

Cardinia Shire Council - 2026 Agricultural Audit: Community Outreach summary

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The draft Cardinia Shire Agricultural Audit report was submitted to the council in December 2025. Before its endorsement and finalisation, it was important to give the local community a chance to comment, share feedback, and point out any additional issues or gaps in the report.

Between January and March 2026, members of the Cardinia Shire community were invited to provide direct feedback on the initial findings and proposed actions of the DRAFT Agricultural Audit (2025), either through in-person engagement or via online platforms.

Community outreach sessions were undertaken in the districts of:

- Koo Wee Rup – 8 attendees
- Gembrook – 40+ attendees
- Pakenham – 2 attendees
- Lang Lang – 1 attendee
- 2026 Pakenham and District Agriculture and Horticulture Show – 3 attendees

Each session aimed to involve community stakeholders with the CSC Economic Development team to review audit findings, give direct feedback, and collectively analyse and refine the report's focus.

The online platform served as an alternative channel for individuals to share their insights, provide feedback, and identify additional topics or gaps for future consideration. This feedback mechanism was open between January 21st – March 6th, 2026.

Community group feedback

General feedback across the four sessions confirmed that people felt the agricultural audit was a useful reference tool for baseline understanding of the peri-urban landscape in which they reside. The draft audit report was described as a 'line in the sand'; a moment intended to foster greater connection and momentum among rural stakeholders, enabling them to provide meaningful contributions that may inform future CSC policy, strategy, and advocacy efforts.

Positive feedback was also received regarding the allocation of key Opportunities for Action towards resources and workforce support prior to the finalisation of the audit report. Notably around the following progress:

- The appointment of a Food & Agribusiness Officer
- Establishment of a Food and Agribusiness Advisory Committee

A wide range of issues were brought up during these outreach forums, and the Economic Development team recognised that these topics would need additional review, discussion, and potential integration in future council and community engagements. Specifically, this relates to rural land use planning, zoning, farm rating, permit process, and protecting high-value soils.

Table 1 summarises outreach feedback on community views, ideas, challenges, and barriers to rural land use and business development across the shire.

Table 1. Agricultural Audit: Community Group feedback

Session	Session
Gembrook	Koo Wee Rup
General feedback: 19/02/2026 POLICY & STRATEGY Ag Strategy: • What is our future landscape identity • Is there a 3rd identity (past identity for timber, potatoes) • Ensure sub-district nuances to cater for accurate needs • Freight and logistics: focus on in/out for shire • Local purchasing: opportunities for procurement • High ag land protection: identify • Water security planning: collaboration across stakeholders (MW, SRW) • Smaller holdings; peri-urban lifestyle area, ancillary, lack of ROI options INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT • Strengthen local networks • Agribusiness forum: local • Calendar of networking events • Support for small landholders: learning • Regenerative farming practices: encourage • Need to talk amongst each other and garner ideas • The more organised the community is – the better the land use outcomes will be • Common community interest leads to better communication, collaboration, partnerships, aligned vision, values, ideas, joint ventures RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT • Mapping supply chain: where does produce go? • Updating the value of agricultural \$ needs to be ongoing • Soil contamination constraints restrict production MARKETING & BRANDING • Provenance: Increased awareness of local food production • Local branding: food bowl • Do you want to keep green rolling hills • Puffy Billy: signature flagship; attraction point • Agritourism: future for smaller businesses: niche market, farmgate, agritourism (not for the SUZ (segregate data) PLANNING • Need a refreshed land use understanding • Review of Farmland rates: community forum (differential rates for land use) • Planning / red tape: will restrict interest in wanting to develop ideas into on-ground activities • Having an internal advocate for rural community voices to be heard really matters • Permit process: improved understanding of timelines WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: • Employment data: understated values in the audit • Improved data sets required (Values and employment)	General feedback: 09/02/2026 POLICY & STRATEGY Ag Strategy: • Include an action plan in back of Strategy and track timelines for implementation • Must be informed and facilitated by the Food & Ag Advisory committee • Ensure no personal vested interest in being on the committee • Need to represent the wider industry view and advocate on their behalf • Meetings need to be more regular (at least 4x year) INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT • Council must advocate for farmers on a larger scale; especially to the state government and represent local needs and opportunities RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT • Very special soils in the area (unique) and need protection • Swamp is only as good as the draining (getting water to it and getting water out of it) • Significant potential to increase productivity in soils WATER • Farms require water, yet many do not have reliable access to it. • Need to facilitate collaborative discussions with Melbourne Water and SRW to review current restrictions • Recycled water: under construction (concerns it is cost prohibitive) • Environmental flow (applying MDBC) rules to the river (No flow upstream opportunities) PLANNING • Planning permits; inconsistency in decision making for individuals (which is upsetting for people) • UGB: needs to be adjusted; creates traffic through farmland which is predominately urban traffic • A nightmare to farm in the UGB with an increase in on-farm biosecurity risks • Signals need to be clear: planning decisions need to protect agricultural lands WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT • Land banking: Shire misses out on a lot of local employment opportunities due to declines in overall production levels and lower density rural communities FOOD BOWL • Urban expansion is real: but peri-urban food production can still be protected, valued and grown • Land banking: transition -> yield decline commences PEST CONTROL • Significant weed and pest control deficiencies in district

Lang Lang	Pakenham
Attendees: Focus on Broiler industry General Feedback: 11/03/2026 POLICY & STRATEGY Food & Agriculture Advisory committee: - Committee make up must include hobby, commercial, investment farmers - Demographics need to be understood better: drivers and motivations of land use INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT - All farmers in the shire of Cardinia need to do well for the shire to do well - Council needs to support industry capacity building and enable all types of farms to “work” (i.e. viable) in the peri-urban landscape RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT - Chicken manure: termed as industrial waste by EPA FOOD BOWL: IMPACTS - Significant level of chicken meat production in the shire (Chicken is the cheapest protein source) - Industry is competing with sand quarries for good land/water security (restricts potential commercial expansion) - Quarries have potential to move onto good quality farmland as state government supports developments WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT - Significant employment focused around one broiler production unit. - Need to better understand the value and contributions of the local workforce which includes: - Shed cleaners and Spray crew - Service people - Pick up crews - Transport: Live haul; feed distribution - Inputs: local sourcing - Feed: local sourcing	Attendees: Focus on Broiler industry General Feedback: 02/03/2026 BROILER INDUSTRY - Best practice: Promote industry best practices implemented to minimise off-site amenity issues - Odour: control on site to reduce smell: all waste run off/chemicals flow into retention dams - Nutrition: improvements in feed preparations to reduce odour have been implemented by industry - Flooring materials: compulsory to remain dry - Service roads: maintain dust suppression were possible - Buffer zones: encourage planting of diverse vegetation along boundaries to screen shed activity - Live haul & Process: Feed trucks need regular site access - Can a road grading program be linked to commercial land use priorities?

On-line feedback

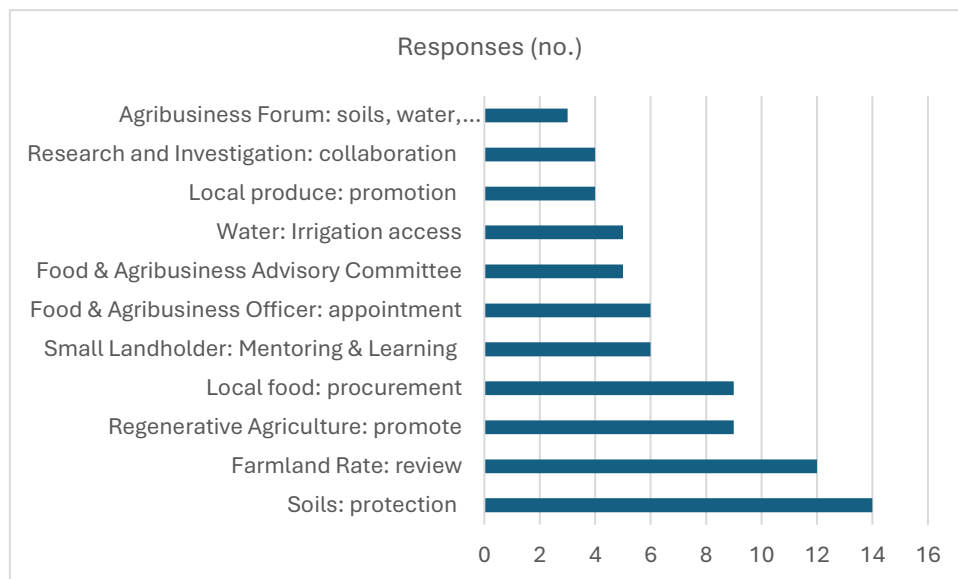
Twenty individual responses were received from community stakeholders via on-line feedback and reiterated the following audit themes as important areas for attention and action.

Theme	Number of responses
1. Soil protection: protect	14
2. Farmland rate policy: review	12
3. Regenerative practices: promote	9
4. Local Food Procurement: encourage	9
5. Small Landholder Learning and mentoring: networking	6
6. Food & Agribusiness Business Officer: appointment	6

Feedback also covered additional areas for action and attention; but recorded a lower number of individual responses:

- Establish a local Food & Agribusiness Advisory Committee
- Undertake an Agribusiness Forum: focus on soils, water, workforce issues
- Enhance promotion of local seasonal produce: Cardinia Food Bowl
- Identify research collaboration with RDE agencies to benefit on-ground management across local industries
- Review constraints to seasonal water access

Summary of online responses



Online: Additional comments or feedback captured about the Draft Agribusiness Audit?

Land use planning was identified as a critical area for ongoing focus, review and improvement with specific feedback as follows:

- *Farmers require stricter planning policy to deter urban development on high quality soils as well as more investment in regenerative agriculture which in turn will lead to less water use.*
- *Refine policy for when farmland abuts residential or semi residential areas, especially for noise, machinery/truck access*
- *I welcome Cardinia Shire Council initiative to help and preserve for what's left of the highly productive land that is suited for commercial farming food production.*
- *Protect our local Agri/Hort industries*
- *Put boundary around urban expansion in shire cities to protect valuable agricultural land.*

Conclusions

Community feedback supports the Agricultural audit findings, confirming the initial strategic focus and actions. Participants supported the integrated food systems approach, affirming the key elements of the recommended framework for the Agricultural Strategy:

Integrated Food Systems Approach

- **Land Use Planning:** Implement robust land use planning with limits placed on rural land development and transfer demand diverted to regional settlements
- **Support Local Farmers:** Provide support to local farmers through various means such as grants, training, and land management resources.
- **Promote Sustainable Farming Practices:** Encourage the use of sustainable farming practices and technologies. i.e. Primary Production Adaptation Action Plan in Victoria supports sustainable land management and farm planning services
- **Strengthen Local Food Systems:** Build local food systems and balance food exports with local needs. Promoting local produce markets and implementing policies that favour local food production and distribution
- **Educate and Engage the Community:** Enhance awareness about the importance of local agriculture and its role in the economy. This can be done through educational programs, community engagement initiatives, and public consultations
- **Collaboration and Connection:** Build collaboration and connection within the food system. Partnerships between farmers, food businesses, and local government, promoting regional cooperation.

The Agricultural Audit (2026) offers a new baseline roadmap for rural initiatives to support CSC's peri-urban agricultural landscape. Community feedback was positive, showing strong interest in advancing the Opportunities for Actions within an integrated food systems approach to enhance the Cardinia Food Bowl (Preservation, Strengthening, Growth, Prosperity).