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East Loddon Food Share Program volunteers packing grocery boxes last week.

Sharing means caring

JENNY DENTON

ON a Monday morning at the East Loddon Community Centre in Dingee, a team of volunteers is working with disciplined efficiency to pack grocery items into brown cardboard boxes.

Into the boxes go rice, Vegemite, tinned salmon and spaghetti, jam, teabags, condensed milk, toothpaste and toothbrushes, pasta, Weet-bix and Cheerios.

The crew - comprising members of the Rotary Club of Bendigo Strathdale and the local fire brigade, amongst other local volunteers - finish 144 boxes by lunchtime and prepare to start on a second batch.

Since November they have packed and distributed just under 1500 of them.

The hampers are distributed by the Salvation Army and Country

Fire Authority volunteers every three weeks or as required.

"We've regulated supply to demand. When there's a need we try to respond to it," East Loddon Food Share Program president, Leanne Welsh says.

But the latest "pack" has seen the last of a \$40,000 grant from the Bank of Melbourne Foundation disbursed into the community, which means the group is back on the hunt for funds, a time-consuming and often dispiriting task that falls to Mrs Welsh, a farmer and mother of three.

The Food Share Program has been running since 2008, when the millenium drought hit hard in the area, and the need now is probably even greater, she says.

"It's bad. We're on our sixth load of water and I don't think I had to buy this much in the millenium

drought. You live in hope that it will rain," she says.

While the boxes save households 50 or 60 dollars in groceries, which is important, their key value is in the message of care and support they communicate.

The East Loddon Food Share Program, which has partnerships with different service and community groups, as well as the Salvation Army, took a turn for the professional in 2016 when "capitalist with a social conscience" Linden Barry came on board.

"Linden was reading in the paper about the plight of farmers and how we were struggling to meet the demand for help, and he rang me and said, 'I think I'd like to come up and help.' I didn't realise he'd turn up with \$5000 worth of groceries on his first visit," Mrs Welsh said.

"Then he came on board as our chairman and brought a sense of business, a sense of professionalism to what we were doing. He was a successful business person so he had all that knowledge. That helped us immensely in getting to the point we are at today."

Mr Barry, a 37-year veteran of the CFA in Narre Warren North, on Melbourne's outskirts, is a man with a hands-on approach.

"I guess what drew me to this is that we buy the food in the morning, we put it in a box in the afternoon and it's on your kitchen table tomorrow. No BS. If we've got \$100 to spend, there's \$100 spent on groceries. It's all volunteer committee time and effort. It's just direct action," he said.

For more information on the group visit: eastloddonfoodshare.com.au

WEDDERBURN SWAP MEET & MARKET
 Saturday, May 18, Engine Park, Racecourse Rd.

Bring along your unwanted engine parts or anything else you don't need any longer, your things may be wanted by someone else!

Entry: \$2
 Stall holders: \$10
 Food and drinks available on site.
7AM START
 Contact: Trevor Bailey 5494 3152

Eucalyptus tea treat

INGLEWOOD'S historic Eucalyptus Distillery Museum is offering mother's a unique Mother's Day treat next Sunday.

Entry to the museum from 2pm for \$20 includes entry to the museum and all its attractions.

Devonshire tea, cakes and finger sand-

wiches is on offer with tea and coffee served in special style!

There will be a distillery demonstration at 3pm and a free aromatherapy gift for mothers.

Bookings close on Thursday by e-mail info@eucymuseum.com.au or phone 5438 3247.

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OVER 70? YOU STILL HAVE TO VOTE IN THE FEDERAL ELECTION

The federal election will be held on Saturday 18 May 2019. Unlike some other elections, voting is compulsory even if you're over 70 years of age. If you can't make it to a polling place on election day, you may be entitled to vote early.

For more information go to www.aec.gov.au or call the AEC on 13 23 26.

Voting is compulsory for Australian citizens aged 18 years and over. If you don't vote, you may be prosecuted.

Federal election, Saturday 18 May 2019
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ELECTION 2019

Authorised by the Australian Electoral Officer for Victoria, Melbourne