

**Submission
No 18**

FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW

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Mr AH Greenwich
Chair, Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning
NSW Parliament House
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Dear Mr Greenwich,

Submission to the Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW

Thank you for inviting submissions to the *Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW*, which represents a critical opportunity to *future-proof* equitable access to food and sustainable food production in NSW.

I am writing in my capacity as a rural sociologist focused on food systems and agricultural livelihoods. This submission is my professional view. Parts of this submission were developed together with other stakeholders and networks including The Right to Food NSW and food systems strategist Mr Peter Kenyon.

Social Inequalities in the Food System

Social inequalities existed in our food system prior to COVID-19 - the social and economic crisis have only exacerbated these inequalities. This is particularly so for regional, rural and remote communities in Australia, and the behaviour around food during the first COVID19 lockdown (e.g. hoarding, stockpiling) was understandable when we use a social based food systems lens to examine these inequalities.

Specifically, there was widespread news coverage of federal and state governments inability to keep rural communities safe during the bushfires of Summer 2019-2020, and food supply issues to many towns effectively cut-off by the fires. For people who may already experience food insecurity in their daily lives, the hoarding and stockpiling of food was a reasonable response to a global crisis of unknown dimensions. In the 12 months prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown, 22% of rural Australians ran out of food and could not afford to buy more (Food Bank, 2018).

Agricultural Exports are not a proxy for Local Food Security

Australia's modern, industrialised and globalised food system is generally presented as a secure, food secure nation with a simplistic focus on Australians agricultural exports, extensive land for broadacre cropping of primarily export oriented crops and livestock, and the romanticised ideals of readily available, affordable and abundant fresh produce in rural areas.

Media attention in Australia on our food systems and the availability of food during the COVID-19 crisis paints a positive picture, with Opinion Pieces from Australian politicians telling us "[Don't Panic..](#)" (Littleproud, 2020) to analysis from the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment stating that "[Australian Consumers can be Confident in our Food Security](#)" (ABARES, 2020). Yet, these analyses and op eds are often based on raw data of agricultural outputs and food production based on geography and nutritionism and are primarily a simplistic supply side analysis.

Government ministers' assurances of no shortages of food, countered by admonishment of Australians to avoid panic-buying reveal a seeming incomprehension of the existing diversity of food systems and vulnerability to food insecurity in Australia. It did not consider the social and economic dimensions of food access.

A social science examination of how that food is distributed, purchased, accessed and used within households shows that there already existed very real barriers that keep individuals and families from having sufficient food.

Rural and Remote communities have less choice and access

The modern Australian food system creates increasingly disadvantaged communities as distance increases from urban metropolises and their central aggregating market power. This is evidenced by lack of choice, higher prices and less fresh produce outside of major state capitals. The NSW food systems are geared to work optimally in urban communities, funnelling in strongly rather than out and thereby failing communities living beyond the suburban fringe.

The NSW food system is dominated by a supermarket duopoly, concentrated urban wholesale markets and combined with an assumption that rural communities are somehow 'closer to the land' and can therefore feed themselves has seen little focus on the food system needs of rural areas.

The recent '[Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities](#)' (2020) the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council identified the problem of communities at times having no food retail outlet at all

"The lack of supermarkets in many remote towns in NSW is a principal barrier to food security for many remote Aboriginal residents. ... In three towns (Brewarrina, Goodooga, and Ivanhoe) there are no commercial supermarkets at all. In Walgett, the only supermarket in the town burnt down over a year ago, and until recently when a pop-up shop was opened, community members had to make a two-hour round trip to Lightning Ridge to shop for food"

The Changing Face of Agricultural and Food Production in Australia

The agricultural sector in Australia accounts for 1.9% of GDP and 11% of our export goods and services. Nearly 70% of our agricultural production is exported (that is, specifically grown and produced for export). In real terms, the number of farms is declining, the variety of farming enterprises is decreasing (from mixed businesses to single product businesses) and the long-term falls in real prices have been offset by volume growth (through intensification or extensification or both)¹. Farmers are already living with the impacts of climate change and The Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment estimates that since 2000, climate change has reduced average annual broadacre farm profits by 22%.

These long-term sector trends are influenced further by demographic trends that show the median age of farmers is 54 years old and 87% are aged over 35 years. In short, a fewer number of farms, that are more concentrated in their product, managed by older workers, primarily producing for export markets.

As highlighted in the ABARES analysis (2021) [Cascading planetary risks: Coming, ready or not](#)

"...Consumers and regional communities will increasingly expect producers to value and protect natural assets – including maintaining healthy ecosystems, water quality, and avoiding loss of species and habitat – and will require action by business and consumers, as well as new government policies ... Many environmental services, like pollination or replenishment of fish stocks, can no longer be taken for granted – and are often becoming more commercially valuable due to both declining natural supply and increasing demand."(para.4)

¹ Data from the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (2021) *Snapshot of Australian Agriculture 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.awe.gov.au/abares/products/insights/snapshot-of-australian-agriculture-2021#australian-farmers-receive-low-levels-of-government-support>



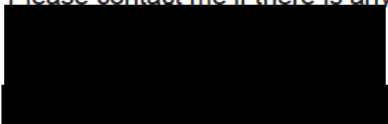
Recommendations

1. The NSW Government should legislate on climate action in line with The Paris Agreement and ambitious climate action
2. The NSW Government should make clear the link between climate action and sustainable food systems.
3. The NSW Government should follow the examples of other Australian states 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 state-level public health plans and legislation, and which explicitly sets targets and requires action on key food system priorities. The recommended plans should require councils to act on both climate action, health and well-being, with an explicit focus on food systems.
4. The NSW Government should reform State planning legislation and instruments to recognise and provide for urban agriculture and protection of land for peri-urban food production.
5. The NSW Government should develop a state-wide, integrated, and comprehensive Food System Policy. This policy should support intergovernmental and community coordination at State and LGA level. The Committee should work to integrate food policy dimensions into social, economic and environment policies, programmes, funding and initiatives.
6. The NSW Government should develop a long-term (2022-2050) Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Food Justice plan that provides both include future scenarios and contingencies for food production, supply, distribution, and access. This plan should draw on intersectional understanding of food systems (from agriculture, climate change, social and health aspects); avoid siloing food system issues and consider climate change impacts.
7. The NSW Government should appoint a Food Systems Scientific Advisory Group. The Food Systems Scientific Advisory Group should consist of civil society, academic, indigenous and community representatives able to advise, guide and provide oversight to the Food Systems Policy and Programs.
8. The NSW Government should initiate a process of agreement-making between the government and First Nations people, drawing on the sentiments in the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#). Food security, food sovereignty and food justice for all NSW communities cannot be achieved without First Nations Voice, Treaty and Truth.

As you read this submission, I hope that you might reflect on the role food has played in your life and its significance to you. Food links us to our childhoods, our culture, it nourishes our bodies, our spirits and our communities. For many, food production, supply, preparation is a livelihood, but for all, food is key part of who we are in the world and how we feel about the world.

I've welcomed the opportunity to provide this submission and I look forward to hearings, reports and government response.

Please contact me if there is any further information I can provide in relation to this submission.


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