

**TASMANIAN**

**UNIVERSITY**

**STUDENT**

**ASSOCIATION**

## **Freshie Bag**

Bringing University of Tasmania students affordable  
fresh fruit and vegetables weekly

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

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## Executive summary

Food insecurity can be defined as insufficient food, hunger because of having no food and not being able to afford more, eating low quality food because of restricted options, or anxiety about sourcing enough food (New South Wales Centre for Public Health Nutrition, 2003).

The Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) is a student led collective that provides University of Tasmania (UTAS) students with representation, support, counselling, clubs and societies, and financial support. TUSA is an encouraging space where students can have their say and ask for support during their time at university, with the main aim to be the voice of students through leadership and community building.

The partnership between TUSA and UTAS aims to combat the problem of food insecurity by implementing solutions to lower the number of students experiencing this undesirable issue. The proposal is to introduce a fresh fruit and vegetable bag scheme, that students can purchase on a weekly basis. The bag will include a range of fresh produce and will be enough to feed one or two students for a week. Bringing students together around food will help build a sense of community and support for those who need it most.

Providing students with easy access to a wide range of healthy food can help ensure their experience at UTAS is a positive, productive, and healthy one. There is ample evidence to show that consuming a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables helps to improve brain function, reduce the risk of major health problems, and have a positive effect on wellbeing. Students who are suffering food insecurity are missing out on these benefits if they skip meals, are reliant on highly processed foods, and are not getting a mix of fresh vegetables and fruit in their diets.

## Introduction

The Freshie Bag Scheme is a mishmash of "Fresh, Fruit and Veggie" bringing University of Tasmania students' fresh fruit and vegetables weekly through a TUSA and UTAS scheme. The aim of the Freshie Bag is to make sourcing fresh and healthy food easy, quick and affordable. Universities Australia released their 2017 university finances survey revealing that one in seven students commonly go without food and other essentials. This statistic increases to one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Universities Australia, 2017) and TUSA want to lower this number by making sure our students are well fed and looked after while studying and living in Tasmania.

The Freshie Bag will give students an opportunity to try new food, cook new recipes and most importantly eat a balanced diet of different coloured fresh food. Products within the bag will be sourced from local suppliers and aim to include many Tasmanian items.

Students will have the choice of a \$12 basic or \$22 premium bag each week, which will include a range of root vegetables, leafy greens, fruit and even herbs (changing frequently due to the seasons and what is in stock from the local provider).

The bags will be ordered online through Qpay and processed by a team at TUSA. The whole processes from purchasing to collecting the bags is very simple and straight forward.

## Background

The Freshie Bag Scheme has been developed by TUSA to address food insecurity amongst University of Tasmania Students. The Freshie Bag was a recommendation from the *Developing Strategic Responses to Food Security Challenges for The Tasmanian University Student Association* report by Bronwyn Mawbey, May 2021.

38% of UTAS students are suffering from food insecurity (Murray et al., 2021) with an additional 47% of those students being dissatisfied with the access and cost of food on campus. The University and TUSA already provide students with support in the form of grocery gift cards, financial counselling, pantry items in the accommodation buildings and more. The introduction of the veggie bag scheme would be an ongoing affordable option for students to gain access to quality fresh produce without having to visit a store.

This project was to research and provide detail on how to implement the veggie bag scheme for TUSA. The project required a project leader to provide critical information to implement and test the scheme.

Along with highlighting TUSA's support to help lower the percentage of students suffering from food insecurity and build a community of food passionate staff and students.

## Scope

The original scope of this project was to introduce the BringMe Home app to UTAS students. After consultation with BringMe Home and their decline to assist, the project was re-directed to focus on the veggie bag scheme that TUSA was already discussing but had no one to project manage. The scheme was run in 2019 successfully, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and structural changes in TUSA, was cancelled.

The project lead role was to design and propose the scheme, then hand the operational side of the project over to a team of dedicated TUSA staff.

## Method / Project Process

This project started by reaching out to BringMe Home and Eat Well Tasmania, which both manage applications addressing food insecurity. Eat Well Tasmania were interested to hear what the outcome of this project was and happy to provide support if needed, unlike BringMe Home which declined the request to meet (due to the pandemic).

After consultation with the project mentor, the scope of the project was changed quickly to focus on the veggie bag scheme. This saw a suite of meetings with key stakeholders in the scheme, to map out ideas and responsibilities.

An invitation was received to attend presentations by UTAS Nutrition students, who provided highly thought-out research into a veggie bag scheme of their own, looking into the cost savings, what would be in the bags, the process of ordering and tried and tested recipe ideas. These presentations helped to shape some of the information regarding the process and the produce that will go into the bags.

Meetings were had with key stakeholders at University of Sydney Food Cooperative and University of Canberra Life, who run similar but larger schemes, along with initiatives such as a student shop and pantry boxes that coincide with the veggie boxes. These have been very successful and well supported by staff and students at these universities. Conducting regular meetings with peers across UTAS/TUSA was instrumental in shaping aspects of this project such as marketing, room hire, staffing, fine tuning plans and more.

A budget was prepared (appendix 2) for the set up and pilot of the program and then a following 42-week (2022) scheme. The plan for the Freshie Bag is to run it for most of the year, even when students are on break (apart from Christmas holidays), therefore local students and accommodation residents can utilise the scheme. It is also on offer to staff as well but is yet to be promoted as an option during the pilot.

The Freshie Bag Proposal (appendix 1) has been prepared to provide TUSA with the key information needed to implement the pilot and prepare for the main roll out of the scheme. A Gantt chart (appendix 3) has been created to allocate stakeholders with tasks and a timeframe on when to complete this task. The project timeframe was quicker than expected with TUSA wanting to run the pilot throughout October 2021. This was easily managed due to the great support and guidance received.

## Data gathering methodologies and analysis

UTAS and TUSA staff were vital in gathering data on the veggie bag scheme, they provided contact details for external bodies who have produced similar initiatives or had experience in delivering food related projects to the University. The majority of information in this report has come from meeting with people via Zoom and participating in presentations. Listening to the Nutrition students' presentations on their idea of the veggie bag helped shape some of the processes and being able to ask them questions assisted in some decision making.

## Findings

Initial findings show students are calling out for support when it comes to eating a healthy, balanced diet and sourcing affordable food. On reading Bronwyn's report on Food Security, it is obvious that it is an issue at the University of Tasmania, but also nationwide. Desktop research found that other universities such as Griffith, Sydney and Canberra are doing similar things to address the issue and provide their students with support.

After discussing the Freshie Bag Scheme with the nutrition students in their tutorial, they were very eager to be involved and to purchase the bag for themselves. This provided hope that the scheme will be well received by students.

The pilot program (complete) had the most interest in Hobart, with little interest in Launceston. The students in Hobart were excited to see what is in their bags and were talking about it with their friends. The team of volunteers and the supervisors for Launceston and Hobart are doing a fantastic job rolling out the scheme.

## Discussion and recommendations

After discussions with stakeholders, it was decided to provide students with the option of a basic \$12 bag or a premium \$22 bag (instead of the originally discussed three size options), making the ordering and packing logistics easier and manageable especially during the first stages of the scheme.

A pilot program was run for four 4 weeks and only sold the basic \$12 bag. This was to help staff to iron out any issues with the process and help gain interest from students during this period.

After the pilot the stakeholders met to discuss and refine the scheme, then roll out both bag options at all three campuses in Tasmania. It was decided to trail a different pick up and order cycle as the current cycle didn't seem to be getting much interest.

The bag will be rolled out to new (and continuing) students in 2022 at Orientation week activities, within student accommodation, in communications and more. Options to deliver bags was discussed and moving the packing locations around campus so that people could see the process and ask questions was a positive suggestion.

## Conclusion

Success! The proposal for the Freshie Bag and the research undertaken was well received by TUSA and implemented successfully by a hard working team. The attached proposal (appendix 1) provided the committee with the right information, resources and context to plan and prepare the Freshie Bags. TUSA and the University will not see the outcomes of this scheme until students are next surveyed, but an increase in orders each week and conversations with students as they collect their bags, will provide a good indication as to whether this is something the students are happy to see.

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## Conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest to report.

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## Appendix

- 1 - Freshie Bag proposal
- 2 - Budget – Freshie Bag
- 3 - Pilot – Freshie Bag Gantt chart
- 4 - Freshie Bag logo