



Story 2 – A community lead solution providing nutritious food to those in need across south west Victoria has the added bonus of providing *Hands on Learning* students with an on-farm experience that opens their eyes to vocational pathways and future employment opportunities. Locally sourcing the highest quality produce we are reducing our reliance on transporting vegetables 100's of Kilometres down the highway from Melbourne and reducing our carbon food print.

Volcano Produce

Illowa Victoria

Do you remember toilet paper? It was mid-2022 and we were facing supply chains challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our regular weekly delivery from Food Bank Victoria became unreliable due to supply issues and we were left with no fresh vegetables for distribution to those in need.

Not only did we have no fresh product for our Emergency Food Hampers (three days supply of food) we also had no fresh product for our community meals partners and with two orders in the system needing to feed 200 people lunch the following day we turned to our community for help via Facebook and 16-year-old Georgie responded with “Dad we have to do something to help Food Share”.

In the following days Georgie and her father Ben Pohlner (owner of Volcano Produce Tower Hill) donated the first few loads of fresh spray free produce which would total 2.2 tonne in 2022. At this early stage of the project Ben and his staff were purchasing the seedlings, growing, and harvesting the produce for Food Share at their own cost.

With a focus on providing access to healthy food to over 50,000 people across the south west of Victoria annually this new partnership which gave us access to spray free local vegetables ten minutes from our warehouse, a real example of the power of local community to support their own.

As the partnership grew and the challenge of harvesting the produce with a limited work force became evident (an additional COVID challenge) we approach Leon Carey the *Hands on Learning* School Support Manager for our region. Food Share already provided hands on learning opportunities for local schools to visit our warehouse and volunteer to build emergency food hampers, so it was a natural extension to scope a market garden experience for the students.

As a result, our local schools *Hands on Learning* students are now offered the opportunity to visit Volcano Produce on farm for a tour, vocational pathways chat and hands on volunteering



opportunity. A clear benefit for students who find the classroom environment challenging and can better engage and learn in an interactive hands-on learning environment.

The outcomes are many including a full calendar of farm visits in semester 2 2023 (200 students). As the students arrive on farm they are met by Ben and given a tour of his market garden which is nestled beside Tower Hill a dormant volcano that provides rich volcanic soil that produces the highest quality vegetables.

Decked out in coats, boots and work gloves provided via sponsorship from the Fletcher Jones Family Foundations the students help to harvest broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, bok choy and many other vegetables. Loading the product into crates then onto the tractor back at the processing shed they meet the Food Share van and proudly load in their produce.

A full circle from seedling to Food Share the students understand the benefit of community supporting community and the power of volunteerism.

The latest news Oct 2023 – After hearing about the community benefits of our project Boomaroo Nurseries located in Lara Victoria have now partnered with Food Share and Volcano Produce Tower Hill to support our Hands On Learning project. They recently donated red and green cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower seedlings which Ben and the team at Volcano Produce have planted just for Food Share. These seedlings will be managed by the *Hands On Learning* students and the product will be donated to Western District Food Share for distribution to those who need emergency food across the south west.

A fantastic partnership between our new commercial partners Boomaroo Nurseries, Volcano Produce, Food Share and our local schools – a projected 5 tonnes of vegetables will be donated in 2023 with significant community, social, environmental and education benefits.

Pictured – Ben Pohlner (left) owner operator of Volcano Produce Tower Hill at Illowa.
(right) Our first delivery of seedlings from Boomaroo Nurseries October 2023.





Western District Food Share

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Perfect afternoon for a drive out to [Volcano Produce - Tower Hill](#) to pick up the beautiful [#sprayfree](#) produce freshly picked by the Hands-on-Learning [Merri River School](#) students this morning 🙌 enjoy the pics 😊 And yes Wally loves broccoli!





Volcano Produce - Lower Hill

2 September · 🌐

These kids are making a difference in our community!

Just look at the huge haul of SPRAY FREE veggies harvested by the little legends from St Patrick's Primary School Port Fairy!!! This crew did an amazing job harvesting, dressing, transporting and packing lettuces, bok choy, cabbages, and wombok. This product was then loaded into the Food Share van for Emergency Food Hampers distributed throughout the South West by [Western District Food Share](#). Top effort by all involved!



22 August · 🌐

[St Patrick's Primary School Koroit](#) Hands On Learning group were on the job today harvesting a heap of Wombok, Cabbages and Bok Choy for [Warrambool And District Food Share](#). What a great crew! Everyone pitched in to get the job done! Harvesting, dressing of product, lugging heavy crates and tubs, and loading the Food Share van. It was wet and muddy, but it was worth it! The end result - Plenty of product donated to Food Share for Emergency Food Hampers! Woohoo!!

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