

Promoting a positive food culture in schools

Outputs, impacts and achievements in 2023



Pick of the Crop is a whole school healthy eating initiative developed by Health and Wellbeing Queensland (HWQld) to increase opportunities for primary school students in Queensland to learn about and eat more vegetables and fruit through the promotion of a positive food culture.

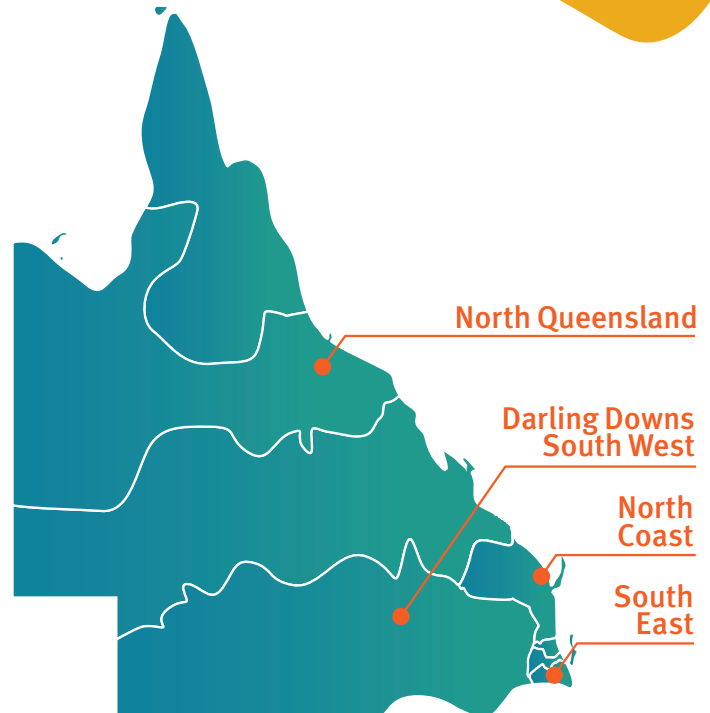
In 2023, 114 schools in North Queensland, North Coast, South East and Darling Downs South West Department of Education Regions participated in Pick of the Crop.

Pick of the Crop was piloted in 2021 with 35 schools and expanded to 59 schools in its second year of implementation in 2022.

Schools participate in Pick of the Crop by developing locally designed actions around five components.



Independent evaluation in 2021 and 2022 was conducted by the Institute of Social Science Research, The University of Queensland. These focused on the feasibility and scalability of Pick of the Crop, provided insights on activities undertaken and inform learning, decision making and future investment decisions.



Evaluation in 2023

The 2023 evaluation aimed to highlight the impacts, achievements, and outcomes resulting from the implementation of Pick of the Crop.

Sources of information included:

1. Experiences and impact of grower connections with Pick of the Crop;
2. Key impacts and recommendations from Pick of the Crop implementation partners hosting regional coordinators across four Queensland regions; and
3. Analysis of data provided by Pick of the Crop schools during a Term 4 review process, conducted by HWQld.

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1. Impacts on connections with growers

Pick of the Crop schools connect with local producers, growers, and industry members to improve students' food, nutrition, and agricultural knowledge and skills.

Activities included excursions, incursions, or connecting with other programs that cover stages from planting and healthy soils through to processing, packing, and transportation.

A Griffith University Nutrition and Dietetic student placement project was completed from October to November 2023, focusing on the Food and Grower Connections of Pick of the Crop. The aim of their project was to gain an understanding of growers experiences and perspectives of Pick of the Crop.

The RE-AIM Framework was used to structure the evaluation, with both inductive and deductive thematic analysis undertaken.

Key Findings

Reach

- 24 surveys with growers
- 8 semi-structured interviews with growers
- 5 semi-structured interviews with Pick of the Crop regional coordinators.

Businesses included hobby farmers, small business farmers, nursery gardeners, and agricultural-tourism farms.

Effectiveness

Acknowledgement and recognition by schools was a strong indicator of satisfaction. All students involved in grower activities were able to consume vegetables and fruit.

Most growers wanted more support for:

- ▶ Developing curriculum aligned content
- ▶ Co-facilitation and staffing
- ▶ Economic overheads
- ▶ Student supervision

Adoption

Growers who had previously worked with schools were very likely to participate.

Motivations for growers to be involved included:

- ✓ Opportunities to connect with the community
- ✓ Inspiring and educating children
- ✓ The teaching of real-life skills
- ✓ Increasing awareness of their business
- ✓ Awareness of regions local produce
- ✓ Advocacy for the agricultural industry
- ✓ Existing relationships with schools

Implementation

Common activities implemented by growers included **farm tours, sustainability and agricultural education, and produce picking and taste-testing.** These were dependent on important factors such as preparation, funding, coordination, time of year, and health and safety.

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Maintenance

All growers were very likely to continue their involvement in Pick of the Crop, due to a desire to give back to the community, recognition and advertisement for their business, and community connections.

Opportunities

- ☐ Funding to cover overheads and losses
- ☐ Implement farm excursions in Terms 2 and 3 or when main crops are harvested
- ☐ Assist curriculum planning to align with Pick of the Crop components
- ☐ Virtual reality farm incursions

WHAT GROWERS SAID

“The kids leave being so excited! They can’t wait to go home and tell their parents. They have even come to the local supermarket and recognised us.”

“It’s a great learning experience for the kids to see how their fruit ends up in the supermarket.”

“I will remain involved with it as long as the program is run.”

2. Feedback reported by implementation partners

Pick of the Crop schools receive support, assistance, and advice from locally-based regional coordinators who were hosted by local organisations (known as Implementation Partners), through funding from HWQld.

Implementation partners include:

- Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Ltd
- Bowen Gumlu Growers Association
- Childrens Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service
- Darling Downs Health

As part of the reporting process completed at the end of 2023, implementation partners were asked to provide feedback on the most significant impact of Pick of the Crop for them and suggest recommendations.

Most significant impact highlighted by implementation partners include:

- ✓ **School recruitment** - multiple engagement opportunities were needed to recruit schools for participation in Pick of the Crop, requiring extensive time.
- ✓ **Support for schools** - schools value support, particularly in the early days.
- ✓ **Links to curriculum** - there was increased discussion and inclusion of veggies and fruit, agriculture, and nutrition education across multiple classroom subjects, beyond the Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) requirements.

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✓ **Stakeholder and community engagements** - positive connections with local organisations, businesses and programs resulted in donations, excursions, shared experiences, and support for school-based activities. Collaboration across the regional coordinator team was very positive.

✓ **School gardens** - gardens (new or revitalised) were schools' topmost positive impact as they energised students and provided positive learning experiences.

✓ **Promotions and events** - by holding regular events, schools were kept engaged.

✓ **School Champions** - reported an appreciation in seeing students try new veggies and fruit and how students learnt to prepare meals with freshly grown produce, which carried over to the home environment.

✓ **Student engagement and impact** - as well as the increased exposure to and willingness of students to try new veggies and fruit, students also found a passion for growing their own veggies and offered the potential creation of future farmers, chefs, horticulturalists, and food scientists.

Recommendations from implementation partners

□ Continue the **flexible approach** of Pick of the Crop.

□ Enable Pick of the Crop to be sustainable and effective (particularly for year 3 and 4 schools) by **extending funding**.

□ **Establishment of a steering committee** to strengthen service delivery, develop resources and partnerships.

□ **Ongoing support by regional coordinators for schools** due to school staff turnover.

□ Increased resources, setting deadlines and better processes may **improve communication** with schools that can be challenging to establish and maintain.

□ **Support connections between regional coordinators.**

□ **Increase face-to-face engagement** between coordinators and HWQld to streamline processes and improve service delivery.

□ **Increased professional development opportunities for regional coordinators.**

□ **Increase links to the curriculum.**

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3. School reviews in 2023

As part of schools participation in Pick of the Crop, it is expected they complete an online review in Term 4. This provides opportunities for HWQld to hear schools' experiences of Pick of the Crop, gain insights into achievements or impacts and inform future directions of the initiative. Regional coordinators support schools to complete the survey, with results analysed by HWQld.

At the end of Term 4, 2023, 79 schools completed a Qualtrics survey.

Number of schools who completed the survey, by years of participation

1 year of participation

32
schools

2 years of participation

24
schools

3 years of participation

23
schools

WHAT SCHOOLS SAID

“Positive connections with local organisations, businesses and programs that resulted in donations, excursions, shared experiences, and support for school-based activities were seen.”

“As well as the increased exposure to and willingness of students to try new veggies and fruit, students also found a passion for growing their own veggies and offered the potential creation of future farmers, chefs, horticulturalists, and food scientists.”

How interested schools are in ongoing implementation of Pick of the Crop

4.27 out of 5

How likely participating schools are to recommend Pick of the Crop to other schools

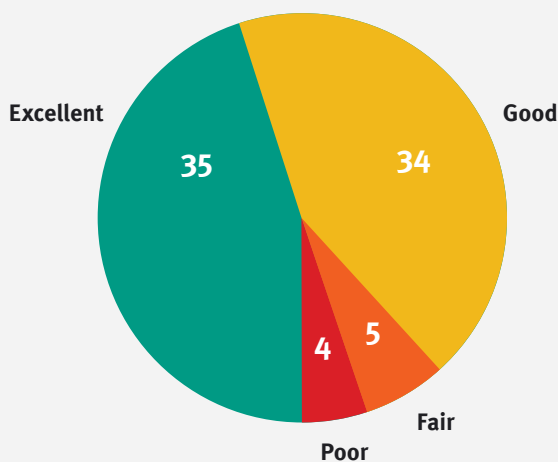
4.84 out of 5

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Experience with Pick of the Crop



Three most enabling factors

- ✓ Funding
- ✓ Support from regional coordinators
- ✓ School garden establishment / revamping

Three most challenging factors

- ▶ Lack of time
- ▶ Lack of staff
- ▶ Drought

How committed growers are to ongoing implementation of Pick of the Crop

4.23 out of 5

Evaluation Contributors and acknowledgements

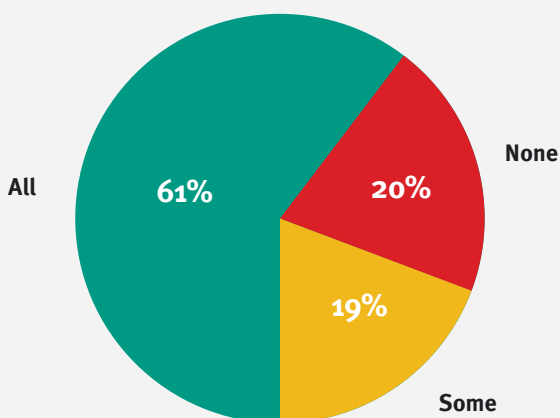
The Growers Survey was led by Griffith University students Christina Mailer and Gina-Maree Teixeira, and HWQld team members Mathew Dick, Charlotte Morrison and Nicole Murray. Thanks to the Pick of the Crop Implementation partners, local growers, and regional coordinators for their contribution to this evaluation.

HWQld wish to thank all the schools who participated in the Term 4 review, providing feedback and continuing to inspire their students to learn about and taste veggies and fruit

HWQld wish to thank the implementation partners: Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Ltd; Bowen Gumlu Growers; Darling Downs Health and Childrens Health Queensland HHS for their feedback on Pick of the Crop, and ongoing commitment and dedication in working with us.

December 2024

Actions completed from action plan



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