

**Submission
No 13**

FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW

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Mr AH Greenwich Committee Manager
Chair, Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning
NSW Parliament
6 Macquarie St
Sydney, NSW 2000

Re: Submission to the Legislative Assembly's Inquiry into food production and supply in NSW

Dear Committee Manager,

I welcome this inquiry initiated by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning into food production and supply in New South Wales (NSW). While transformational food system change was required long ago, it has never been more apparent than in more recent years, with crises such as the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic having thrown into stark relief the flaws of contemporary food systems.

As a member of a team conducting [research](#) into the role of local government and civil society in creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system, I support the submission provided to the Committee by Dr Belinda Reeve (University of Sydney Law School) on behalf of the research team.

I support the recommendations proposed in the Consensus Statement on *Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria*.¹ Drawing on that document, and the research conducted by myself and my team, I propose the following reforms to state-level law, policy, and funding in NSW:

- The NSW Government should follow the examples of Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia in establishing a Public Health legislative framework that sets goals and targets at the state level and requires all NSW councils to develop a Public Health and Wellbeing Plan that is consistent with the state-level plan, and which explicitly sets targets and requires action on key food system priorities.
- The Government should legislate on climate change (as Victoria has done), and in doing so, make clear the link between climate change and health. The recommended NSW local

¹ Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group, *Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement* (2022).

government Public Health and Wellbeing Plans should require councils to act on both climate change and health, with an explicit focus on food systems.

- NSW (along with other Australian states) needs to urgently amend its planning framework, including planning legislation, to address council's lack of power to approve or refuse food outlet types based on the healthiness of the food sold, and thus stem the phenomenon of 'food swamps'.
- NSW needs to develop a state-wide, integrated, and comprehensive Food System and Food Security plan that sets objectives and targets at the state level (and evaluates progress against these objectives and targets), and which empowers local governments and communities to set local objectives and targets on priority food system issues, and then work toward their achievement. This plan (and other state government activities on food systems) should be implemented and overseen by a new, whole-of-government Food Systems Committee, and be accompanied by dedicated, significant funding for local government food system policies and programs.

In addition, I present the following points for the Committee to consider.

11. Consideration of Indigenous food and land management practices.

I put my support behind any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or organisations (and their genuine non-Indigenous allies) who are relevant to and working in any of the sectors associated with this Inquiry. I cannot speak on their behalf, but do put it to the Inquiry that Indigenous food systems, food sovereignty and voices must be at the forefront of any discussions regarding food systems. This is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, NSW should develop and implement legislation and related strategies that protect the intellectual property of First Nations People and their knowledge of bush foods from non-Indigenous appropriation and economic gain.

1. Improving food security and equitable access to food.

I support fundamental conceptual points raised by associates who have provided separate submissions:

- a. Food sovereignty framing embedded as the goal of all policies, projects and initiatives.
- b. Right to food – equity and social justice at the forefront of decisions and policy-making. State government and local governments to officially recognise and act on their responsibility to implementing the Right to Food and human-rights based policies.

- c. The response to food insecurity should not be one dominated by emergency food relief/food charity, as it currently stands. We must have an approach that has the dignity of all people at heart, and allows them to grow their own food or obtain it by socially and economically acceptable means, *not* rely on charitable handouts coming from surplus food offloaded by the major supermarkets. The charitable model should be only a short-term solution for people in crisis.
- d. Food security is not only a matter of quantity. Any discussion of food security must also have nutritional quality and cultural appropriateness at its heart.

The NSW government should facilitate and invest in a NSW Food Security Council that creates a network of both cross-governmental and non-government organisations to oversee and implement a coordinated approach to improving individual and household food security.

Local governments are optimally placed to respond to the needs of their communities. However, they require ongoing state investment to support their work. Sustained funding must be available for local governments to develop place-based solutions that will improve access to healthy, affordable food for all. Responses to food security must be co-designed with people with lived experience of food insecurity.

We need better routine monitoring of food security and related indicators (e.g., fresh/healthy food pricing). Food consumption, food insecurity, food accessibility and food affordability data are outdated and inadequate. The NSW government must commit to rigorous monitoring and research to understand the extent of the problem and to assess progress, including conduct of qualitative studies.

5. Managing the impact of climate change

4. Preserving productive land and water resources.

6. Limiting the impact food production has on the environment, including overfishing.

7. Addressing complex challenges to food production including declining pollinating species and productive fertilisers.

Terms of reference 5, 4, 6, and 7 from this Inquiry are inextricably linked and cannot be addressed in siloes. Decision-making and action on environmental sustainability connected with food systems should draw on Indigenous knowledges and agroecological principles. The relationship between food systems and climate change is a reciprocal one and must be explicitly acknowledged and addressed as such.

8. Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development.

Support initiatives such as Green Connect (Wollongong-based social enterprise) that provides employment training and opportunities to young people and former refugees, including through their urban farm and market garden.

There needs to be a system for recognising the qualifications that people from overseas bring with them when they settle in Australia. Many bring a wealth of expertise relevant to the food system but are relegated to working (or volunteering) in completely irrelevant positions through desperation of needing to gain an income and being locked out of the sector in which they are trained.

Support initiatives and implement financial incentives programs that provide land for farming (including urban agriculture) at affordable prices, particularly to benefit young people wishing to enter farming.

3. Developing technologies to bring food production into cities.

Food production in cities does not need to take an agri-tech design, or not completely. There are already mechanisms at our disposal that draw on long-standing agroecological knowledge and practices, and social changes, rather than novel technology:

- a. There needs to be mapping and preservation of suitable land. This needs to be done urgently so that high quality land is not handed over to irreversible residential and/or industrial destruction/development.
- b. Changes to state planning schemes and Local Environmental Plans (at local government level) and regulation that empower local governments and planners to put urban agriculture ahead of other development. Introduce appropriate SEPP's for Councils to adopt urban agriculture policies and support new and existing activities.
- c. This land needs to be made easily and financially accessible for people and groups who want to grow food.
- d. Funding – there needs to be dedicated streams of funding for urban agriculture, specifically.
- e. Education/professional development of planners so they understand urban agriculture (and that it is not only green walls and roofs, or conducted in shipping containers).

2. Reducing food waste and destruction.

We are producing and wasting food in an unsustainable fashion. One of the primary methods of 'addressing' this issue at present is a reliance on an underfunded and under-resourced food rescue and

food charity sector. While we must reduce food waste and food losses, progress in this respect must be matched by advanced progress on household food insecurity so that those who are currently reliant on food charity are able to purchase their own food with dignity when supplies through food charity are reduced.

In the inevitable situation that some level of food waste will occur, local governments must be supported to develop infrastructure to process organic waste both from households and commercial premises.

The NSW government must also include strategies that reduce the amount of single-use packaging, particularly plastics, that are used for foods and beverages.

10. Implications for quality control and labelling of processed/manufactured food.

Eaters should be able to access and interpret as much information as possible about their food. This requires: a) for information to be available, including but not limited to origin, additives/chemical inputs/GMO, nutritional properties; and b) educational campaigns that enhance individuals' food literacy and ability to understand the information presented on food labelling and marketing.

9. Development and growth of the food industry (raw or processed) as an export.

I disagree that development of exports should be a focus of the NSW (and indeed Australian) food system. The globalised food system is the cause of many environmental, animal welfare, and farmer income problems. We should not be aspiring to grow exports when we have significant localised food system security problems.

Additional concerns not explicitly listed in the terms of reference

Governance

There is no dedicated food system policy framework at a state level in NSW (or at federal level, for that matter). The NSW government should create a comprehensive, food system policy framework at a state level that brings together all of the items included in the terms of reference for this Inquiry. This framework must be accompanied by funding specifically dedicated to *food systems*, an implementation plan, and a governance structure that includes diverse representation, including First Nations people and civil society while limiting the presence of "Big Food" at the table.

The NSW government should improve the transparency of political donations by introducing real-time declaration of political donations; add food manufacturers and associated entities to the list of prohibited political donors; and modify the government lobby register to require more detailed reporting, including details of specific lobbying activities.

Research and evidence

The NSW government must commit to a comprehensive research agenda encompassing all aspects of the food system. This includes gathering evidence of existing best-practice, adapting and scaling up proven strategies, conducting original research where evidence does not exist, and rigorous evaluation and monitoring of policy/program implementation processes and outcomes.

I look forward to following the progress of the Inquiry and welcome you to contact me should you require additional information on the points raised.

Healthy regards,



Dr Amy Carrad