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Students want school canteens to go green with fresh fruit and veg and sustainable food waste practices

A poll of more than 1,398 South Australian high school students reveals they want their school canteens to be offering more fresh and affordable food, and to improve the way food packaging and food waste at schools is being managed.

Students want to be involved in the planning and decision-making that will decide how best to reduce their school's collective waste levels and ensure they adopt sustainable practices that include changing how food is being managed, supplied and disposed of at schools across the state.

Suggestions from students included creating more school community gardens from which canteen staff can harvest fresh, more affordable food daily, and to which school food waste currently going to landfill can be diverted as compost. They also want to see plastic packaging removed and utensils at school canteens replaced with reusable or recyclable kitchenware and cutlery, while offering students 'eat in' options to support these changes.

Members of the SA SRC's Greening Our Canteens campaign are highlighting that students want to work with their school to build a greener future. They are campaigning for government to take a state-wide approach to supporting schools and their canteens to adopt environmentally sustainable practices. This would be in addition to school wide sustainability programs and changes to waste management already in place and being made available to SA schools.

To ensure their campaign is representative of young people across the state, the poll asked students in Years 7–12 to share their thoughts on the sustainable practices they would like to see more of in their school, how environmentally friendly they think their school canteen is, and what changes would make their canteen more environmentally friendly.

SA SRC Campaign members canvassed their peers' opinions throughout March, April and May at 28 secondary schools across South Australia representing Government, Catholic and Independent sectors. The schools polled were in 15 local government areas, with responses coming from students in various year levels and with different genders.

Many young people are extremely concerned about the climate crisis. They want their school to commit to working with them to adopt environmentally sustainable practices wherever possible and their school canteen is one place they feel practical action can be taken to protect the environment and help address young people's concerns around climate change.

The SA SRC Greening our Canteens campaign operates on the premise that involving young people in greening school canteens will see schools able to provide greater variety of fresh food at more affordable prices. Ideally over time these would also include halal, dairy and gluten-free options, alongside fresh fruit and vegetables that become the norm rather than the exception for school canteens across the state.

The SA SRC Greening Our Campaigns campaign is one of five key issues identified by SA SRC representatives for student-led action this year with the other four being: Fitness for Free; Seeing Ourselves; Our Future Our Vote; and Greening Our Canteens.

Details of the 2024 SA SRC Campaigns can be found at:
<https://civicsandcitizenshipsa.com.au/young-people/sa-src/>

Quotes attributable to Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly: Access to fresh food sourced locally will help to reduce each school's carbon footprint. Putting sustainable practices in place which manage food waste and packaging appropriately, has already been achieved by many schools across the state. These schools are utilising food scraps and managing disposal of their food packaging and utensils to ensure their school canteen is championing food sustainability best practices for their students, showing by example what everyone must do to help the environment. If we can replicate at school what many children are already doing at home, we will also be helping to reinforce how important it is close the loop on food waste while ensuring students have access to affordable fresh food on a daily basis.

Quotes attributable to members of the SA SRC Free Fares for our Future Campaign:

Rose Vincent

Currently young South Australian students are not able to buy canteen food because it is too expensive, horribly unhealthy which means we don't get the energy we need for the day and impacts our environment. How is this acceptable! We are buying food that is packaged with layers of plastic and harmful materials that go into the landfill which then hurt our school environment and community. We call on the state government to help us stop this and make our canteens a place of sustainability both environmentally and economically. Take action now!

Lara Wallace

We aren't here to change the world, only the lives of students by creating greener, more sustainable canteens. This will create a ripple effect that could make a huge impact. As we lead change, the rest of the nation will follow. We can create healthier, more affordable environments for all of our students.

Download the [SA SRC Greening Our Canteens Campaign Position Brief here.](#)

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