

## **FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Sustain: The Australian Food Network  
**Date Received:** 28 February 2022

28<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Mr Alex Greenwich MP  
City of Sydney

Dear Mr Greenwich,

**Submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning  
Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW**

Thank you for inviting submissions to this inquiry into food production and supply in NSW, which represents a critical opportunity to create a healthier and more resilient, equitable, and sustainable Australian food system. We note the Terms of Reference require that the Committee on Environment and Planning inquire into and report on food production and supply in NSW on a number of matters, including:

1. Improving food security and equitable access to food.
2. Reducing food waste and destruction.
3. Developing technologies to bring food production into cities.
4. Preserving productive land and water resources.
5. Managing the impact of climate change.
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.
8. Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development.
9. Development and growth of the food industry (raw or processed) as an export.
10. Implications for quality control and labelling of processed/manufactured food.
11. Consideration of Indigenous food and land management practices.

**About Sustain: The Australian Food Network**

Sustain: The Australian Food Network is a national body and registered health promotion charity, established in January 2016, representing 30 member organisations, including 13 local governments, and over 130 individual members who work together towards building a healthy, sustainable and fair food system that benefits all Australians.

Our members support policy levers that shift individual and organisational activity towards a fair food system that has as its goal above all else, the long-term health and wellbeing of the community. Sustain would like to see the NSW Government, and indeed all governments (state, federal and local), realise the significant return on investment and potential of all forms of regenerative agriculture, urban agriculture and edible gardening. This would address significant community issues and deliver multiple beneficial outcomes through the simple acts of growing, cooking and eating nutritious food.

Sustain is a ‘think and do network’ whose mission is to design and build sustainable food systems. We base our work in the scientific understanding of the interconnectedness and mutual interdependence of all elements of food and agricultural systems, and their

**We design and build better  
food systems**

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interrelationship with other systems including education, health, economy, culture and politics. We ground our work in a principled commitment to the human right to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, which all Australian governments are bound to uphold following Australia's ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976.<sup>1</sup> Having regard to the increasing levels of food insecurity in Australia which disproportionately impact First Nations communities and other vulnerable community members, as well as the rapidly rising burden of dietary-related ill-health, it cannot reasonably be contended that Australian governments are fulfilling this commitment.

### **Acknowledgement of First Nations sovereignty**

We ground our work in the recognition and acknowledgement that all agricultural and other economic activity in Australia takes place on land stolen from First Nations peoples; and indeed, that the establishment and expansion of agriculture was a principal means of the dispossession and genocide of First Nations peoples.<sup>2</sup> The processes of historical truth-telling and a duly negotiated treaty are essential for justice for First Nations peoples. The path to a better food system for all Australians must begin with the principles of care, respect, healing, justice and regeneration.

Uncle Ghillar Michael Anderson is chief advocate of the Indigenous Sovereignty Movement, and Leader of the Euahlayi People's Republic, an Aboriginal nation-state that he proclaimed as a republic in 2013. At the Victorian Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogue, convened by Sustain and held online on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2021, Uncle Ghillar shared with attendees the following story about the food cultures of First Nations peoples. The story speaks to water, sovereignty, Country, ancient foods, and health and wellbeing. It is published with his permission.

When the creators came and they created our society, we, the Euahlayi, the Gomeroi and the Wiradjeri, we were the same skin groups, and those four skin groups all connected to an ecosystem. Within that ecosystem – everything that lives within that single system – is family. In our case, we have the Nyungar, the Kurrajong tree – that's the mother of that ecosystem, and it grows on rocky ridges, on rocky soil. Within that system, we have all the food – not only do the humans have a relationship there, but all the different plants, and animals and birds and fish where we connect down to the rivers.

This is where we have all the family. In the same way that native American Indians talk about all the family. Within that system, we're generally not supposed to eat animals and birds that are related to us as part of that ecosystem. It's a conservation method as part of maintaining our population and our numbers. It's the same as the grasses, it's the same as the fish. We have the neighbouring clans – they have a different system, different animals, birds and vegetation. Within these systems, this is how we managed to live a sustainable lifestyle, so that we're not all farming one area, but we move around.

Because our food can only be harvested in a short window of 2-3 weeks, you need to make sure that you're there at that place at that time; and so over the thousands of years we've been here we understand how that works. We didn't have to till the soil, because nature provided everything that we needed. It's a wonderful system – if we could only get back to it.

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<sup>1</sup> [OHCHR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Mayes, C. (2018). *Unsettling food politics: Agriculture, dispossession and sovereignty in Australia*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Nowadays, my people are looking at how we can plant those species in a particular area, so that – in this modern day that we’re forced to live in and we can’t get around to all those places where those things are naturally – we have to germinate them in our own areas and increase the numbers so we do have access to them at certain times.

We have 8 cycles or seasons – sometimes you’re not eating plants and fruit because they’re not there, and you’re living on fish or birds, or on meat, such as echidna or goannas. We have great variety in our diet, and it’s all sugar-free, which is a wonderful lifestyle.

## **General observations and the urgent need for transformative changes**

*“For the true measure of agriculture is not the sophistication of its equipment, the size of its income or even the statistics of its productivity, but the good health of the land.”*

— Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*

Food and agricultural systems are the biggest global drivers of climate change, species loss, hunger and ill-health. Our food system is not merely unsustainable but unfair and destructive. Below we summarise the key issues that form the context for this Committee’s inquiry.

### **Environmental crisis**

Large-scale industrialised monocultures and the deforestation and land-use change that they entail are major drivers of anthropogenic climate change, with the food system accounting for as much as 37% of all greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>3</sup> Such practices are also major drivers of the ‘unprecedented’ rapid decline in ecosystems and accelerating rate of species extinction, leading to humanity ‘eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide’.

Summarising these and other major datasets, 16 leading biophysical scientists, in a paper published in January 2021, stated that ‘the scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is so great that is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts.’ They added that the current political and policy responses were woefully inadequate to the extent and severity of the crisis, concluding that:

The gravity of the situation requires fundamental changes to global capitalism, education, and equality, which include *inter alia* the abolition of perpetual economic growth, properly pricing externalities, a rapid exit from fossil-fuel use, strict regulation of markets and property acquisition, reigning in corporate lobbying, and the empowerment of women.<sup>4</sup>

Absent such thorough-going structural changes, they warned, the future in the coming decades would be ‘ghastly.’ They concluded with an exhortation to ‘experts in any discipline that deals with the future of the biosphere and human well-being to eschew reticence, avoid sugar-coating the overwhelming challenges and ‘tell it like it is’. Anything else is misleading at best, or negligent and potentially lethal for the human enterprise at worst.

Sustain approaches our work in the spirit of this intellectual and philosophical call to arms, and we urge the Committee members to do the same.

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<sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>. Updated 2018. Accessed February 10, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw CJ, Ehrlich PR, Beattie A, et al. Underestimating the challenges of avoiding a ghastly future. *Front Conserv Sci*. 2021;1:615419. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2020.615419>

## Land and agriculture crisis

Since the advent of the ‘Green Revolution’,<sup>5</sup> capitalist agriculture has turned increasingly in the direction of monoculture cropping, which at times can reach very large scales; and which is generally dependent on irrigation and the regular addition to the soil of agri-chemicals. As noted by the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in its most recent report,<sup>6</sup> such practices frequently entail major changes in landscapes and waterways, such as de-forestation and increasing soil salinity, thus compromising the integrity of eco-systems.

Many now realise that the worldview leading to the current level of development is no longer able to underpin the needs of the future.<sup>7</sup> Those seeking a new worldview search for holistic approaches and frameworks to inform and guide decision-making and practice,<sup>8</sup> moving from a ‘mechanical mindset’, where the earth is seen as a resource from which to extract profit, to an ‘ecological mindset’, where humans are part of nature, and can contribute to its thriving.<sup>9</sup> The principles of First Nations sovereignty can powerfully inform this process.

A key issue in the Australian context is urban sprawl and loss of farmland. Agricultural land is increasingly at risk from development as land is valued at its highest use – rather than highest productivity. As development encroaches on farmland it increases the costs and risks of production and drives up land values beyond the reach of producers in surrounding areas. Primary producers have less access to affordable land for farming activities, even on a small-scale (local and regional supply chains). This cycle inevitably pushes productive farmland away from communities and increases the speed of urbanisation. Within farming, the functioning of the land market is such that it favours large farmers and leads to land concentration. In parallel, more non-agricultural people and businesses are investing in farmland, which they view as a highly profitable investment. This phenomenon fuels land speculation and, in extreme cases, land grabbing.

Finally, there is a succession crisis in Australian agriculture, with the average age of farmers now very close to 60 years, and a severe lack of support mechanisms and pathways for young people to enter agriculture. This is compounded by a decrease in family farm succession and thus a lack of new/first generation farmers. The question must be asked: where is the next generation of Australian farmers going to come from?

## Food systems crisis

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<sup>5</sup> Borlaug, N., 2009, ‘Foreword’, *Food Security*, 1(1), 1; Shiva, V. 1991, *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics: Ecological Degradation and Political Conflict*, Zed Books, London.

<sup>6</sup> IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673>

<sup>7</sup> Charles Massy, *Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture, A New Earth*, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Various philosophies and methodologies have emerged that seek to reverse the destructive impacts of industrial agriculture, including holistic agriculture (Widdowson, 1987), permaculture (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978; Holmgren, 2002), regenerative agriculture (Rodale, 1983), organic agriculture (Northbourne, 1940) and biodynamic farming (Pfeiffer, 1938). These are all informed by First Nations cultures that were based in an integrated and symbiotic relationship with the land.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Massy, *Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture, A New Earth*, 2017.

While mega-scale food and agricultural systems generate large profits for agri-food corporations and generous dividends for their shareholders, they also produce poor human health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as highly destructive environmental impacts. By some estimates, as many as 2 billion people globally are malnourished and/or undernourished, while a further 750 million are obese, with more than 1 billion at risk of obesity.<sup>10</sup> The total human health costs of food systems have recently been calculated at \$US13 trillion, a stunning one-sixth of global GDP in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Levels of hunger and malnutrition have substantially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the FAO estimating that the ‘zero hunger’ by 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 2 will be missed by at least 660 million people.<sup>12</sup>

Further, COVID-19 has exposed vulnerabilities and gross inequalities within the Australian food system, resulting in unprecedented demand for food relief, as well as a shocking increase in the destruction of good food because of supply chain disruptions. Nick Rose distils the intersecting challenges of the contemporary global food system as follows:

Whether we examine the factory farming of livestock [or] the proliferation of ultra-processed and unhealthy foods and sugary beverages ... the underlying theme is clear: the contemporary global food system has generated a pandemic of non-communicable diseases and produced environmental devastation on a barely comprehensible scale. This sombre picture becomes bleaker still when we examine the multiple intersecting and reinforcing policy, regulatory and institutional mechanisms and dynamics by which this food system further entrenches, consolidates and expands itself, and is being expanded ... [The COVID-19 pandemic and its handling] has brought into the sharpest possible relief the opposing interests of national and global public health, on the one hand; and the relentless...drive for capital accumulation and profit, on the other – regardless of the consequences.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the drivers of industrial agriculture (brown), together with solutions to drive a more holistic approach (grey), are set out in Figure 1 below. In this infographic, the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) synthesise the elements that constitute what they term the ‘lock-ins’ of the industrialised food system, based on large-scale food and agricultural systems that are producing the destructive impacts outlined above. Each of these ‘lock-ins’ reinforce the other and further embed systemic inertia.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hickel, J. (2016). The true extent of global poverty and hunger: Questioning the good news narrative of the Millennium Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*, 37, 1–19; Hickel, J. (2017). *Addressing the structural causes of world suffering*. In R. Anderson (Ed.), *Alleviating world suffering* (vol. 67, pp. 2–10). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

<sup>11</sup> IPES-Food. (2017a). Unravelling the food–health nexus: Addressing practices, political economy, and power relations to build healthier food systems. The Global Alliance for the Future of Food and IPES-Food. Retrieved from [www.ipes-food.org](http://www.ipes-food.org).

<sup>12</sup> FAO 2021. State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World. United Nations.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, N. (2021). From the cancer stage of capitalism to the political principle of the common: The Social immune response of “food as commons”. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 10(Special Issue on Political Economy of Food Systems), 946–956.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the ‘feed the world narrative’ frames the problem of global food security almost entirely in terms of production (e.g. the world’s population is growing and will need double the amount of food by 2050); the ‘path dependency’ of industrialised agriculture claims that the world can only be fed through large-scale mega farms; the export orientation insists that as much food as possible should be traded in the interests of global food security; and all of this is driven by powerful commercial interests observable in the concentration of power that characterises the global food system, with a handful of mega agrifood corporations dominating all commodity sectors.



The grey boxes present an integrated and holistic approach to ‘cut through’ the lock-ins, charting a feasible pathway to truly sustainable and regenerative food and farming systems, united by the diverse practices around the world of agroecology. This infographic thus in many ways captures the core of the key problems this Inquiry seeks to address (unsustainable farming practices, loss of farmland and lack of support for new farmers, jeopardising medium and long-term food security) as well as the solutions proposed (the establishment of mechanisms and pathways towards an integrated and sustainable food systems).

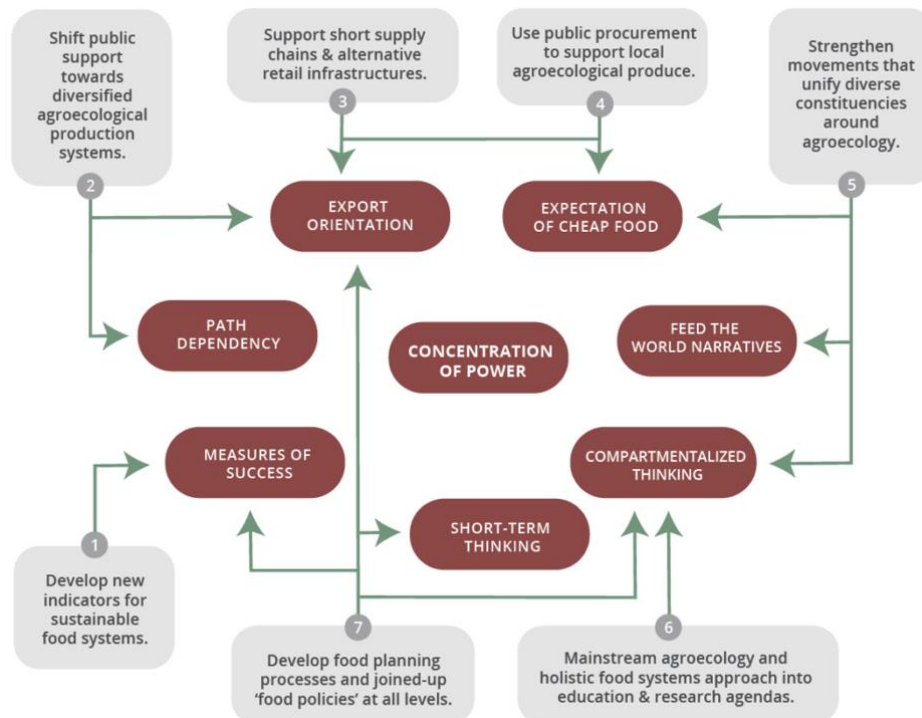


Figure 1: Mooney P. (2017). Too big to feed: exploring the impacts of mega-mergers, consolidation and concentration of power in the agri-food sector<sup>15</sup>

### The costs of a dysfunctional food system are unsustainable: climate change, diet-related ill-health and mental illness cost Australia around \$200 bn every year

Climate change costs are anticipated to grow, with extreme weather events alone costing the Australian economy \$35 billion over the past decade, according to the Climate Council.<sup>16</sup> While Australia ranks as one of the most food secure countries in the world at a macro level, at the community level vulnerable communities disproportionately experience barriers to access nutritionally adequate, safe, and affordable food. Food insecurity is associated with poor mental and physical health with approximately 800,000 adults per year experiencing food insecurity. These figures have increased sharply in the wake of the substantial economic disruption experienced as a result of the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic starkly revealed – and deepened – the inequities that contribute to food insecurity and hunger in Australia. Foodbank Australia’s 2020 *Hunger Report* documented a 47% increase in demand for emergency food relief during the first year of COVID-19.<sup>17</sup> This

<sup>15</sup> International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food). [http://www.ipes-food.org/\\_img/upload/files/Concentration\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Concentration_FullReport.pdf). Reproduced with permission from IPES-Food.

<sup>16</sup> See [NEW REPORT: Australia Takes Massive Financial Hit From Climate Change | Climate Council](#)

<sup>17</sup> Foodbank Australia (2020). [Foodbank Hunger Report 2020: food insecurity in the time of COVID-19](#)

was despite Commonwealth income support measures that tangibly improved the economic circumstances of millions of Australians, above all the more than 1 million receiving the Youth Allowance and NewStart (replaced by JobSeeker in March 2020). However, many of those excluded from government support accessed food relief for the first time, particularly temporary visa holders, casual workers and international students. The demand for food relief was so great during Melbourne's second major lockdown in August 2021 that Foodbank Victoria's drive-thru food relief service in Yarraville was overwhelmed, creating a line of traffic that disrupted the flow of traffic on the West Gate Bridge.

A survey by the Australian Council of Social Services in August 2020 of people receiving JobKeeper or the JobSeeker uplift reported that 80.8% said they were eating better and more regularly, demonstrating the direct link between greater income support, reduced food insecurity and improved health and wellbeing. The Foodbank *Hunger Report 2021* reveals the difference the rollback of government support made to food insecurity.<sup>18</sup> Of those accessing JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments from March 2020-2021, **48% reported they were not coping well at all with the rollback of support payments. Food relief is now being accessed more frequently by more food insecure Australians**, with 29% reporting much more often and another 29% reporting somewhat more often. Those accessing food relief report doing so with disturbing regularity: daily for 8%, a few times a week for 13% and weekly for 11% and a few times a month for another 12%. In other words, **nearly half of all those accessing food relief rely on it regularly or very regularly in order to eat**. These figures demonstrate clear and direct connections between food insecurity and government policy. Simply put, when people on income support are not forced to live below the poverty line, they can afford to buy food and improve their household health and wellbeing. Figure 2, reproduced from the Grattan Institute, makes this point starkly, highlighting how current levels of unemployment benefits condemn recipients to a standard of living that can only be regarded as extreme poverty.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Foodbank Australia. (2021). [\*Foodbank Hunger Report 2021: the reality of the food crisis facing Australia\*](#).

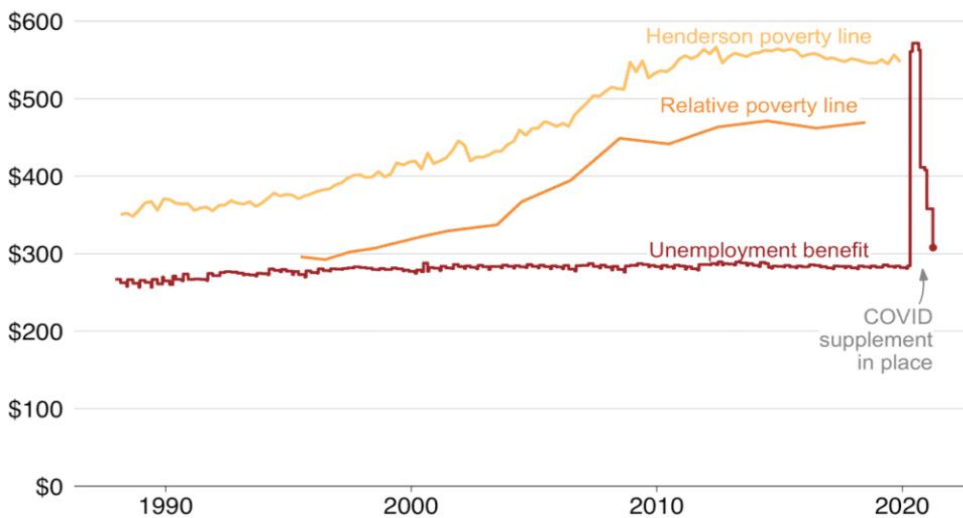
<sup>19</sup> The relative poverty line is half of median weekly income. The Henderson poverty line was developed by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty chaired by Ronald Henderson, which delivered a major report, *Poverty in Australia*, in August 1975. It set a line for an 'austere' standard of living, accounting a range of basic needs for a family of four, beneath which a household was deemed to be living in poverty. The Henderson poverty line is between 25%-33% higher than the Relative Poverty Line and [updated quarterly by the Melbourne Institute](#).



## An extra \$25 a week leaves the unemployment benefit a long way below the poverty line

GRATTAN  
Institute

Poverty lines and unemployment benefits per week, inflation-adjusted 2020 dollars



Notes: Adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index. Unemployment benefits have at various times been called unemployment benefit, Job Search Allowance, Newstart Allowance, and JobSeeker Payment. Unemployment benefit includes Energy Supplement where applicable.  
Sources: Grattan analysis of Melbourne Institute 'Poverty Lines: Australia', ABS 6523.0, ABS 6401.0, ABS 5206.0, and DSS Social Security Guide.

**Figure 2:** Coates & Cowgill (2021), "[Now is an especially bad time to cut unemployment benefits](#)," Grattan Institute

From a human rights perspective, and having regard to the fact that Australia is one of the world's wealthiest nations, **the gross inadequacy of unemployment benefits is a shameful situation.** In a 2020 commentary, Booth and Pollard describe this state of affairs as reflective of "food crimes" manifesting from "structural violence":

Australian food insecurity crimes include inadequate social protection causing vulnerability, excess food production, processing and advertising fostering overconsumption, and related poor health and excessive use of scarce health system resources. The economic policy failure and relentless redistribution of surplus, unsaleable, inferior food and the formation of a [parallel and inferior] food system is a crime against the most vulnerable. Australia has failed to implement appropriate legal measures to protect the human right to food.<sup>20</sup>

### Sustain's call for a national Edible Gardening Fund

Our members are seeking a \$500 million investment over three years in an edible gardening fund to support a mass expansion of urban agriculture activities across Australia, co-financed by state and federal governments as well as developers and philanthropy. The budget priority areas identified below will assist this sector to contribute to the important goals of supporting preventative health, climate resilience, food security and employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups, including:

- \$137.25 million to create 2,875 jobs nationwide to expand the network of community gardens and local government facilitated urban agriculture activity across Australia
- \$35.460 million in grant funding to support all public schools receive a \$5000 grant to establish and maintain edible gardens, directly benefiting 2.59 million students' nationwide

<sup>20</sup> Booth, S., & Pollard, C. M. (2020). Food insecurity, food crimes and structural violence: an Australian perspective. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 44(2), 87-88.

- \$12 million grant fund for urban food networks, urban agriculture organisations and cooperatives to expand edible gardening across the country
- \$41.615 million infrastructure funding to establish or expand community gardens, school gardens, allotment gardens, low income housing edible gardens
- \$42.75 million to subsidise local councils that provide rate discounts to incentivise urban agriculture
- \$225 million in urban agriculture subsidies for social prescribing referrals made by GPs
- \$12.5 million for research collaborations on impact and benefits of urban agriculture and edible gardening.

**There is a growing body of evidence indicating the simple act of gardening provides substantial human health benefits, such as reductions in depression, anxiety, and body mass index, as well as increases in life satisfaction, quality of life, and sense of community.** In 2020 we validated these findings in the Australian context, with a national Pandemic Gardening survey that received 9,140 responses. 98% of respondents reported that edible gardening either greatly or substantially improved their mental health.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, the urban agriculture sector is poised as a significant policy lever to drive a growth in household consumption of vegetables. In 2018, the AIHW estimated only 7% of adults and 5% of children ate sufficient serves of vegetables, and the overall proportion of people with adequate vegetable consumption has decreased since 2004–05. A modest 5% growth in vegetable production through the above investment in urban agriculture activities across Australia would see an additional \$4.1 billion gross value in the economy.

**If vegetable consumption also rises by 5% a further \$50 million per annum savings to the budget is estimated as a result of reduced medical treatment and procedures.**

Other benefits that can be seen in international examples of urban agriculture include:

- agricultural practices that support national soil strategy activity on soil rejuvenation and climate action on carbon sequestration
- improved land, fire and water management, by including the knowledge and practices of First Nations people
- innovation in agriculture through circular economic recycling of organic waste streams
- greater access to fresh and affordable food in communities disproportionately experiencing food insecurity
- training and employment pathways as well as small business creation, as recently validated in a survey mapping the urban agriculture sector in Victoria that we have conducted for Agriculture Victoria (2021).

### **Sustain's recommendations regarding other measures to support urban agriculture**

We make the following recommendations to State and local governments for integrated, coordinated and comprehensive action to expand urban agriculture:

- **Planning:** amend local and state planning frameworks to include urban agriculture; develop and implement professional education resources for planners to raise awareness of the benefits of urban agriculture and why/how it should be supported

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<sup>21</sup> See [The Pandemic Gardening Survey Report | Sustain](#) (Donati, K. & Rose, N., 2020).

- **Sector coordination:** establish a Strategy and Advisory group to build capacity and programming across local and state government, enterprises and the sector more broadly – to enable an intersectoral approach and avoid silos, supported by an evidence base to inform policy development and implementation – recognises and values the role and contribution of households and communities to the food system (including food security) – their voices and representations should be part of any strategic discussions, design and planning
- **Access to land:** work with public and private stakeholders (including public utilities) to audit and identify suitable land; create pathways to facilitate access to it through fiscal incentives (e.g. rates discounts, land tax rebates) – facilitate an intersectoral approach to land use planning, so that other sectors are included in design, planning and implementation (including health, agriculture, environment, biodiversity and conservation)
- **Grants:** develop dedicated grant streams for community and commercial operators that are flexible, simplified and tailored to organisational size and capacity (given the limited window of opportunity for a grant application, complexity of bureaucratic processes, and need for specialist skills of volunteers in community groups)
- **Information, advice, training:** establish an Urban Agriculture Hub / Centre of Excellence to function as a central repository of key information and advice for the sector as well as conduct training and research to capture the sector's impact and multifunctional nature, and support community education and discussion about food system issues
- **Research:** invest in a research agenda that identifies the world's best practice in urban agriculture, trials and pilots new approaches and captures the sector's impact and multifunctional nature. Citizen science projects also present an opportunity for engagement of the wider community in research, valuing their lived experience.

See also the Infographics on the Pandemic Gardening Survey attached to this submission.

### **Role of local governments in supporting the transition to a healthy, sustainable, resilient and fair food system<sup>22</sup>**

Australian local governments have an important role to play in addressing the crises discussed above. We join Dr Belinda Reeve and others in calling for state government reforms to empower NSW local governments to address food production and supply challenges at the local level.

As part of our research, we gathered and assessed over 2,000 policy and strategic documents from all local governments in NSW (128) and Victoria (79) (a full report of this study is available on the project website: <https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/>). These policy and strategy documents were current as at 30 June 2020.

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<sup>22</sup> This part of the submission draws on and in part reproduces the related submission by Dr Belinda Reeve, on behalf of the Australian Research Council project team: *Strengthening Local Food Systems Governance*. Sustain's Executive Director, Dr Rose, is a partner investigator in this project in his role with William Angliss Institute. This research involved a three-year project on how Australian local governments and communities contribute to the creation of a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system.

These documents were analysed against a framework of 34 recommendations for local government action to address food system issues, encompassing the domains of health and wellbeing, sustainability and environment, economic development, food waste, food quality and safety, social policy, and planning. A database containing relevant extracts from these documents was created by the research team, and is a useful resource for information on local government food system initiatives: <https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/policy-database/>

The policy mapping study found that only 13 local governments (less than 10% of the total) – and only two in NSW (less than 2% of all NSW councils) – had a dedicated food system policy. However, local governments addressed food system issues in a wide range of non-food specific policies and strategies. These included the documents created by NSW local governments under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, such as Community Strategic Plans, as well as policies on topics such as health, sustainability, and the environment. In particular, there was widespread support in local government policies for local food production, reducing food waste, and education campaigns and events on food system issues (over 85% of all councils had one or more policy initiatives on these areas). Conversely, there was very little policy action to restrict unhealthy food advertising or vending machines under local government control (less than 4%), or to incentivise the affordability and consumption of healthy foods (e.g. through vouchers / discounts for vulnerable population groups – less than 2%).

Each of these areas are potential opportunities for further action. We recommend that the NSW government consider the recent work done by the Victorian Department of Health on ‘local and social procurement’, as regards the provision of food and food outlets in hospitals and other health services.<sup>23</sup>

The ARC research policy mapping study found that Victorian local governments were more likely than those in NSW to be acting on food systems, with the greatest differences for topics such as promoting/supporting breastfeeding, supporting sustainable water management in food production, and partnering with sports clubs to provide healthy options. Good examples of integrated, comprehensive and long-term food systems policies include the City of Greater Bendigo’s *Food Systems Strategy*<sup>24</sup>, Cardinia Shire Council’s *Community Food Strategy*<sup>25</sup>, and the City of Moreland’s *Food Systems Strategy*.<sup>26</sup> Note that in each case council has resourced the implementation of the strategy with a dedicated officer role and associated funding to support community actions.

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<sup>23</sup> Victoria State Government 2018 *Victoria’s social procurement framework: Building a fair, inclusive and sustainable Victoria through procurement*. Melbourne.

Department of Health (Vic) 2021 *Review of food standards in Victorian public hospitals and residential aged care services*. Summary report. Melbourne, Victoria.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 2019 *Healthy and high-quality food in public hospitals and aged care facilities: Audit overview*. Melbourne. April.

<sup>24</sup> See [Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030 | City of Greater Bendigo](#)

<sup>25</sup> See [Community Food Strategy - Cardinia Shire Council](#)

<sup>26</sup> See [food-systems-strategy--20172020.pdf \(moreland.vic.gov.au\)](#).

For 22 of the 34 recommendations, metropolitan local governments (in both states) were more likely than non-metropolitan (i.e., regional) local governments to have a relevant policy, with the biggest differences being for recommendations to: ensure healthy food retail is easily accessible; support affordable housing; allow food production on local government-owned land; and support home and community gardening. While the research did not investigate this disparity in action on food systems between metropolitan and regional / rural councils, it is reasonable to assume that capacity and resourcing has a part to play, given the much lower population and rate bases of regional and rural councils. It is important for the NSW government to prioritise capacity building in this area across the whole state, given the asymmetrical physical and mental health challenges experienced between different regions as well as differential access to primary and allied health care services.<sup>27</sup>

### **Specific policy actions by NSW local governments that can help to create a healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable food system**

It should be noted that the ARC policy mapping research examined only the existence of policies, not their implementation or effectiveness. This is an area requiring further investigation; and we recommend that the NSW government invest in building food systems monitoring and evaluation capacity at all levels in order to assess and determine the effectiveness and impact of particular policy interventions, at both the state and local levels.

***Food security and equitable access to food:*** Local governments contribute to food security and equitable access to food by seeking to increase local food production, distribution, and consumption. The creation of local (regional and city region) food systems can help to minimise food supply disruptions created by crises such as Covid-19, as (for example) local food producers and businesses are nimble and proximate to supply chain partners. This means they can innovate more quickly and pivot to new market channels and buyers.<sup>28</sup> Local governments (e.g. the ACT government has various ‘community pantries’ available throughout the suburbs for people to access – as part of ‘Communities @ Work’ a social program)<sup>29</sup> also provide or support a range of programs aimed at increasing food security, such as school breakfast programs, and the Dhungung (Food) Share program. This program provides food for local Aboriginal families and is facilitated by Wingecarribee Council in conjunction with Australian Red Cross and OzHarvest.

Local governments and regional entities (e.g. the G21 group of councils in the Greater Geelong region in Victoria) need to consider the food system more broadly within their catchment areas to resolve food security issues, not in a fragmented and siloed way. This means looking ‘upstream’ at the bigger picture (the various determinants of food insecurity), not just the immediate ‘downstream’ impacts on individuals / households / communities. It also requires a participatory approach based on the principles of deliberative democracy, including citizens / community members (especially youth, women, indigenous people,

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<sup>27</sup> See [Regional and Rural Health Outcomes | Conrad Curry Law](#)

<sup>28</sup> Dawn Thilmany, Elizabeth Canales, Sarah A Low, and Kathryn Boys, ‘Local Food Supply Dynamics and Resilience During Covid-19’ (2020) 43(1) *Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy* 86-104.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.commsatwork.org/?s=community+pantry>



migrants and refugees) as key stakeholders/their voices and representation in discussions, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, action and evaluation <sup>30</sup>

### *Examples of local innovations and opportunities to enhanced food security*

- **Community supported agriculture (CSA)** – this is a form of solidarity marketing that supports both producers and community members, especially in locations where a farmers’ market is not available.<sup>31</sup> CSA marketing boosts the local economy, assists farmers with their forward planning of crops / livestock management; and helps to build more secure localised and / or regionalised short supply chains. We note that in many instances there will need to be improved local/regional infrastructure (e.g. coolroom storage, warehouse and packing facilities, road/rail transport), as well as logistical processes, marketing and communications assistance to support this form of solidarity marketing
- **Local food boxes** - some producers, chefs and social enterprises are already sourcing and marketing local fresh food boxes as a consequence of ‘pivoting’ their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. These local marketing innovations encourage community members to extend their food literacy, nutrition, cooking and other skills – also enhancing personal/household food security
- **Community kitchens and community gardens** – these community-led initiatives increase cooking and gardening skills, as well as lead to greater recognition and respect for the efforts and contributions of households and community members to food security.<sup>32</sup> For example, the Health Promotion Unit at Barwon Health (Geelong, Victoria)<sup>33</sup> manages a community kitchens program, enabling the development of various literacies/skills, including nutrition, financial (budgeting), food purchasing, preparation, consumption and storage. These venues are also an opportunity for shared

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<sup>30</sup> Amongst other reports and sources, see Australian Parliament 2020 *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*. Canberra: House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia. November; Béné C, Prager SD, Achicanoy HAE, Toro PA, Lamotte L, Cedrez CB and Mapes BR 2019 Understanding food system drivers: A critical review of the literature. *Global Food Security*. <https://doi.org/10.106/j.gfs.2019.04.009>; Bowden M 2020b *Identifying and responding to food security in Australia*. CFCA practice guide. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; Brouwer ID, McDermott J and Ruben R 2020 Food systems everywhere: Improving relevance in practice. *Global Food Security*. 26:100398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2020.100398>; Godrich SL, Stoneham M, Edmunds M and Devine A 2020 South west Food Community: How government and community initiatives are supporting systemic change towards enhanced food security. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 44(2): 41:129-36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12975>; Londberg R, Barbour L and Godrich S 2019 A rights-based approach to food security in Australia. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 00:1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.324>.

<sup>31</sup> See [Home \(csanetworkausnz.org\)](http://Home.csanetworkausnz.org) and [Urgenci – The International Network for Community Supported Agriculture](http://Urgenci.org).

<sup>32</sup> See Gennari C and Tornaghi C 2020 *The transformative potential of community kitchens for an agroecological urbanism: Preliminary insights and a research agenda*. Conference proceedings: *Agroecological transitions confronting climate breakdown - food planning for the post-carbon city*. 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the AESOP Sustainable Food Systems. Madrid, Spain. 7-8 November 2019; Iacovou M, Pattieson DC, Truby H and Palermo C. 2012. Social health and nutrition impacts of community kitchens: A systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980012002753>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/services-departments/community-health-services/healthy-communities/community-kitchens>



learning in the company of others, weaving social connections in the wake of the challenges of the past two years. Community Gardens Australia (CGA)<sup>34</sup> – a national network of community gardens around the country, with representatives in every state and territory, is an important stakeholder in expanding the existing network of community gardens in NSW.

- **Farmers markets** – a standout example that benefits local NSW producers close to the ACT is the weekly *Capital Region Farmers Market* (held at the Canberra showgrounds).<sup>35</sup> This is a much-loved venue for Canberrans/visitors/tourists to access fresh locally/regionally sourced seasonal produce and value-added products, all produced by farmers/artisans within a 1-2hr distance by car/truck from Canberra. The exchanges (both commercial and social) at the market enables engagement between producers and consumers/citizens about food production, with story-telling and conversations that increase food and nutrition literacy, as well as contributing to farmers' incomes and the local/regional economy.

**Reducing food waste and destruction:** Local governments play a central role in preventing food waste. Many NSW local governments have a kerbside food organics and garden organics (FOGO) or food-only collection service for household food waste, which is then commercially processed into compost. Some also run organics processing services for commercial businesses. Others undertake educational activities and campaigns for residents that aim to prevent food waste, such as workshops on fermenting/pickling, menu planning, or cooking with leftovers (sometimes in partnership with the *Love Food Hate Waste* initiative or *Halve Waste*), as well as rebates enabling residents to purchase compost bins or worm farms. One 'quick win' for reducing food packaging waste would be for the NSW Government to support all local governments to implement the Return and Earn container deposit scheme.

### **Local examples and innovations**

The adoption of the philosophy and principles of the Circular Economy is now underway in Victoria and elsewhere, and we commend that the NSW Environment Protection Authority for its leadership in this important area. Resourcing, grants and incentives are important to support households, communities and businesses to embrace what is a major cultural shift in dealing with food and packaging waste.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.communitygarden.org.au/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://capitalregionfarmersmarket.com.au/>

<sup>36</sup> KPMG 2020 *Fighting food waste: Using the circular economy*. Report. Website: [www.kpmg.com.au](http://www.kpmg.com.au) accessed: 29 June 2020; C40 2018 *Municipality-led circular economy case studies*. In partnership with Climate-KIC Circular Cities Project. Copenhagen, Denmark. Website: [www.c40.org](http://www.c40.org) accessed: 11 March 2020; Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2019 *Cities and circular economy for food*. London. Website: [www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org) accessed: 11 March 2020; Esposito B, Sessa MR, Sica D and Malandrino 2020 Towards circular economy in the agri-food sector: A systematic literature review. *Sustainability*. 12(7401). doi:10.3390/su12187401 [www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability); Fassio F and Tecco N 2019 Circular economy for food: A systemic interpretation of 40 case histories in the food system in their relationships with SDGs. *Systems*. 7(43). doi:10.3390/systems7030043 [www.mdpi.com/journal/systems](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/systems)

In Melbourne's laneways, various cafes and venues are collectively disposing of food waste via 'food dehydrators' (e.g. [Closed Loop](#)). The resulting product is taken away and used by farmers to improve their soil (for growing produce and enabling food supply to these venues: a good example of a circular economy).

**Composting:** more support, guidance and incentives could be provided for households and communities to engage in this age-old practice that is essential for enhancing soil fertility as well as dealing effectively with food waste. for 'composting'. ABC *Gardening Australia* (TV program) is one amongst many sources of good information that provides vital evidence-based information on composting. Particular consideration for adequate support mechanisms is required for high-density urban developments. Community gardens and school gardens are an excellent source of community education and awareness-raising about the benefits of composting, as well as running workshops to provide 'how to' practical guidance.

**Developing technologies to bring food production into cities:** Local governments support initiatives that enable local food production, including forms of urban agriculture such as rooftop and vertical farms, shipping container mushrooms, microgreens production in polytunnels and other types of climate-smart urban agriculture. We have detailed above in our general remarks the suite of actions required to expand urban agriculture (see also Infographics attached).

While not a 'technology', local governments use regulatory instruments such as planning schemes to dedicate areas of public space to community gardens and other forms of food growing. North Sydney's Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability is home to the largest publicly-accessible [green rooftop](#) in Sydney. It features a community garden and leased allotment plots, raised wicking beds that are irrigated by recycled stormwater, and an aquaponics system.

Beekeeping (including on rooftops and backyards) has become popular in several urban areas and is a source of livelihood for experience operations. As well as commercial and educational benefits, beekeeping serves a vital ecological function in terms of protecting and supporting pollinators whose wellbeing is essential for the horticultural industry, amongst much else. The NSW government could support the establishment of beekeeping groups in rural and regional areas with appropriate grants and incentives programs, creating educational opportunities for all ages and building food literacy in the process (e.g. ensuring that water is accessible for bees/other insects and pollinators, growing flowering plants in their gardens, and selecting appropriate trees for town and city streets, such as crepe myrtles which are drought tolerant).

Making land available in urban contexts to urban farmers and community gardeners is a critically important issue. Local governments are understandably risk averse in this area, and hence there is a critical need for leadership from the state government. A key reform is to amend the State planning framework so that urban agriculture and urban farming are recognised as appropriate and encouraged land uses across a range of zoning classifications.

A further reform is to enable local governments to allow appropriately capable operators and groups to access land on a temporary basis, if its intended long-term (permanent) use for housing and / or commercial businesses may be some years away. This will help to address the ‘land-banking’ phenomenon that sees many parcels of land across our towns and cities sit vacant, growing weeds behind cyclone fencing for years and even decades in some cases. Unlocking that land with appropriate planning controls and supports would create business opportunities, training and employment pathways, venues for social connection, and enhance the local production of fresh and healthy food.

To reduce the onerous burden of grant applications (LGA and / or state and / or philanthropic funding for projects), the applications process could and should be simplified and made less bureaucratic. This is especially important for volunteer-based community gardens and other similar grassroots groups, with grants processes matching their time, capacity and resources, whilst at the same time having appropriate financial controls in place. This would enable more community groups to apply for resources to aid their community-based activities around food production, climate change and other concerns; thus, contributing to beneficial community and environmental outcomes.

‘Verge gardening’ is a way for enabling urban agriculture, even in small rural/coastal communities and in the peri-urban fringe. A number of LGAs across Australia (e.g. City of Brisbane, City of Bayswater)<sup>37</sup> provide support, guidance and incentives for community members to undertake verge gardening. Verge gardens can contribute to cooling and shade cover, thereby reducing the urban island heat effect.<sup>38</sup> They can also support the localisation of food production, help with carbon sequestration and water retention over time, contribute to improved air quality, beautify neighbourhoods, increase liveability (especially in socially disadvantaged communities) and create more ‘urban green spaces’.

Local and state governments could encourage and support the provision of ‘community orchards’ by providing support, incentives and guidance, assisting with resources, and enabling community education on orchard care/practices (e.g. soil fertility, watering options, pruning, harvesting, cooking/storage of produce).<sup>39</sup>

*Personal reflection from Dr Anita Peerson:* As I wander around the ANU campus, Canberra, ACT, I note how the many mature and new trees and plants yield incredible shade and

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<sup>37</sup> City of Bayswater 2019 *Street verges policy*. Perth, WA. April. Website: [www.bayswater.wa.gov.au](http://www.bayswater.wa.gov.au) accessed: 11 June 2020.

City of Brisbane 2017 *Verge garden guidelines*. Brisbane. March. Website: [www.brisbane.qld.gov.au](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au) accessed: 12 March 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Sutherland, K. (2021). On the verge. *Green: sustainable architecture and landscape design*, (77), 72-78; Kingsley, J., Egerer, M., Nuttman, S., Keniger, L., Pettitt, P., Frantzeskaki, N., Gray, T., Ossola, A., Lin, B., Bailey, A., Tracey, D., Barron, S., & Marsh, P. (2021a). Urban agriculture as a nature-based solution to address socio-ecological challenges in Australian cities. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 60, 127059. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2021.127059>.

<sup>39</sup> Salbitano F, Fini A, Borelli S and Konijnendijk CC 2019 Editorial - Urban food forestry: Current state and future perspectives. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. 45:126482. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2019.126482>

coolness, even during >30C days and a high altitude (578m) /clean air. This helps the personal and collective wellbeing of students, staff and visitors on-campus. When travelling around the countryside in Wodonga (Vic), Albury, Wagga Wagga (NSW), and Canberra (ACT), there is high use of crepe myrtle trees used as street trees by local government, as well as a mix of natives and exotics (even in industrial areas). These species and the canopy they provide increases the comfort of local residents, workers and visitors, improves soil health, and increases the potential range of food production options in urban areas.

***Preserving productive land and water resources:*** Local governments, particularly those on the urban-rural fringe (such as Penrith City Council and Hawkesbury Council) and those in rural areas with significant agricultural industries (e.g., Cabonne and Singleton), are concerned with protecting and preserving arable land for food production. Local governments include objectives on protecting food producing land in documents such as Settlement Strategies and Rural Land Use Strategies. For example, Tweed Shire Council's *Sustainable Agriculture Strategy (2016)*, one of the first local government documents of its kind in Australia, includes as an outcome that prime agricultural land is preserved for sustainable primary production and land-use conflicts are avoided or managed.<sup>40</sup> Local governments in regional areas also have policies and initiatives on using wastewater and effluent for irrigated agriculture, and on managing water assets, as with the *Edward River Agribusiness Masterplan (2019-2024)*.<sup>41</sup>

Preserving agricultural heritage can be connected with culinary traditions and local hospitality industries. This has been done by the City of Greater Bendigo, with its Food Systems Strategy (2020-2030) aligned with its designation as Australia's first UNESCO Creative 'City of Gastronomy', with regional benefits for surrounding communities.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Mornington Peninsula is developing a unique 'agroecology and food economy' strategy<sup>43</sup>; and Launceston became Australia's second UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in November 2021.<sup>44</sup> We would encourage the NSW government to explore this opportunity with one or more regions (e.g. Northern Rivers) in the state.<sup>45</sup>

The National Heart Foundation has been working with architects and other experts for some time, to address land use planning issues, and encourage greater 'healthiness' and 'liveability' for residents.<sup>46</sup> There are opportunities for state and local governments to indicate the

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<sup>40</sup> [Agriculture and farming | Tweed Shire Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.tweedshire.nsw.gov.au/~/media/Assets/Planning%20and%20Development/2016%20Sustainable%20Agriculture%20Strategy.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Available from: <https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/agribusiness.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> See [Bendigo City and region of Gastronomy \(bendigogastronomy.com.au\)](https://www.bendigogastronomy.com.au/)

<sup>43</sup> Mornington Peninsula Shire 2021 *Agroecology and food economy strategy*. Rosebud, Victoria. (in progress) Website: [www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](https://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au) accessed: 2 September 2021.

<sup>44</sup> [Launceston Gastronomy-Connecting Northern Tasmania](https://www.launcestongastronomy.com.au/)

<sup>45</sup> [Northern Rivers Food - Northern Rivers Food](https://www.northernriversfood.com.au/)

<sup>46</sup> National Heart Foundation of Australia 2013 *Making the case for investment in street trees and landscaping in urban environments: Position snapshot*. Website: [www.heartfoundation.org.au](https://www.heartfoundation.org.au) accessed: 8 February 2021; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2019 *Blueprint for an active Australia: Government and community actions to increase population levels of physical activity and behaviours in Australia*. Website: [www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 29 May 2020; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2020 *Sense of place*. Healthy Active By Design Program. Melbourne. Website:

multiple benefits of including urban green spaces and areas for food production. These areas can also be multifunctional in terms of also providing open green space for recreational purposes, particularly if new and existing houses/properties have small/no gardens for children's play and household recreation.

In many rural/coastal communities (and on the peri-urban fringe of large cities) there are ongoing concerns about the pressures on farmers to sell their prime agricultural land to real estate developers – and impacts on affordable land access and resulting capacity to feed people. For example, see City of Melbourne policies<sup>47</sup> and DELWP<sup>48</sup> (Vic state government) consultations on Melbourne and 100km city fringe for food growing (not only affecting food supply to Melbourne but also particular communities). The Foodprint Melbourne research team has worked on these issues for several years, making representations to the Victorian government for long-term planning to provide permanent protection.<sup>49</sup> British Columbia has an excellent proven model in the Agricultural Land Reserve as does Toronto with the Greenbelt which together preserves over 6 mn acres and thousands of family farms.<sup>50</sup>

***Managing the impact of climate change:*** Local governments are heavily involved in managing or mitigating the local impacts of climate change, including in relation to the food system, with support for local food systems used as one strategy. For example, Ballina Shire Council's *Northern Rivers Food Links* project (ongoing) seeks to mitigate climate change impacts associated with food production, distribution, and consumption by reducing reliance on food sourced from outside the region. Regional local governments also aim to support agricultural industries facing climate change impacts, with Temora Shire housing an agricultural research station that performs research trials related to 'future-proofing' crops against the effects of climate change.

Increasing numbers of local governments have adopted Climate Emergency Plans, at times incorporating previous food system goals and strategies into these plans (e.g. Surf Coast Shire, City of Darebin, Borough of Queenscliffe) However, there is a risk in such an approach in subsuming specific and critical issues (e.g. regarding regenerative and sustainable agriculture) under the overall umbrella of climate change. On balance, we believe a better approach – at both the state and local level – is to have a dedicated food systems and food security strategy, with clear actions (e.g. on regenerative agriculture) that will reinforce simultaneous actions on climate change.

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[www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 29 May 2020; National Heart Foundation of Australia 2020/21 *What Australia wants: Living locally in walkable neighbourhoods*. Website:

[www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) accessed: 8 February 2021.

<sup>47</sup> City of Melbourne 2012 *Food city: City of Melbourne food policy*. Melbourne.

City of Melbourne 2017 *Nature in the city: Thriving biodiversity and healthy ecosystems*. Melbourne. Website: [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au) accessed: 25 October 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) 2020 *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land*. Consultation paper. May. Melbourne: Victoria State Government. Website: [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au) accessed: 21 April 2021.

<sup>49</sup> [Foodprint Melbourne \(unimelb.edu.au\)](http://Foodprint Melbourne (unimelb.edu.au))

<sup>50</sup> [Agricultural Land Reserve - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://Agricultural Land Reserve - Province of British Columbia (gov.bc.ca)) and [Greenbelt Foundation](http://Greenbelt Foundation)



***Limiting the impact food production has on the environment, including overfishing:*** Local governments in regional areas of NSW undertake a range of activities that aim to support more environmentally sustainable forms of agriculture, as well as more environmentally sustainable hospitality and related industries. They provide landholders, food growers, and farmers with information and education on topics such as weed and biosecurity management, sustainable agriculture practices and forms of food production (including those drawing on regenerative, permaculture, and organic principles/practices), responsible land management, and protecting native habitat and biodiversity. They also undertake programs to protect sensitive lands and ecological communities from agricultural activities, manage agricultural run-off into waterways, prevent livestock from entering riparian areas through fencing and stock control, and provide waste collection services for agricultural products. The *Maitland Greening Strategy* (2002-ongoing) encourages care of native plant areas, wetlands, and biodiversity through education, environmental awards, the provision of equipment, environmental levies, and salinity credits.

***Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development:*** Many local governments work in partnership with education and training providers (e.g., high schools, TAFE) to provide pathways into agricultural careers. Gwydir Shire is home to a unique project, The Living Classroom (TLC - ongoing). TLC has repurposed 150 hectares of town common to create a unique learning centre that combines education, tourism, regenerative agriculture, and research using a food systems lens.<sup>51</sup> One component of TLC is a primary industries trade training centre. It also works with local high schools to promote agriculture career pathways and provide work experience for students. The *Edward River Agribusiness Masterplan* contains multiple programs aimed at developing the agribusiness sector, including those on upskilling agricultural workers and promoting career opportunities to school students, as well as on promoting pathways for younger farmers into farm ownership.

Partnerships with the TAFE sector can include various programs leading to numerous qualifications (e.g. horticulture, agriculture, land management, hospitality, tourism, commercial cookery/baking/butchery/patisserie). Opportunities to offer sustainability and related design innovations integrated across all courses is becoming of more interest and relevance for teachers and students. However, they also need better informed and evidence-based resources/materials for teaching and learning,<sup>52</sup> depending on literacy levels and English as a first language or not. There may be other student concerns with applied/practical learning opportunities (e.g. work-integrated learning). These concerns should be well-coordinated and resourced by the educational institutions, rather than dependent on students' limited or non-existent support networks. This is especially important for international students, and others with limited regional/local opportunities/resources for equipment, travel

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<sup>51</sup> For more information on The Living Classroom, see: <https://www.bingara.com.au/the-living-classroom/>; <https://www.gwydir.nsw.gov.au/Venues/The-Living-Classroom>.

<sup>52</sup> Anita Peerson, conversations with Will Dagliesh – Bendigo TAFE (sustainability and design course) – late 2021



timetables.<sup>53</sup> TAFE pathways should be better linked to universities, by exposing students (as well as community members and youth) to role models, mentoring and other options. This type of coordinated and integrated approach to vocational education, mentoring and pathways will boost workforce development and opportunities for regions and communities.

Collaborations or partnerships of state and/or local government with universities and scientists/postgraduate students could also foster innovation and application in practice. Even initially implementing small scale studies, trials and/or demonstration sites involving a cohort of farmers and other stakeholders in a community/region can yield significant results and benefits, enabling replication. This would also enable exploring potential IP and commercialisation opportunities at this time, leading to scaling-up, resulting in more evidence to improve practice and inform policy development and implementation.

‘Citizen science’ projects, with community engagement and recognition respect for community knowledge/‘lived experience’, is another excellent opportunity that the state government can support and resource. Such projects can lead to increased science/other literacy in community, development of new skills (e.g. understanding research process, data collection, translation of knowledge into action). Citizen science also contributes to the evidence base (e.g. DustSafe and VegeSafe by 360 Analysis is a global citizen science project involving Macquarie University, NSW<sup>54</sup> – enabling farmers/community members to submit soil samples for testing at a cost of donating \$20/sample, with analysis and recommendations for action. This is far cheaper than a private laboratory for the same service.

Many local organisations that are deeply embedded in communities can be involved in citizen science projects, such as neighbourhood houses (Vic), community centres, CWA groups, Men’s Sheds, community gardens, Land Care groups, Coast Care groups, Caring for Country programs and others. These can be supported in such initiatives by their local governments. These opportunities also aid skills development and inform career/study aspirations, raising awareness and enabling discussions about local community issues.

***Development and growth of the food industry (raw or processed) as an export:*** As well as ensuring food security for residents, councils collaborate with federal and state government departments, industry associations and businesses to increase opportunities for developing export pathways and relationships. Eurobodalla Shire Council has developed a *Food Production Plan* to enhance the potential of local agriculture and aquaculture industries, including through identifying export markets. It has also held discussions with potential export businesses aimed at improving capacity for growth into Asian markets.

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<sup>53</sup> Anita Peerson, reflections on chef training experience Cert III and IV commercial cookery – The Gordon, Geelong

<sup>54</sup> 360 Dust Analysis program, Macquarie University, Sydney - [https://www.360dustanalysis.com/?mkt\\_tok=NjIyLUxNRS03MTgAAAAAYVax8IwqLIZVtbRhWvTRSBdAuvQeFuFAnG6c5odTKThe813J-OVEjC6czHiW](https://www.360dustanalysis.com/?mkt_tok=NjIyLUxNRS03MTgAAAAAYVax8IwqLIZVtbRhWvTRSBdAuvQeFuFAnG6c5odTKThe813J-OVEjC6czHiW)

Partnerships with universities and scientists/postgraduate students could foster innovation and application in practice, and identify ‘value-added’ product and / or service opportunities with IP and commercialisation benefits (e.g. Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology (CEAT) at Australian National University, Canberra).<sup>55</sup> Local and state governments could provide incentives and/or /resources to assist with start-ups and mentoring programs. State government could also ensure regular evaluation to address sustainability and any impacts of processes, and enable fine-tuning of any implemented programs and projects.

***Consideration of Indigenous food and land management practices:*** Many councils across NSW have established bush tucker gardens that facilitate learning about Aboriginal culture and food, and the continuation of connection to Country, sometimes established in consultation or partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents or groups. These include in: Hawkesbury, Canada Bay, Bellingen, Georges River, Gwydir (within *The Living Classroom*) and Tamworth.

Councils also facilitate the use of native species and Indigenous knowledge in land management. For example, Cootamundra-Gundagai’s *Rural Lands Strategy* encourages exploration of endemic flora and fauna as a source of native food, wood, and fibre, as well as using native plants as drought fodder and windbreaks to increase tree canopy, improve water retention, and resilience to drought. Tweed Shire Council’s *Sustainable Agriculture Strategy* aims to recognise and promote Aboriginal culture and farming practices, and provide opportunities for Indigenous partnerships in sustainable agriculture, including Indigenous farm programs. Councils also support the economic opportunities offered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food knowledge and practices. The Brewarrina Fish Traps are a significant feature of Brewarrina Shire, and Council aims to enhance their tourism benefits (see their [Destination Management Plan](#)). Gwydir is exploring options for scaling-up production of native foods to support a local industry, while Lachlan Shire Council is investigating a bush tucker/bush medicine shop and Aboriginal culture tours.

Engagement, collaboration and partnerships with indigenous people is vital, regarding bushfoods and medicines, ensuring recognition of indigenous knowledge (land and water management), intellectual property and shared commercialisation opportunities. This will result in various cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits of value-add products, creating important employment opportunities for First Nations communities as well as the recovery and practice of cultural knowledge.

In small rural and remote communities of Australia, many indigenous people rely on bushfoods and medicines to supplement their diets and improve their wellbeing, including by using traditional food gathering and hunting practices of hunting and gathering (see the

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<sup>55</sup> <https://ceat.org.au/> - see also other examples of food innovation/entrepreneurial ventures - Monash University, Central Coast NSW (Food Innovation Initiative), University of Queensland, University of Adelaide (Waite Institute)

statement by Uncle Michael Ghillar, above). Some community gardens include space for indigenous/native plants which are also bushfoods (e.g. lemon myrtle, yam daisy).<sup>56</sup>

Intellectual property and commercialisation of indigenous knowledge applicable to land and water management needs to be recognised/respected. This is an increasing concern for IP Australia and other entities. Other strategies can include: protection of grasslands and remnant vegetation, especially where flora and fauna species are endangered or becoming extinct; recognition and valuing local neighbourhoods for their local knowledge and of heritage/history that can inform initiatives; acknowledgement of the contribution of migrants and refugees, and in particular their cultural knowledge and practices regarding food production, water and land management. All of the above can create positive opportunities for cross-cultural learning within communities about food production, growing and cooking different types of food.

Various universities in Australia (eg. Australian National University, University of Melbourne, University of Adelaide) have programs to support indigenous students (undergraduate and postgraduate), and scholars. These students and scholars could lead and/or be involved in projects addressing food production as well as land, fire and water management knowledge and practices. Their project findings would contribute to and extend the evidence base, and inform practices and policy development – addressing food systems, climate change and other food production concerns.

#### **Need for integrated governance and leadership from State government**

The examples above demonstrate that NSW local governments provide a wide range of local programs, services, and supports to help create a healthier, and more resilient and sustainable food system, using policies and initiatives that are tailored to the specific issues facing each area. However, our project also demonstrates that **local governments face significant practical and legislative challenges in undertaking food systems work**. Currently unpublished results from a survey of NSW and Victorian local governments, and case studies of six innovative local governments (three in each state), report on these barriers to action.<sup>57</sup>

In this part of the *Strengthening Food Systems Governance at the Local Level* project, NSW local governments have described how the lack of legislative and financial support from state government limits their work on food systems. There is an absence of an explicit legislative and/or policy mandate on food systems at the state (and federal) level, and a lack of cooperation between state government departments and agencies with responsibilities in relation to food. This is accompanied by an absence of dedicated, ongoing funding for food system work at the local level. The result is that local government initiatives on food systems are often short-term, limited to the issues on which state government funding is available (such as food waste, climate change, water quality), and are not evaluated systematically – or in relation to other sectors/concerns or community-identified needs (requiring ‘systems

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<sup>56</sup> Examples of community gardens – Community Gardens Australia (CGA) website

<sup>57</sup> Suggest contact Professor Amanda Devine and Ros Sambell (Edith Cowan University, Joondalup) – for their work with Dr Stephanie Godrich and others – including LGAs and other sectors/organisations in taking a systems approach to ‘food security’ in SW region of WA, and plans underway to extend to other regions in WA

thinking’).<sup>58</sup> NSW local governments find it difficult to fund dedicated food systems positions within council, or to maintain comprehensive, ongoing programs of work.

*C40*, the *Milan Food Policy Pact*, *Vermont Farm to Plate* initiatives (amongst others), as well as outcomes of the recent *UN Food System Summit* (UN FSS, 23 September 2021) are evidence of the growing international attention to the importance of strengthening food systems and achieving an integrated, cohesive governance approach. Australian governments at all levels can and should learn from these examples, as well as draw on existing community-based initiatives to inform and enable integrated and comprehensive food system policy and legislation development, and as well as resource this work adequately.

A people-centred, place-based and intersectoral approach is required, avoiding the ‘silo’ effects that unfortunately plague much institutional work.<sup>59</sup> It is also important to consider the valuable contribution of households and communities to the food system in regions and communities (including food security, short supply chains, supporting local farmers/business – especially during the pandemic).<sup>60</sup> Developing food policies and strategies needs to be a participatory process respectful of ‘lived experience’, as well as being evidence-based (see Centre for Food Policy, London).<sup>61</sup> In such processes, it is necessary to ensure representation and voices of different population groups is heard (e.g. youth, women, migrants and refugees, indigenous people, small-scale food producers).<sup>62</sup>

Food system issues are not integrated into other relevant legislative schemes in NSW. For example, the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act* 2008 (and similar public health legislation in SA and WA) requires local governments to create municipal public health and wellbeing plans, which some have used to address food security and diet-related health. The Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023* and *Climate Change Act 2017* also highlight the need to recognise climate change as a threat to health, creating an opportunity for Victorian local governments to address issues such as agriculture- and food transport-related greenhouse gas emissions in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.

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<sup>58</sup> Meadows DH 2008 *Thinking in systems: A primer*. D Wright (ed). White River Junction, Vermont, US: Chelsea Green Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-60358-055-7; Senge P 2006 *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation*. London: Random House. ISBN: 9781905211203. (Originally published 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Tett G 2015 *The silo effect: Why putting everything in its place isn’t such a bright idea*. London: Little Brown.

<sup>60</sup> Niles MT, Wirkkala KB, Belarmino EH and Bertmann F 2021 Home food procurement impacts food security and diet quality during COVID-19. *BMC Public Health*. 21:945. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10960-0>  
Sellberg MM, Norström AV, Peterson GD and Gordon LJ 2020 Using local initiatives to envision sustainable and resilient food systems in Stockholm city-region. *Global Food Security*. 24:100334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2019.100334>; Tribaldos T and Kortetmäki T 2021 Developing principles and criteria for just transition in food systems: a transdisciplinary endeavour. In *Justice and Food Security in a Changing Climate*. Hanna Schübellvo and Wallimann-Helmer (eds). Fribourg: EurSafe. Pp. 158-163.

<sup>61</sup> Centre for Food Policy 2018 *How can evidence of lived experience make food policy more effective and equitable in addressing major food system challenges?* Report of the City Food Symposium 2018. London: University of London.

<sup>62</sup> UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS) 2021 *Synthesis of independent dialogues*. Report 3. September 2021. New York. September 2021. Website: [www.summitdialogues.org](http://www.summitdialogues.org) accessed: 10 November 2021.

However, the NSW *Public Health Act* 2010 does not place a similar obligation on NSW local governments, limiting their ability to implement policies and programs on diet-related health.

There are also calls for ‘food in all policies’ or ‘integrated’ ‘coherent’ or ‘joined-up’ policy, reflecting a ‘food systems’ approach, rather than addressing a single issue<sup>63</sup> (in a similar way to the ‘health in all policies’ approach pioneered by South Australia and Finland).<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, the NSW *Planning and Environment Act* 1987 does not include food systems or health promotion as an objective, limiting the extent to which local governments can consider issues such as nutrition or food security in their own planning activities.<sup>65</sup> For example, local governments cannot refuse development consent to new fast-food restaurants seeking to open in an appropriately zoned area, and are limited in the extent to which they can diversify the mix of food retail outlets based on food access or nutrition concerns.<sup>66</sup> This means they are unable to address the issue of ‘food swamps’: geographical areas characterised by a high density of fast-food restaurants and other unhealthy food retail outlets, and a relatively low density of healthy food retail outlets (such as supermarkets), most often located in areas of low socioeconomic advantage.<sup>67</sup>

Examples from Victoria demonstrate what local governments can achieve when they are more fully resourced to undertake food systems work. VicHealth, an independent health

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<sup>63</sup> Candel JL and Pereira L 2017 Towards integrated food policy: Main challenges and steps ahead. *Environmental Science and Policy*. 73:89-92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.04.010>;

Parsons K 2019 *Brief 3: Integrated food policy: What is it, and how can it help transform food systems?* In: Rethinking food policy: A fresh approach to policy and practice. London: Centre for Food Policy; Macrae R and Winfield M 2016 A little regulatory pluralism with your counter-hegemonic advocacy? Blending analytical frames to construct joined-up food policy in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies*. 3(1):140-94; Parsons K and Hawkes C 2018 *Connecting food systems for co-benefits: How can food systems combine diet-related health with environmental and economic policy goals?* Policy brief 31. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; Parsons K and Hawkes C 2019 *Brief 4: Embedding food in all policies*. In: Rethinking food policy: A fresh approach to policy and practice. London: Centre for Food Policy.

<sup>64</sup> de Leeuw E and Peters D 2014 Nine questions to guide development and implementation of *Health in All Policies*. *Health Promotion International*. Published 10 June. doi:10.1093/heaprodau034; Browne GR and Rutherford I 2017 The case for ‘Environment in All Policies’: Lessons from the ‘Health in All Policies’ approach in public health. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 125(2):149-54. <http://doi.org/10.1289/EHP294>; Government of South Australia 2018 *Global status report on health in all policies*. Adelaide; Government of South Australia and World Health Organization 2017 *Progressing the Sustainable Development Goals through Health in All Policies: Case studies from around the world*. V Lin and I Kickbusch (Eds); McQueen DV, Wismar M, Lin V, Jones CM and Davies M (ed) 2012 *Intersectoral governance for Health in All Policies: Structures, actions and experiences*. Geneva: World Health Organization; World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2014 *Health in all policies. Helsinki statement: Framework for country action*. Geneva: WHO.

<sup>65</sup> Christine Slade, Claudia Baldwin and Trevor Budge, ‘Urban Planning Roles in Responding to Food Security Needs’ (2016) 7(1) *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 33–48; Maureen Murphy, Hannah Badland, Helen Jordan, Mohammad Javad Koohsari and Billie Giles-Corti, ‘Local Food Environments, Suburban Development, and BMI: A Mixed Methods Study’ (2018) 15(7) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 1392. Available from: doi:10.3390/ijerph15071392.

<sup>66</sup> Slade, Baldwin and Budge, above n 4. Other disruptions to the food system – see FAO 2021 food shocks and resilience report

<sup>67</sup> Cindy Needham, Gary Sacks, Liliana Orellana, Ella Robinson, Steven Allender and Claudia Strugnell, ‘A Systematic Review of the Australian Food Retail Environment: Characteristics, Variation by Geographic Area, Socioeconomic Position and Associations with Diet and Obesity’ (2020) 21(2) *Obesity Reviews*, e12941. Available from: doi.org/10.1111/obr.12941.

promotion agency, has a long history of facilitating local government action on diet-related health, including providing \$5 million to eight councils to address food security as part of its 2005-2010 *Food for All* program. In 2021, VicHealth launched a *Local Government Partnership* program with a specific focus on building LG capacity in relation to food systems policy making. Along with a more supportive legislative environment, this kind of dedicated funding and resourcing may explain why we found greater engagement with food systems policy making by local governments in Victoria as compared to NSW.

The health, sustainability, and equity challenges created by global food systems have been extensively researched and documented. The adoption of healthy and sustainable diets by the world's population has been identified as 'potentially the greatest synergy between human and planetary health'.<sup>68</sup> Covid-19 disruption of food supply chains has only heightened the importance of re-framing policy and regulation to create more diversified and resilient food systems, including at the local and regional level.<sup>69</sup> Action by all levels of government and all sectors of society will be required to achieve this goal, but we argue that **local governments can – and do – play a critical role in addressing food production and supply issues in NSW** (and indeed, across Australia). However, **comprehensive reform at the state level** and federal/national level is needed to activate the potential of local governments and to empower them to contribute to wide-ranging, lasting improvements to Australia's food system.

We support the recommendations proposed in the Consensus Statement on *Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria* (2022 - attached). Drawing on that document, and our own research, we 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 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'.

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<sup>68</sup> Sylvia Gralak, Luke Spajic, Iris Blom, Omnia El Omrani, Jacqueline Bredhauer, Saad Uakkas, Juliette Mattijsen et al, 'COVID-19 and the Future of Food Systems at the UNFCCC' (2020) 4(8) *The Lancet Planetary Health*, e309-11. Available from: [doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(20\)30163-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30163-7).

<sup>69</sup> Thilmany et al, above n 1.



- 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), and which empowers local governments and communities to set local objectives and targets on priority food system issues, and 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.

We urge you to recommend these actions to the NSW Government, so that NSW local governments can reach their full potential in contributing to a more sustainable, equitable, resilient, and healthier food system.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is any further information I can provide in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nick Rose, Executive Director

Dr Anita Peerson, Institute for Water Futures | Fenner School of Environment & Society |  
ANU College of Science, The Australian National University

Contact: 



“  
Every seed I plant is  
a wish for tomorrow  
”

## Main Findings & Key Messages

### 01 Edible gardening was a source of good food for those who need it most

Households growing more than 30% of their own food by income (n=924)

45%  
Under \$50k

15%  
\$75k-\$99k

10%  
over \$150k

16%  
\$50k-\$74k

14%  
\$100k-\$150k

### 03 Gardening contributed a sense of focus and reduced anxiety for many

How important was edible gardening during COVID-19? (n=8597)

2%  
Not so important: I  
could take it or leave it

17%  
Somewhat important:  
I like gardening but it's  
not essential

19%  
Extremely  
important: I  
couldn't have  
made it through  
without my  
garden

62%  
Very important: Being able  
to garden during this time  
has meant a great deal

### 05 The abundance of the garden is a source of sharing and connection

What have you done with the food you've grown in 2020? (n=8662)

93%  
Consumed  
immediately  
within the  
household

74%  
Shared with  
family and  
friends

48%  
Preserved for  
future use

21%  
Swapped with  
others

5%  
Other

3%  
Sold it

3%  
Donated for emergency  
food relief

“  
Single income, family of  
four with one being an  
adult with a disability and  
not working. No choice but  
to grow food but to make  
the budget work and eat  
well. We never eat out. We  
are self-sufficient in all  
vegetables and most fruit.”  
Low-income experienced female  
gardener, Anglo-Australian,  
55-64, Warragul Vic

02

### Edible gardening is very important to mental health

To what extent have your  
gardening activities resulted in  
improved mental health and  
wellbeing? (n=8642)

34%  
Significantly - gardening  
makes me feel relaxed,  
less stressed and  
anxious and happier

3%  
Very little - gardening  
makes little difference to my  
levels of relaxation, stress,  
anxiety and happiness

38%

Greatly - gardening makes me  
feel much more relaxed, less  
stressed and anxious, and happier

23%  
Somewhat - gardening  
helps with relaxation,  
stress and anxiety

04

### Edible gardening contributes to diverse and healthy diets

What kinds of food have you grown  
during the COVID-19 pandemic?  
(n=8925)

97%  
Vegetables

66%  
Fruit

28%  
Eggs

“  
It's very satisfying being able to supply  
pretty much all of the vegetables we  
consume in the house. [...] I've realised  
we've actually saved a lot of money on  
food....[W]hat has shifted throughout  
the pandemic is that growing my own  
food was once something I had to put a  
lot of thought and effort into. It is now  
second nature and the new normal.”  
Low-income female gardener, Anglo-Australian,  
25-34, Warrandyte Vic

“  
It has meant we didn't need to shop as frequently  
reducing our risk of virus. We have eaten a more  
vegetable-based diet. We have plenty to share and  
swap locally which has increased feeling of  
community even when we had to socially distance.”  
Low-income experienced female gardener,  
55-64, peri-urban Adelaide

“  
I'm so glad someone is recording this awakening. I feel that it keeps me in touch with the  
basis of our existence. It reminds me that the complexities of life can sometimes just require  
observation and interaction. It reminds me that the graciousness of life is abundant.  
These are qualities learnt in a garden.”  
”



## An Action Agenda to Make Australia's Towns & Cities Edible

### \$500M National Edible Gardening Fund

Dietary-related ill-health and mental illness costs Australia around \$200B every year. For a tiny fraction of this, the return on investment on an Edible Gardening Fund could be enormous.

*Dr. Nick Rose, Sustain*

As part of the COVID-19 recovery process, we are calling for the establishment of a national, co-financed Edible Gardening Fund as a long-term investment in the public health of all Australians.

*Dr. Kelly Donati, Sustain*



#### Urban Planning/Land Use

- › **Work towards land justice for First Nations** by acknowledging Indigenous land governance, support recovery of history and culture, and enable First Nations communities to access their own land in towns and cities
- › **Prioritise urban food production** as part of vital city and town infrastructure
- › **Embed urban agriculture** in local and state planning schemes
- › Map and **audit available land**
- › **Facilitate access** to public land through specific initiatives



#### Finance, Subsidies & Incentives

- › A **\$500M national Edible Gardening fund** as an urgent investment in public health and wellbeing
- › This will support nearly **3000 new jobs** in local government, community gardens and social enterprises
- › A **\$40M national gardening infrastructure** and materials fund, co-managed by community and local government
- › A **\$50M annual grants program**, with \$35M for schools benefiting 2.6M students nationally
- › **\$45M in rates rebates** to support local government to incentivise private landowners to unlock land
- › **\$225M in social prescribing** supporting vulnerable community members to access subsidised local and healthy food as well as gardening and cooking classes



#### Capacity Building

- › **Make food literacy a key goal** and embed it through curriculum
- › **Create and distribute resources**, fact-sheets and how-to-guides
- › Host **workshops** and hold courses
- › Provide mentoring, advice and **guidance**
- › **Facilitate supported exchanges** between older and experienced gardeners with younger and new gardeners



#### Governance & Coordination

- › Resource and support **urban agriculture cooperatives**
- › Resource and support **local food networks**
- › Resource and support **Youth Food Security councils**
- › Resource and support **national and state sector coordination**
- › **Joint governance and coordination** at local level between councils and community groups



#### Infrastructure & Materials

- › Councils and communities to **make essential gardening infrastructure available** to groups and low-income individuals
- › **Free water connections** as of right for approved community gardens / urban farms
- › Mass expansion of **community composting**
- › National network of **community seedling nurseries**



#### Policies & Plans

- › National **commitment to eradication of food poverty** and food insecurity
- › Participatory **development of local, state and national food security** & food system strategies and plans
- › Implementation resourced through **dedicated food security and food system officer roles**
- › Participatory **monitoring and review**

“

"I think [COVID-19] has made many people realize how dependent and vulnerable we really are and the importance of taking back some of the control over our food supply. It has also shown we are capable of making significant change to the environment with our actions if we all work together."