

INQUIRY INTO ASPECTS OF AGRICULTURE IN NSW

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Date received: 14/08/2007

SUBMISSION RE LAND USE.

I am writing as a resident, farmer and businessman whose home and property are in the Kurrajong Hills. I have lived here since 1960. Together with my wife, Patricia, and son, Adrian, we operate a stone-fruit orchard and roadside stall.

I grew up at Emu Plains on a citrus orchard where my father's Georgian residence abutted a section of the original Governor Macquarie's government house. My father also owned a farm on the Castlereagh flats near Penrith.

As a result I have a wide knowledge of the agricultural aspect of the Nepean and Hawkesbury Valley and its immediate geographical environs. I also have a deep love of the valley's history.

The steady encroachment of Sydney and its suburbs threatens to wipe out what is left of the diminishing supply of agricultural land in the Sydney basin.

This land is extremely diverse. In the Hawkesbury local government area are the Richmond/Windsor flood plains which, whilst under-utilised at this moment, have in the past grown a wide range of vegetables and citrus.

In the Kurrajong Hills there is highly fertile land enclosing a wide range of micro-climates, resulting in the capacity to grow an extensive range of crops – from cool-temperate to sub-tropical.

Further west and at a higher elevation is the Kurrajong Heights / Bilpin district renowned for its rich soils and production of cool temperate fruits, particularly apples.

Whilst agriculture is currently undergoing great difficulties, people will always need to eat. Therefore alternative forms of agriculture need to be devised to produce that food.

The Hawkesbury / Nepean Valley is admirably positioned to assume that role.

Firstly, it is blessed with stunning landscapes and views (particularly the Kurrajong Hills) that happen to be the only remaining region of its kind in the Sydney basin. Tourism is thus a vital factor. This area is not only an hour's drive from Sydney, whose population needs "lungs to breathe" and a rural alternative to an increasingly "citified" lifestyle, but it also has enormous potential for overseas tourism.

Strategies that have been developed by local farmers include

- Direct selling (eg Farmgate Trail and farmers' markets)
- Niche marketing
- Value adding.

While it is very difficult for farms to be entirely self-sufficient, there are many people who for different reasons wish to work on the land. These include

- Retirees
- Part-time workers
- Families where one spouse works part-time or full-time off the farm
- Farmers operating a value-adding or direct-selling enterprise.
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Ultimately Sydney residents need food, particularly locally-grown produce which, as time progresses, will become increasingly important for the following reasons:

- Increased fuel costs
- Increased carbon emissions due to distance food is carried
- If climate change becomes a long-term reality, then food producing land west of the Blue Mountains will become increasingly marginalised. For example, if the Murray / Darling food basin becomes severely diminished the loss of what remains of productive land in the Sydney basin could be catastrophic. For any government to allow that situation would be an act of monumental folly.

The councils of Baulkham Hills and Penrith are aware of this predicament and are pursuing appropriate policies. Paradoxically, Hawkesbury Council, where most of this agricultural land lies, is showing a distinct lack of interest.

Factors threatening the future agricultural potential of the Hawkesbury / Nepean Valley are:

- Ian Armstrong's proposed six-lane super-highway which would smash through the scenic and agricultural Kurrajong Hills;
- The Penrith Lakes Scheme which has the potential to dramatically reduce the Hawkesbury Nepean River flow, thus affecting the rich Richmond / Windsor river flats;
- Probably the most serious threat is posed by developers who have already devised comprehensive plans for housing in the Hawkesbury local government area and who are applying enormous pressure on appropriate agencies.

Because of the importance of retaining what remains of the open, scenic and agricultural land in the Sydney basin, I would suggest a special ministry be established, with direct links to the Premier, to investigate appropriate steps and policies towards saving this valuable natural resource and asset.

David Mason, who is the Leader – Urban Agricultural Sydney Region and Churchill Fellow, recently visited several countries to investigate how cities allow and encourage agriculture on their fringes.

From David's experience it would appear that the Toronto model, which establishes green zones for agricultural use, would be worth investigating. Details of David Mason's travels can be found on www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Submission – John Maguire

I would also refer you to a copy of the Farm Gate Trail which is published by Hawkesbury Harvest and can be found on their website at www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au . The Farm Gate Trail is only one of the activities undertaken by Hawkesbury Harvest whose policy is to retain and encourage agriculture in the Sydney basin.

Details of our orchard can be found at www.enniskillenorchard.com.au

I have no objection to my submission being made public if the committee so chooses. I am also prepared to appear personally before the committee if that is deemed necessary.

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