

Special Issue of Australian Journal of Environmental Education

Growing Local and Global Futures: The Impacts, Imperatives, and Complexities of Food Systems Education

Guest Editors

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Timeline:

- Call for papers: February 2026
- Abstracts due: 15th May 2026
    - Email abstracts (300-400 words) to abbey.macdonald@utas.edu.au
- Full Manuscripts due: 15th September 2026
    - Submit to AJEE (See author instructions, 6 – 7000 words)
- Publication of Special Issue: Volume 43 (manuscripts published on FirstView asap)

Rationale and scope

Food systems encompass all processes, practices, and initiatives involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of food, and are shaped by complex interacting ecological and social elements (Ingram, 2011; Nguyen, 2018). Education intersects directly with the contemporary political dilemmas that enable and constrain food systems. These assets include building knowledge, skills, and capabilities that equip the population to engage with and navigate the tensions, dilemmas, and opportunities arising within and between industrial Western agriculture and sustainability, as well as the social justice imperatives of food security and food sovereignty (Meek & Tarlau, 2016). These are just some of the reasons why education plays a central role in supporting the mobilisation of food systems and the effective operationalisation of the entire food system ecology (Lopes et al., 2025; Ribeiro Duthie, 2011).

Food Systems Education (FSE) is a growing field that spans all levels of learning from school-based settings to community initiatives to higher education and, that in the West, is situated across diverse disciplinary areas from agriculture to ecology to health and nutrition (Hilimire et al., 2024; Lieblein et al., 2000; 2008). Food systems are mobilised through relational human efforts and actions grounded in strong food literacy foundations and pathways into

agrifood and postsecondary futures (Klerkx & Begemann, 2020). Food literacy is a key concept within Western food systems education, equipping consumers and those involved in system mobilisation with the practices, skills, and knowledge required to engage meaningfully with food literacy foundations and pathways into agrifood and postsecondary futures. Through closer examination of FSE initiatives, we can begin to recognise, understand and appreciate the breadth and diversity inherent in this work, locally, nationally and globally. These can include, for example but not limited to, school-based food, kitchen and garden programs (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024), community driven food justice projects (Wekerle, 2004), and university level agrifood innovation and sustainability courses (Francis et al., 2011).

In school-based contexts, food systems education initiatives can play a key role in connecting curriculum with lived contexts through the fostering of partnerships between schools, communities, and industry (Holloway et al., 2023). These interrelationships often offer rich, place-responsive learning opportunities that situate students and communities within broader food, ecological, and cultural systems (McVittie et al., 2019). The environments in which these interrelationships are supported to flourish typically foreground relationality and reciprocity in ways that position food as a vital site of ecological, cultural, and more-than-human entanglement (Curl & Truelove, 2012; MacDonald et al., 2025).

FSE presents a unique starting point for learning, as it equips learners to engage critically and creatively with health, culture, and the interconnected social-ecological systems that shape life at both local and global scales (Bohunicky et al., 2021; Olive et al., 2024). A growing body of evidence affirms the significant benefits food systems education initiatives deliver for and with young people and communities (Block et al., 2015; Welch et al, 2023). Demonstrated outcomes range from measurable gains in academic achievement and health to strengthened cultural identity (Badham et al., 2021; Watabe & Takano, 2025) community resilience (Ribeiro Duthie, 2021; Wittenberg at al., 2022), and socio-ecological literacies (Turner et al., 2022; Welch et al., 2016). Many programs are recognised for their capacity to promote sustainable practices, develop skills for healthy living, and build environmental stewardship, cultural values and social cohesion (Hogarth et al., 2025; Taylor et al., 2021).

FSE initiatives are being increasingly recognised and celebrated for their capacity to offer students authentic, contextually relevant ways of living, working and engaging with the world, with core dimensions of holistic development essential for being, becoming and belonging. These dimensions have been shown to be vital for achieving enduring educational and wellbeing outcomes that extend beyond schooling (Kilpatrick et al., 2023; Wise et al., 2022). These outcomes include attuning learners to transformative, future oriented postsecondary pathways in industry and community, as well as to the broader practices and responsibilities as active food citizenship (Beasy et al., 2023; Nash et al., 2024).

Despite the tangible successes of FSE and its demonstrated potential for further impacts to be realised, persistent challenges remain in how advocates communicate its value and in securing recognition and long-term investment from key stakeholders at policy and system

levels (Lohr et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2021; Yeatman et al., 2014). Maximising the demonstrated ability of FSE initiatives to address critical issues for education, public health, food security, and cultural/community transformation requires coordinated policy action and strategic advocacy supported by the generation and communication of a robust research evidence base (Erceg et al., 2025; Williams et al., 2021) term investment from key stakeholders at policy and system levels.

Articulating the distinctive role and proven impact of FSE positions it not only an educational platform but also a catalyst for cultural transformation and systemic change (Lieblein et al., 2008; Wolsey & Lapp, 2014). This calls for reframing food not simply as a resource for curriculum delivery or health intervention, but as a relational pedagogical medium capable of transforming how societies understand care, interdependence, and planetary responsibility (Narayan et al., 2020; Walshe et al., 2024). Prioritising and investing in the proven potential of this work is essential to secure sustained support from governments, education departments, and policy leaders globally (Hogarth, 2025; White et al., 2024).

To advance understanding of the contributions food systems education initiatives make, it is pertinent to examine the unique curricula-pedagogic (Ball, 1990; Brooke et al., 2025) and metho-pedagogical affordances (Coleman et al., 2025; Gallagher & Wessels, 2011) that emerge within food systems education contexts. These settings are far more than sites for content delivery; they function as dynamic, relational spaces where practice, place, and partnership converge in ways that can challenge and invite reimagination of conventional approaches to implementation, inquiry, and evaluation (Chan et al., 2022; Christian et al., 2023).

Investigating the collective features and attributes of food systems education can offer critical insight into how their initiatives activate and nurture transformative pedagogies and methodologies that weave reciprocity, care, and ecological consciousness into teaching and learning (Hogarth et al., 2025; Jukes et al., 2021; McLeod et al., 2020). FSE scholarship collectively demonstrates that meaningful engagement with food systems requires critical examination of the political structures and agendas that shape them.

This call for papers highlights examples of scholarship exploring how trade policy, corporate consolidation, and regulatory frameworks are felt to influence access to food, doing so in ways that can privilege particular knowledge production systems while marginalising others (Bohunicky et al., 2021; Lopes et al., 2025; Parker & Johnson, 2019). Drawing on Freire (2020), Meek and Tarlau (2016) examine how FSE can be mobilised as a vehicle for social transformation. Their work illustrates the need to engage critically with policy processes, revealing how implementation plays a decisive role in either addressing or reproducing inequity across social, economic, and agricultural systems,

Such analyses reinforce the importance of criticality as a central dimension of FSE. Further scholarly contributions emphasise the importance of supporting learners to grapple with tensions between industrial agricultural imperatives and socio-ecological justice, demonstrating how environmental regulation, land-use policy, and cultural food rights can

both inform and constrain possibilities for system transformation (Mann, 2019; Meek & Tarlau, 2016). These critiques foreground the many ways political forces permeate the conceptualisation and mobilisation of metho-pedagogies (Gallagher & Wessels, 2011) that can empower young people to understand how power operates within food systems (Ma Rhea, 2018).

Together, these scholarly contributions reveal how the politics of food systems can directly shape the pedagogies and methodologies used in FSE contexts. They underscore the need to attend carefully to approaches that equip learners to interrogate inequities, recognise competing interests, and envision the forms of action and advocacy required to achieve more just and sustainable food futures. It is therefore essential that the politics that both surround and arise from within contemporary food systems are brought into sustained critical examination within FSE pedagogies and methodologies.

The collective curiosities and concerns outlined in this call for papers sets the scene for FSE scholarship and practice to engage critically with food systems politics. Such engagement must incorporate perspectives from all levels of the system, including those who work directly within it, those who receive its end products, and those who shape it, such as citizens, politicians, and educators (Valley et al., 2018). Attention given here should also extend to the broader Western educational climate and landscape in which FSE approaches are designed and delivered. Such engagement must incorporate perspectives from all levels of the system, including those who work directly within it, those who receive its end products, and those who shape it, such as citizens, politicians, and educators (Valley et al., 2018).

Indicative topics

This special issue showcases contributions that critically explore the impacts, imperatives, and complexities shaping the design and delivery of food systems education initiatives in schools and communities locally, nationally and internationally. Submissions should demonstrate how, where, and in what ways FSE initiatives generate meaningful educational outcomes; respond to health, cultural, and policy priorities (Clague et al., 2018); and contribute to addressing broader socio-political and ecological challenges that both enable and constrain the pursuit of planetary health imperatives (Brand et al., 2023; Guzmán et al., 2021).

We invite empirical, speculative, theoretical, and practice-based knowledge contributions that advance critical understandings of food systems education and its political, pedagogical, and methodological dimensions. Collectively, these works should illuminate how food systems education can be conceptualised, enacted, and transformed in ways that address inequity, strengthen learner, teacher, and researcher agency, and support more just and sustainable food futures.

Topics may include (but are not limited to):

- **Innovative pedagogical approaches** for integrating food systems education within formal and informal curricula or settings, including relational, culturally responsive and more-than-human pedagogies

- **Environmental and sustainability drivers** shaping the design, implementation, and evaluation of food systems education
- **Community engagement models**, including intergenerational learning and cross-sector partnerships, industry and approaches grounded in reciprocity, care, and local food sovereignty
- **Cultural and First Nations ways, perspectives or partnerships** on food growing, harvesting, preparing, sharing and/or sovereignty within educational contexts
- **Policy frameworks, funding mechanisms, and systemic factors** that support or hinder food systems education initiatives
- **Issues of scalability, access, and equity**, including strategies for sustaining programs across diverse contexts
- **Innovative research paradigms, methodologies and methods** for the responsive investigation and evaluation of food systems education initiatives, including through transdisciplinary, creative practice, relational and participatory models.
- **Food systems education as transformative spaces** for cultivating ecological literacy, planetary ethics, learner agency, and active citizenship
- **Comparative and cross-cultural studies** of food systems education initiatives across regions, nations and land or Country.

All submissions should showcase research that demonstrably adheres to approved ethical permissions, expectations and affordances required of academic scholarship. Where relevant, submissions must also align with ethical codes and frameworks relating to the safeguarding of creative, cultural, and intellectual property.

We welcome researchers seeking to prepare a submission showcasing non-traditional research or practice-based accounts of educational work in and across diverse contexts. We ask that you confirm the publication strategy clearly in your proposal.

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Bios for guest editorial team

Associate Professor Abbey MacDonald

Dr. Abbey MacDonald is an Associate Professor in Arts Education at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). Her scholarship interrogates the intersections of education, creative arts, and cultural practice, foregrounding collaborative inquiry with schools, communities, and industry partners. This includes evaluative research on initiatives such as school kitchen garden programs, emphasizing their pedagogical and socio-cultural impact. A/Prof. MacDonald is widely recognised for advancing methodological innovations in practice-based research, with her work featured in leading methodology compendia and handbooks, including invitations to explore novel applications, emerging parameters, and future directions for arts-based research.

Dr Kim Beasy

Dr. Kim Beasy is Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), renowned for her leadership in sustainability education, inclusive pedagogy, and place-based learning. Her work interrogates how educational systems can foster transformative engagement with complex social and environmental issues, and how curriculum and pedagogy can be designed to support justice-oriented futures. Dr. Beasy has led and contributed to multiple nationally and internationally recognised projects, including Curious Climate Schools, the Tassie Climate Change-Makers Project, and a Trans-Tasman longitudinal study tracking beginning teachers' experiences of inclusive practice and professional identity across four universities.

Professor Sue Kilpatrick

With senior leadership roles including Professorial and Pro-Vice Chancellor appointments at the University of Tasmania and Deakin University, Professor Sue Kilpatrick is widely recognised as a leading scholar in economics, vocational education and training (VET), rural education, development, and health. She has led more than 80 research projects and consultancies valued at over AUD $10 million. Prof. Kilpatrick's research significantly influenced national agricultural training policy, shaping the multimillion-dollar joint

Australian federal–state FarmBis program and laying the foundation for the current today's Farm Business Resilience Program (FBRP) under the Future Drought Fund. An expert in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, Prof. Kilpatrick addresses critical issues in higher education, equity in education access and participation, agricultural extension, innovation and social capital. Her work demonstrates a sustained commitment to advancing scholarship and shaping practice across these domains.

Dr Rosie Welch

Dr. Rosie Welch is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, where her research interrogates the socio-cultural and material complexities of health across schools, teacher education, institutions, government, and community settings. Drawing on design, sociology, cultural studies, and education, her work applies critical and creative approaches to social challenges, including public pedagogy, media, curriculum, Indigenous–settler relations, and the role of gardens and learning places in everyday life, particularly in relation to health, food studies, wellbeing, and the environment.

Professor Kit Wise

Professor Kit Wise is a leading figure in Australian creative arts education, shaping global conversations on transformative arts pedagogies across diverse learning contexts. He has held influential leadership roles in national bodies such as the Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA) and the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS), driving sector-wide innovation. Since 2008, Prof. Wise has served in senior academic leadership positions in Australian tertiary institutions and is currently Dean of the School of Art at RMIT University. His research focuses on interdisciplinary curriculum and pedagogy in schools and higher education, and he has advised creative arts institutions internationally on course design and interdisciplinarity, including LaSalle (Singapore), Massey University (New Zealand), and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Canada)

Sarah Brooke

Sarah Brooke is a PhD candidate and Graduate Teaching Fellow in Arts Education at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), as well as a practicing artist, educator, and researcher. With over 15 years' experience as a specialist visual arts teacher, Brooke's work champions genuine co-design and community-engaged practice for education programs in schools. Her doctoral research investigates teacher confidence and competence in visual arts education through arts-based and storied methodologies, focusing on innovative professional learning for generalist primary teachers using a/r/tographic approaches. Brooke holds a range of leadership roles in arts education professional associations, including President of the Tasmanian Art Teachers Association (TATA) and Secretary of Art Education Australia (AEA), and serves on the Public Arts Advisory Committee for Devonport City Council in Tasmania. Her practice and research are characterised by a strong commitment to collaborative and creative pedagogies that forge meaningful connections between schools, communities, and the art.

Dr Joselynn Baltra-Ulloa

Dr Joselynn Baltra-Ulloa (Jos) is Head of Community Practice and Impact at the Material Institute. A Mapuche–Australian educator of refugee background, she brings over twenty

years' experience across tertiary education, health and community services, including 18 years as a social work academic. Her research and practice centre on decolonising social and community work and education, transformative social innovation, sustainability and regenerative practice, grounded in Southern and Indigenous knowledges. Jos works alongside Indigenous and First Nations scholars and education collectives globally, leading community-based, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary projects that build capacity for decolonisation and foster regenerative relationships between people, communities and the natural world. Drawn to community development and whole-systems thinking, she is passionate about weaving networks that support experimentation, storytelling, expression and new ways of knowing, being and doing. Her pedagogical practice is progressive, relational and inclusive, centring community, mutual respect, culturally responsive learning and knowledge co-creation.