with representatives of four FMs, one CSA and one box scheme. Interview questions sought views on customer demographics, target markets, access for low SES groups and existing engagement strategies. Representatives were asked to provide feedback on strategies generated by focus groups to enhance access to CFSs. Focus group discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis of focus group data was informed by grounded theory and identified deductive and inductive codes to produce broader categories or themes.²⁷ Focus group transcripts were analysed for deductive codes drawn from the focus group guide. Inductive codes were then identified and a process of constant comparison was used to further group codes into themes. Interview transcripts with food system representatives were thematically analysed. Codes and/or themes derived were discussed with other researchers ensuring accuracy and completeness.²⁸ Reflexivity was a key approach applied to data collection and analysis.^{27,29} During data collection participants were encouraged to share honest viewpoints, and during analysis researchers continually checked themes against raw data to ensure integrity of interpretation.

Results

Demographics of low SES participants (n = 24) and food system representatives (n = 6) are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

When asked about using FMs and CSAs, focus group participants expressed interest in accessing these food systems as they provided quality produce, leisure and learning opportunities, and fostered social connectedness. These aspects are described and discussed elsewhere²⁶ and align with enablers identified in existing literature.^{21–25} Some had previously engaged with these initiatives; however, high costs prevented frequent patronage.

When food system representatives were asked about low SES groups using their initiatives, most stated they were not a significant customer group. Only one representative (FM4) reported trying to attract low SES customers; however, the effectiveness of these efforts was unknown. Some representatives suggested CFSs and low SES groups are unsuited to each other. Others indicated that low SES people are uninterested in accessing CFSs and may feel more comfortable utilising familiar or cheaper supermarkets or produce markets.

'... you don't tend to get people from a lower socioeconomic background wanting to shop here. Because they haven't got that ability to spend. And some of them haven't grown up with ... a foodie culture ... that seems to come with a higher economic ... bracket.' (Rep FM3, regional FM)

Despite interest from focus group participants in accessing FMs and CSAs, affordability, convenience and knowledge were deemed key barriers to their use. Both initiatives were believed to be more expensive than other food retailers. Participants discussed additional costs associated with FMs including parking fees, and a tendency to overspend at FMs as prices were not always clearly displayed, multiple transactions were made with different vendors, and the foods available tempted customers. Paying for a CSA share in advance was considered a struggle for low-income earners. Several aspects made FMs and CSAs inconvenient to use. For

Table 1 Characteristics of focus group participants (n = 24)

Focus group (number of participants)	Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age range (years)	Highest level of education achieved	Employment status	Household income (\$A/year)	Household family structure
1 (n = 8)	Amy	F	25–34	Year 10	HD	40 000–49 999	Young family
	Balthazar	M	55–64		E	20 000–29 999	Mature family
	Bella	F	35–44		HD	40 000–49 999	Young family
	Bob	M	35–44		U	20 000–29 999	Young family
	Jasmine	F	25–34		E	10 000–19 999	Young family
	Sandra	F	35–44		DP	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
	Tina	F	45–54		E	40 000–49 999	Mature family
	Yvonne	F	65 and over		R	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
2 (n = 7)	Donna	F	65 and over	Year 10	R	10 000–19 999	Mature single/couple
	Harry	M	45–54		E	40 000–49 999	Mature family
	Jenny	F	45–54		HD	10 000–19 999	Middle family
	John	M	55–64		DP	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
	Larry	M	35–44		E	40 000–49 999	Middle family
	Len	M	55–64		E	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
	Scott	M	55–64		U	30 000–39 999	Mature single/couple
3 (n = 9)	A	F	45–54	Year 10	E	20 000–29 999	Mature family
	Clare	F	65 and over		R	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
	Jack	M	45–54		E	40 000–49 999	Mature family
	Jake	M	55–64		R	20 000–29 999	Mature single/couple
	Jayden	M	25–34		U	30 000–39 999	Young family
	June	F	35–44		HD	40 000–49 999	Young family
	Linda	F	35–44		HD	40 000–49 999	Middle family
	Mary	F	45–54		E	20 000–29 999	Mature family
	Nadia	F	25–34		HD	40 000–49 999	Young family

DP, disability pension; E, employed; F, female; HD, home duties; M, male; mature couple/single, couple or single ≥ 35 years of age with no children in the home; mature family, couple or single parent with most children >15 years of age and at least one child living at home; middle family, couple or single parent with most children 6–15 years of age; R, retired; U, unemployed; young family, couple or single parent with most children <6 years of age.

Table 2 Characteristics of food system representatives (n = 6)

Representative (Rep)	Role	Type of initiative	Location/area of service
Rep FM 1	Manager	FM	Metropolitan location
Rep FM 2	Manager	FM	Regional location
Rep FM 3	Manager	FM	Regional location
Rep FM 4	Manager	FM	Rural location
Rep CSA	Manager	CSA	Statewide service
Rep box scheme	Fundraising Officer	Commercial franchised box scheme	National service

CSA, community-supported agriculture scheme; FM, farmers' market.

FMs, these included limited opening hours, lack of parking and electronic payment facilities, and difficulty comparing prices between vendors, as captured below:

'... and markets, it's cash, and guaranteed to buy potatoes for a dollar in one aisle, you go to the next one it's ... 20 cents cheaper. So it's like, forget it ... just ... go to the supermarket, get it all done and get out. One hit ... swipe the card, done.' (Tina, 45–54 years, mature family household)

A critical barrier to using CSAs was the inability to choose the produce received in the CSA box. This lack of control

may result in inconsistencies with family preferences and usual repertoire of meals, leading to food wastage. This linked to the final barrier—knowledge—including concerns about possessing insufficient knowledge to prepare unfamiliar foods as Jasmine explains:

'... I don't like that you're obviously not getting a choice. ... you're not always gonna get in your box of stuff what you need, then obviously you are going to waste most of it because, I mean I don't even know what to do with a pomegranate.' (Jasmine, 25–34 years, young family household)

Other barriers included lack of knowledge about CSAs and the details of local FMs.

Food system representatives also perceived barriers for low SES groups to be knowledge, cost and convenience. Lack of knowledge about or interest in food was most commonly reported. Some believed low SES groups lacked food skills, did not value healthy eating or were uninterested in broader food issues such as sustainability.

‘Because they [people of low SES] won’t buy fresh fruit and vegetables because they have to cook them. And they don’t know how to cook ‘em. Because . . . they buy white bread . . . take-away and a tonne of ciggies and alcohol. So, if you’re going to do that [put a FM in a low SES suburb] and need so much government support to have continual education about how to use it . . . and subsidise the farmer to be there. Because he couldn’t sell his product at a high price . . .’ (Rep FM1, metropolitan FM)

Two representatives (Rep FM3, Rep CSA) acknowledged their produce were expensive, noting this may be a barrier for low-income groups. Three representatives (Rep FM1, Rep FM2, Rep FM4) reported their products were set at a range of price points with one (Rep FM4) reporting some produce was cheaper than other food retailers. Two representatives (Rep FM1, Rep box scheme) believed they were competitive on price with other food retailers when discounts or promotions were not employed. The upfront membership cost was noted as a possible barrier to accessing member-specific discounts. Shopping outdoors at FMs and seasonal limits on variety were acknowledged by some as barriers, although these were considered unchangeable parts of CFSs.

Focus group participants nominated strategies to overcome barriers to accessing FMs and CSAs. Food system representatives provided feedback on these strategies and some suggestions.

To improve affordability, focus group participants suggested FMs could reduce produce prices by eliminating vendors’ stall fees or using promotions such as two-for-one deals. While directed at FMs, representatives of the CSA and box scheme also responded. Two representatives (Rep FM3, Rep CSA) acknowledged their higher prices; however, Rep CSA also identified their produce (which are organic) are cheaper than supermarket organic produce. Others believed their prices were competitive (Rep FM1, Rep box scheme) and/or that high prices were a misperception (Rep FM1, Rep FM2, Rep FM4), explaining that their markets provided a mix of high- and low-priced produce. Most representatives believed any higher prices were offset by produce freshness, longevity and value. Difficulties in controlling prices were acknowledged by FM representatives as they are set by individual stallholders, but made no comment about reducing stall fees to encourage cheaper prices.

Focus group participants supported a discount or voucher strategy similar to the Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers in the USA.³⁰ While no such scheme exists in Australia, the FMs in the present study offer memberships providing 10% discount on products with annual fees

ranging from \$35 to \$62. Two representatives (Rep FM2, Rep FM4) reported trialling strategies to overcome cost barriers to obtaining membership such as a \$1 day membership for seniors and a mid-year membership reduction, both resulting in increased membership. Representatives acknowledged upfront membership fees provide important capital for smaller markets and some believed discounted membership rates would increase administrative work. Neither the CSA nor the box scheme offered discounts.

Focus group participants suggested establishing central payment points or checkouts to assist in monitoring spending at FMs. FM representatives deemed this impracticable as vendors operate as individual businesses.

‘. . . As far as a central checkout, definitely not. I mean that’s the whole point of a farmers’ market is to go and meet your growers and pay directly to your grower, so that is definitely not a model that I could see us going down.’ (Rep FM4, rural FM)

Representatives clearly stated that FMs do not compete with supermarket conveniences and disagree that comparing prices or shopping on a budget at FMs is difficult. Educational strategies including tours and information sessions about using FMs were suggested to overcome this perception:

‘One thing we did come up with is tours. For groups. . . . Once I introduce them to . . . how to use it, like how it can benefit them, what’s cheaper, how to move around, what they can get out of it. . . . the little barriers will melt away.’ (Rep FM1, metropolitan FM)

The ‘working share’ concept where customers work for a CSA farm in exchange for a discounted or free share was supported by focus groups. Neither the CSA nor the box scheme offered this option. Alternatively, the CSA gave a 25% discount on shares to customers who provided homes or businesses as a pickup point.

To improve convenience, focus group participants suggested FMs operate at least weekly to allow regular access. All FMs studied opened once a week and at the time of interviews, a second mid-week market was mooted by Rep FM1. Representatives identified operational challenges to running a market of increased frequency including increased workloads of organisers and vendors and difficulty attracting sufficient vendors and customers.

Focus group participants also recommended FMs make electronic payment facilities available; however, FM representatives deemed their cost too high, noting each market had an automatic teller machine close by. One FM operated a single electronic payment machine allowing customers to make small cash withdrawals.

Focus group participants were receptive to CSAs allowing customers greater choice of produce by indicating preferences from an online list. While the box scheme already allowed customers to choose produce, the CSA was trialling software to allow customers some choice; however, needed to balance this against increases in packing time and staff costs:

‘... we’ve got a certain degree of efficiency in the [packing] system, but customisation . . . throws that out a bit. . . . So we’ve kind of resisted that [providing more choice] on one level, but we’ve got it in the software, so we’re playing around with it.’ (Rep CSA)

Some focus group participants welcomed offering home delivery of CSA shares; however, others indicated this could be expensive for the CSA. The box scheme provided home delivery with purchases over \$25, made possible because the box scheme operates as a franchise where each franchisee services a defined geographical area. The CSA services a broader region and home delivery would require a critical mass of customers in specific areas to be viable.

To overcome knowledge barriers, focus group participants agreed greater advertising was needed to raise awareness of FMs and overcome knowledge deficits about how they work. Newspapers, community notice boards and the Internet were suggested advertising avenues. Although directed at FMs, all representatives reflected on this strategy. As previously mentioned, only Rep FM4 reported explicitly trying to attract low SES customers through organisations serving the disadvantaged. Some acknowledged that attracting new customers would be advantageous, yet believed low SES groups would not be interested in their services and efforts would be unfruitful.

‘. . . if there was a new membership base, potentially yes [there would be advantages in targeting marketing at low-income groups], but . . . we’re not into twisting people’s arms either. . . .’ (Rep FM3, regional FM)

Rep FM1 suggested talks, market tours and field trips to local farms could help increase interest in local food and familiarise new customers with FMs. In relation to CSAs, focus groups suggested CSAs supply recipes to assist customers in preparing produce; however, both the CSA and the box scheme already did this.

Discussion

The present study revealed that low SES individuals and representatives of FMs, a CSA and box scheme held converging and diverging perspectives in regard to improving low SES groups’ access to CFSs. Perspectives are summarised in Table 3 and elaborated below.

Minimal convergence in perspectives exists between focus group participants and food system representatives. Some focus group participants reported infrequent participation in CFSs aligning with representatives’ reports that low SES groups were a minority customer group. Both focus group participants and representatives noted barriers of affordability, convenience and knowledge to accessing CFSs, corresponding with previous research with low SES individuals^{21–25} and CFS managers.^{13,16}

Differences in perspectives between participant groups are salient. Focus group participants expressed interest in accessing CFSs, yet only one FM promoted to this group. Although both participant groups identified affordability as a

barrier, some representatives felt higher costs were offset by longer shelf-life or were a misperception, while others stated they were competitive on price when discounts or promotions were not applied. Indeed, while a recent Australian study suggests non-significant trends towards higher produce prices at FMs compared to conventional retailers,³¹ it is important to acknowledge price as a key influence on food choice,³² and for many low-income earners, discounts and promotions are used to stretch their food dollars.²² Focus group participants’ concerns about affordability also extended to associated costs (e.g. parking fees) whereas representatives overlooked these expenses. Some representatives saw lack of affordability as secondary to lack of knowledge, believing low SES consumers lacked food skills and were uninterested in healthy eating or broader food issues. These views are consistent with American managers, although they believed lack of affordability was the primary barrier.¹⁶ Contrary to the views of food system representatives, focus group participants expressed interest in accessing fresh produce from CFSs and supporting farmers. Comments about lack of food knowledge were limited to unfamiliar produce. Lack of convenience and awareness about CFSs were also identified by focus groups as barriers—two areas not fully recognised by representatives. Some representatives acknowledged some minor inconveniences, although these were generally viewed as inherent in CFSs. The inaction of CFSs in this region to facilitate access for low SES groups may be explained by beliefs that low SES groups are disinterested in using CFSs. If representatives recognised low SES groups as an untapped market segment, CFSs could potentially capitalise on a new customer group.

Some alignment exists between strategies suggested by focus group participants to improve access and what representatives are willing and able to provide. Focus group participants suggested some strategies that the initiatives sampled are already providing, for example, weekly opening of FMs. This may reflect focus group participants’ unfamiliarity with these food systems. Some strategies were implemented by some initiatives only or implemented in a modified form. For example, only one FM advertised to low-income groups, and instead of a ‘working share’ the CSA offered discounts to customers who provided their premises as produce pickup points. This indicates these strategies are achievable; however, limited resources may prevent some CFSs from implementing strategies in their entirety. CFSs must also be aware that even minor compromises to strategies may render them inequitable. For example, eligibility for a discount from the CSA in the present study requires offering a pickup point with sufficient space to store CSA boxes in an area with a critical number of CSA customers—assets that low SES individuals are less likely to have. This illustrates the complexity of balancing the needs of CFSs with low SES customers.

There was a disconnect between other strategies suggested by focus group participants and what food system representatives believed was feasible. Focus group participants’ suggestions focused on economic and functional changes, whereas representatives believed educational strategies were

Table 3 Converging and diverging perspectives and strategies

Theme	Converging principles and understanding		Diverging principles and understanding	
	Focus group participants	Food system representatives	Focus group participants	Food system representatives
Access and use of CFSs	Short-term/intermittent use of FMs and CSAs due to high cost or low quality	Low SES group not a significant customer group	Interested in utilising FMs and CSAs	Some believed low SES group uninterested in accessing their initiatives
Barriers to using CFSs	High cost/lack of affordability	High cost/lack of affordability	Lack of knowledge to prepare unfamiliar produce Lack of convenience (opening hours, location, inability to shop for all groceries, lack of facilities, lack of choice) Lack of awareness about location of FMs and existence of CSAs	Some believed higher expenses offset by long produce shelf-life. Others believed high cost a perception. Lack of knowledge about healthy eating, preparing fresh food, cooking skills Some recognised inconveniences however viewed these as inherent to CFSs Disinterest in healthy/fresh food and food issues, for example, environmental sustainability
Strategy: Affordability	Working share for CSAs Discounts/vouchers	The CSA offered a 25% discount to customers who provided their home/business as a pickup point All FMs offered memberships (usually annual) for a fee that granted members a 10% discount on purchases	Reduce prices, use supermarket-style promotions like two-for-one deals, free parking Single payment point at FMs	Some FM representatives noted discounts/vouchers would increase administrative work. The CSA and box scheme did not offer discounts/vouchers. FM representatives stated prices are difficult to control as they are set by individual vendors. CSA and box scheme representatives believed prices were competitive for the service provided (organic or home delivery, respectively). FM representatives believed it was not difficult to compare prices or shop on a budget at FMs. A single payment point was believed unfeasible as vendors operate as individual businesses within FM model.

Table 3 Continued

Theme	Converging principles and understanding		Diverging principles and understanding	
	Focus group participants	Food system representatives	Focus group participants	Food system representatives
Strategy: Convenience	FMs operate regularly (at least weekly) CSAs to allow customers to choose own produce CSAs to provide home delivery	All FMs opened once per week The box scheme allowed customers to choose their box contents. The CSA was trialling software to allow customers some choice in the produce received. The box scheme offered free home delivery with purchases over \$A25. The CSA representative noted home delivery could only be viable in areas with a critical mass of customers. Since data collection was completed this CSA has begun offering home delivery to some areas.	FMs and CSAs to provide electronic payment facilities	All FM representatives agreed the costs of electronic payment facilities were too high and noted each FM had an automatic teller machine within walking distance. The CSA and box scheme offered online payment only.
Strategy: Knowledge	CSAs to provide recipes with produce boxes FMs and CSAs to use more advertising to raise awareness about their businesses and how they operate	The CSA and box scheme provided recipes via weekly newsletter and website Only one FM targeted advertising to low SES group		All FMs and the CSA and box scheme used advertising; however, many used cheaper forms which may have limited reach (e.g. flyers, social media). One FM representative believed talks/tours could familiarise new customers with how FMs operate.

CFS, community-based food system; CSA, community-supported agriculture scheme; FM, farmers' market; SES, socioeconomic status.

more valuable. Focus group participants' suggestions to improve affordability were generally dismissed. Representatives believed produce prices were difficult to control or relative to product value, and that discounts associated with

purchased membership were sufficient. Representatives were concerned modifications such as centralised payment would change defining qualities of their initiatives. Other suggestions, such as offering electronic payment facilities, were

seen as too costly. Finally, while increasing informative advertising was recommended, many initiatives used inexpensive advertising, thus limiting reach.

These comparisons suggest neither stakeholder group fully understands the other's needs and circumstances resulting in misalignment in their perceptions of barriers and solutions to improving access to CFSs. This raises two questions. Firstly, how can these differing understandings be aligned? Secondly, how can the needs of each stakeholder group be met in a mutually beneficial way?

We suggest aligning understandings may require support from an external party to broker dialogue between these stakeholder groups. The appropriate external party for this role will vary between communities but may include health professionals such as nutritionists, community development workers, local government staff or faith-based workers. These professions often have experience working with community and examples exist where these disciplines have successfully partnered with CFSs to address barriers to healthy eating.³³ This external party may assist by:

- 1 Facilitating communication roundtables to foster understanding and develop acceptable strategies.
- 2 Researching effective strategies used by other CFSs to improve access for low SES groups.
- 3 Supporting stakeholders to secure funding to trial and evaluate selected strategies with CFSs.

A community development approach is recommended where the external party acts as a facilitator rather than leader and stakeholders' capacity to act on community issues is increased.³⁴

Improving access to CFSs while meeting the needs of both stakeholder groups will be challenging due to differences in stakeholders' values and agendas. As recognised in previous research, CFSs must remain financially viable which may conflict with low SES consumers' desires for competitively priced produce.¹⁶ However, findings from this research and extant literature provide some feasible strategies. To improve affordability, FM managers could investigate with vendors more affordable produce-pricing options as described in other research.^{15,16} Options could include selling second-grade produce at reduced prices and promotions such as two-for-one deals. The success of six-month memberships reported by one FM suggests shorter, cheaper memberships improve uptake. Internationally, some FMs and CSAs provide in-house discounts funded internally or externally which have successfully attracted new low-income customers.^{14,15} Other CSAs sell boxes on an income-based sliding scale where higher income subscribers pay higher prices which subsidises reduced pricing for poorer subscribers.^{13,16} To assist in comparing prices and controlling spending at FMs, managers could encourage vendors to clearly display prices and specials.

Clear signage advising customers of nearby automatic teller machines may address the lack of electronic payment options and enhance convenience. While the box scheme studied already allowed customers to choose produce and request home delivery, post study the CSA began providing

home delivery to large, localised groups of subscribers and continued working towards facilitating customer choice. Such strategies may also be feasible for others.

Finally, increasing awareness about CFSs among low SES groups may require a greater investment in targeted advertising.

The present study displays several notable strengths and limitations. In terms of strengths, the study adds to the scant Australian research on access to CFSs for low SES groups by comparing perspectives of key stakeholders—low SES individuals and food system representatives. Low SES individuals and representatives were drawn from the same location and interviewed from June to August 2012, ensuring the two data sets were contextually relevant. Finally, guidelines for enhancing the quality of qualitative research were employed throughout the study.^{28,29} In particular, researchers adopted a reflexive approach to minimise the influence of social context on participants' contributions and ensure participants' views were preserved.^{27,29} In terms of limitations, few CFSs operate in the study area thereby limiting the number of interviewees. Similarly, focus groups were limited due to funding. Consequently, saturation was not achieved during data collection and findings must be considered exploratory. The videos shown during focus groups presented FMs and CSAs positively which potentially biased participants' responses. However, participants were also asked to reflect on their *own* experiences using these initiatives and time was allocated to examining barriers to their use. Given these limitations, further investigation into low SES individuals and CFS providers' perspectives on improving access to CFSs is necessary. Future research may seek consensus about key barriers and mutually feasible strategies from larger samples and trial strategies.

In conclusion, the present study highlights potential ways to increase access to CFSs for low SES groups by comparing perspectives of both low SES individuals and food system representatives. Low SES participants acknowledged affordability, convenience and knowledge as important barriers to accessing CFSs. Representatives are cognisant of these barriers, but showed differing understandings of their importance. While some strategies suggested by low SES individuals to improve access to CFSs aligned with representatives' views, in other cases there was disconnect, particularly relating to strategies addressing affordability. Further communication and collaboration between these stakeholders is required to identify additional innovative solutions.

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Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

Authorship

JC and SB conceptualised and designed the study. KM and SS collected and analysed the data. KM drafted the manuscript and all authors revised the manuscript.

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