

**Submission  
No 64**

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

**Organisation:** Green Connect

**Date Received:** 28 February 2022

I am writing on behalf of Green Connect, a not-for-profit social enterprise that employs young people and former refugees (those who need the jobs most in our region) to do work that helps the planet and the environment. We have run an award-winning 11 acre permaculture farm in one of the poorest suburbs in Australia for the past 9 years, on which we grow more than 90 types of fruit, vegetables and herbs, with a variety of animals integrated into our farming systems. We do so using permaculture and organic principles.

We have seen how growing food in this way, in the middle of suburbia, has had an enormous positive impact on the community and the environment. We write to ask that you consider how small-scale, chemical-free, polyculture urban farms can play a part in securing a sustainable food future across NSW.

We grow food without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertiliser. This greatly improves the soil and therefore the productivity of the farm in the long term (see the book *Soil* by Matthew Evans for scientific evidence of how chemical farming contributes to topsoil erosion, loss of biodiversity and enormous production losses over time).

We grow food close to our customers. All of our food (more than 35,000 kg per year) is sold within 20 km of the farm. This reduces the environmental impact through reduced food miles, connects customers to where their food comes from, promotes local and seasonal eating which has shown to be better for human health, reduces the time between harvesting and eating which has been shown to maximise nutritional value, reduces food waste because produce is not spoiling along the way, reduces cost by shortening the supply chain, and safeguards supply chains which are small and nimble. See <https://www.fao.org/state-of-food-agriculture/en/> for UN advice on the benefits of small, local producers and supply chains.

We waste nothing. As a permaculture farm, everything that is produced is seen as a resource, not waste, and non-recyclable components are minimised. Food is delivered to customers within 36 hours maximum of being picked. Any leftover produce is given to staff and volunteers. Once a month, the community can come and pick anything left on the plants for free (improving food security, access to fresh produce, and reducing social isolation for people who cannot afford fresh food). And any remaining food or byproducts are fed to the livestock on the farm or put into compost to build the soil back up, in a closed loop.

We provide good employment and increase local skills. Our staff are paid Award wages, which is not the case for most farmers who work well beyond normal hours each week in return for average salaries. Our staff become highly skilled at food growing, animal husbandry and farm management, filling workforce shortages and improving resilience in the local community.

We have been internationally recognised as pioneers in sustainable development. In 2021, the Green Connect farm was highlighted as one of the 15 best projects across 56 member countries and 2.6 billion people in the Commonwealth, achieving excellent social and environmental outcomes. See <https://www.thecommonwealth.io/innovator-awards-2021/> for more information. This is not a pie-in-the-sky idea. It is a multi award winning enterprise.

To have more polyculture urban farms, which will improve human health, food security and environmental impacts, we need:

1. Planning controls that make it easier to set up urban farms. Many community gardens and urban farms have failed because of planning restrictions and lengthy approval processes.
2. Financial support if possible, to encourage the growth of these enterprises.
3. Sharing of case studies and knowledge, to inspire and help the next generation of urban farmers.

4. Improved supply chains including incentives for farmers markets, which offer a good outlet for urban growers.