



The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

Photo: Wendy Wei from Pexels.

More Tasmanians started growing their own food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Report number: 20 | Date: 23 June 2020 | Authors: Katherine Kent, Sandra Murray, Stuart Auckland, Beth Penrose

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic sparked Australian's interest in home gardening, with people stocking up on items to produce their own food at home, including vegetable and herb seeds and seedlings. Given the many benefits of gardening, this interest in increased self-sufficiency could be seen as a positive response to the pandemic.

The Tasmania Project's Food Survey of 1170 Tasmanians investigated if respondents were growing and catching more of their own food, and whether the pandemic had increased their interest in learning how to grow, catch and hunt food.

Understanding who our new home gardeners are in Tasmania could reveal where there are new opportunities for people to continue developing and sharing food production and catching skills, to assist with maintaining gardening for both self-provisioning and health into the future.

Key findings

- 35% of respondents reported that they were growing more of their own food as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 33% of respondents reported that they are interested in how to grow, catch or hunt food.
- A minority of respondents (15%) agreed that they were catching less of their own food during COVID-19.

Survey results

Growing food at home

Across Tasmania, 35% of respondents reported that they were growing more of their own food as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A greater proportion of respondents living in rural areas reported growing more of their own food (44%) in comparison to those living in urban areas (31%).

More people aged 46-55 years (40%) and people aged 65 years or older (34%) reported growing more of their own food during the pandemic in comparison to younger respondents aged 18-24 years (18%).

Interestingly, people living with a health condition or disability were more likely to be growing more of their own food (40%) in comparison to those without a disability (33%). Respondents who were food insecure were also growing more of their own food during COVID-19 (40%) versus those who were food secure (33%).



Photo by João Jesus from Pexels

Change to household income was a driving factor for growing food at home. Those who had no loss in income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (32%) were less likely to report growing more of their own food in comparison to those who had lost income. For example, 39% of respondents who had lost a quarter of their income and 43% who had lost up to half of their income reported growing more food. This number grew to 77% of respondents who had lost the majority (up to 99%) of their income.

Catching and hunting food

As part of the COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the survey, recreational boating and fishing were considered non-essential activities and were not allowed. This may have impacted on Tasmanians' ability for self-sufficiency through catching their own food.

The majority (50%) of respondents were neutral on whether they had caught less of their own food during the COVID-19 pandemic, 35% disagreed that COVID-19 restrictions mean they were catching less of their own food, and a minority (15%) agreed that they were catching less of their own food during COVID-19. A greater proportion of those who reported catching less of their own food were from the Northern regions (18%) and North-West and West regions (17%), with fewer respondents from the South (13%) reporting being impacted.

Males (19%) reported that restrictions meant they were catching less of their own food in comparison to a smaller proportion of females (13%). Those who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (20%) reported catching less food than those who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (15%).

Respondents who were food insecure reported being unable to catch as much of their own food during COVID-19 (22%) versus those who were food secure (13%).

Interest in learning how to grow, catch or hunt food

Across Tasmania, 33% of respondents reported that they were interested in how to grow, catch or hunt food.

47% of people living in urban areas reported being uninterested in learning how to grow, catch or hunt food, compared to 40% of those living in rural areas.

More younger respondents (36% of 18-25 year old and 40% of 26-35 year old respondents) reported being interested in how to grow, catch or hunt food compared to older respondents (20% of those aged 65 years or more). This may be due to a higher level of relevant skills and/or knowledge among older respondents.

A greater number of people with higher levels of education were more likely to report being interested in learning to grow, catch or hunt food, with 33% of respondents with a University education and 35% of respondents with a diploma or TAFE certificate reporting interest, in comparison to 26% of people whose highest level of education is high school (year 12).

38% of respondents with dependents in the household indicated they were interested in learning to grow, catch or hunt food, which is higher than single person households (23%).

A drop in household income related to the COVID-19 pandemic was a major factor contributing to interest in learning to grow, catch or hunt food, with interest increasing relative to the drop to income. While 30% of respondents who had no loss in income indicated they were interested in learning more, this increased to 35% of those who had lost a quarter of income, 42% of those who had lost half of their income, and 65% of those who had lost the majority of their income. Respondents who were food insecure were also more interested in how to grow, catch or hunt food during COVID-19 (40%) versus those who were food secure (29%).

Where next?

Given the many benefits of gardening, which include access to green space and an increase in consumption of healthy, home-grown foods, this interest in increased self-sufficiency can be seen as a positive response to the pandemic situation.

However, empty shelves at nurseries seen earlier this year tell us that Australia was insufficiently prepared to rapidly scale up productive home gardening. Better preparation may be needed for there to be an equitable and effective response to a pandemic situation in the future.

By examining the specific groups across Tasmania who have responded to the pandemic by growing more of their own food, and who report an interest in learning how to catch or hunt for food, or grow their own produce at home, we can identify the specific groups that may need further help to develop their knowledge and skills to maintain higher levels of gardening and self-sufficiency in the future.