



Agriculture in the Sydney region: historical and current perspectives

by John Wilkinson

1 Introduction

Spreading urbanisation and population growth are putting pressure on agricultural lands on the fringes of Sydney. The conflicting forces and interests at work were acknowledged in NSW Planning's 2010 discussion paper, [Metropolitan Strategy Review 2036](#). The paper recognised the economic importance of agricultural production in the Sydney region, which was said to supply a 'significant proportion of the fresh produce consumed in Sydney'. It also acknowledged that:

viable agricultural lands are facing continual pressures from alternative land uses and have a role in contributing to a sustainable future for Sydney. This is especially important given the expected population increases, projected housing needs, changing rainfall patterns and the increasing cost of transport.¹

The Metropolitan Strategy Review discussion paper continued:

The strategy aims to maintain rural activities and resource lands and protect resource lands from incompatible and inappropriate uses. The NSW Government is also

to contain Sydney's urban growth in identified areas. Containment will continue to reduce the pressure on valued rural and resource lands.²

This E-brief presents an overview of the history of policies relating to agriculture in the Sydney region, placing this in the context of the current policy debate. It starts with a commentary on the extent of Sydney's agriculture.

2 Assessing the scale of Sydney agriculture

2.1 Trends and issues

Historically, agriculture in the Sydney region provided a substantial proportion of NSW requirements for primary produce. According to Denis Winston, in the late 1940s:

it produced three-quarters of the state's lettuces; half of the spinach; a third of the cabbages and a quarter of the beans; 70% of the state's poultry farms were located in the [area]...and more than 18 per cent of Sydney's milk came from [there].³

Commenting in 1998 on the benefits of the reliable supply and availability of

fresh produce to the residents of the Sydney region, NSW Agriculture said that, for example:

85% of mushrooms, 70% of tomatoes and 95% of spring onions produced in NSW are grown in the Sydney region.⁴

The following table shows the total number of farms and the total area of land farmed in the Sydney region from 1992-93 to 2007-08:

Sydney's Agriculture, 1992-93 to 2007-08⁵

	Farms	Hectares
1992-93	1,474	80,373
1993-94	1,928	90,519
1994-95	1,862	100,784
1995-96	1,860	88,100
1996-97	1,872	87,600
2000-01	1,920	76,899
2005-06	2,611	103,780
2006-07	2,548	94,029
2007-08	2,263	82,243

The above table is from a 2010 report, [Sydney's Agricultural Lands: An Analysis](#), prepared for the NSW Department of Planning by Dr Sarah James and other members of the Urban Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney. The figures provided are calculations from ABS data on agricultural statistics, published between 1995 and 2009. In James et al, the data is accompanied by a warning, to the effect that, 'due to the methodological changes in the time period represented', the trends suggested 'are not conclusive'.

Without delving too deeply into this methodological debate, the point to make is that, from the early 1990s, concern was expressed about the perceived undercounting of Sydney agriculture in ABS reports. James et al state:

Characterised by small scale farms run by culturally and linguistically diverse groups, Sydney's vegetable farms have been seen to belong to a class of agriculture – peri-urban farming – which has been systematically under-recognised by an ABS data collection methodology focused on broad scale agriculture. The perceived undercounting of Sydney agriculture by the ABS agricultural census resulted in the development of numerous non-ABS reports seeking to readdress the apparent data gap.⁶

As shown in the above table, the revised methodology used in the 2005-06 ABS agricultural census resulted in a marked increase in the number of farms. Both James et al and the Malcolm and Fahd study, which is discussed below, agree that the revised ABS data "provide relatively trustworthy data on Sydney Basin agriculture", at least to the extent that this data refers to farm numbers.⁷

2.2 ABS statistics for 2006

Published in December 2010 but based on ABS 2006 figures, the NSW Department of Planning's [Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036](#) presented the following overview of agriculture in the Sydney region:

Sydney's agricultural industries contribute approximately seven per cent of the State's total value of agricultural production, yet comprise just 0.2 per cent of NSW's total rural holdings. ABS data valued all Sydney farm production at \$630 million in 2006, and total agricultural production including value adding and processing is currently around \$1.5 billion annually.

Twelve per cent of NSW's agricultural workers are employed in Sydney... In 2006, there were 2,548 agricultural businesses in the Sydney metropolitan area,

employing 8,162 full-time workers and many part time, casual and seasonal staff.⁸

In more detail, based on ABS figures the following major forms of primary production, by value, were being pursued in the local council areas of outer Sydney, listed on a north-south axis:

Hawkesbury: 2005-06⁹

Vegetables	\$55.4m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$40.5m
Poultry Slaughterings	\$4.6m
Egg Production	\$3.6m
Milk Production	\$2.8m
Fruit	\$2.3m
Cattle Slaughterings	\$1.6m
TOTAL	\$110.8m

Penrith : 2005-06¹⁰

Poultry Slaughterings	\$17.8m
Vegetables	\$15.8m
Egg Production	\$12.8m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$4.5m
Cattle Slaughterings	\$2.4m
Fruit	\$1.1m
Milk Production	\$0.5m
TOTAL	\$54.9m

Liverpool: 2005-06¹¹

Poultry Slaughterings	\$19.8m
Vegetables	\$15.7m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$4.6m
Egg Production	\$2.9m
Cattle Slaughterings	\$0.6m
Pig Slaughterings	\$0.6m
TOTAL	\$44.2m

Camden: 2005-06¹²

Poultry Slaughterings	\$11.9m
Vegetables	\$11.1m
Egg Production	\$5.6m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$3.8m
Cattle Slaughterings	\$1.6m
Fruit	\$0.3m
TOTAL	\$34.3m

Campbelltown: 2005-06¹³

Cattle Slaughterings	\$26.5m
Vegetables	\$3.4m
Poultry Slaughterings	\$1.4m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$1m
TOTAL	\$32.3m

Wollondilly: 2005-06¹⁴

Poultry Slaughterings	\$29.8m
Vegetables	\$12.5m
Nurseries/Turf/Cut Flowers	\$7.6m
Milk	\$4.8m
Cattle Slaughterings	\$3.2m
Eggs	\$1.8m
Crops for Hay	\$1.1m
Fruit	\$0.5m
TOTAL	\$61.3m

2.3 Two recent studies

The two studies considered here are: first, the report produced in 2009 by Malcolm and Fahd and commissioned by Horticulture Australia Limited and the NSW Department of Primary Industries; and, secondly, the 2010 Urban Research Centre report written by James and others.

2.4 P Malcolm and R Fahd - *Ground Truthing of the Sydney Vegetable Industry in 2008*

This survey presents an assessment of the vegetable growing industry on the Sydney outskirts. For the purposes of the study, the Sydney area was defined as bounded by the local government areas of Gosford, Wyong, Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Wollondilly. The region was divided into a grid pattern and GPS, satellite imagery and cadastral mapping were used, plus on ground verification, to identify relevant properties. The actual area growing vegetables on each property was measured using satellite imagery verified by on ground physical inspections. The vegetable farms studied were broken down into three

categories: (a) in-ground vegetable farming; (b) greenhouse production; and (c) hydroponic farming.

Malcolm and Fahd's key findings on the extent of vegetable growing in the region were as follows:

- the total number of identified vegetable farms was about 1,052;
- the area planted in outdoor-field, greenhouse and outdoor hydroponic vegetables is about 2,025 hectares;
- the average size of vegetable planting on those 1,052 holdings was 1.9 hectares;
- more than half of Sydney's identified vegetable growing concerns are in the State Government's proposed North West and Southern Growth Centres, that is, areas earmarked for release/close subdivision; and
- together, by area the Southern and North West Growth Centres contain 60% of Sydney's greenhouse vegetable industry.¹⁵

Broadly, it was found that, when compared with the results from previous studies, the Sydney vegetable industry had decreased over the last 12 years. The authors noted that 'Currently, it is considerably smaller than many industry observers had previously suggested'. They went on to say:

The major implication of the development of the Southern and North West Growth Centres is that the number of vegetable farms in the Sydney Region could fall by more than 50% and the area devoted to greenhouse vegetables could decline by as much as 60%.¹⁶

On the methodological front, Malcolm and Fahd noted that, based on ABS figures, estimates of the relative contribution of Sydney's vegetable industry to the NSW vegetable industry can vary dramatically, depending on whether it is calculated on farming area (20%), total production in tonnage (23%), or grower numbers (52%). The authors also noted that ABS data suggests that the 'gross value' of vegetable production, in the Sydney region, is around \$132 million.¹⁷

On the inter-State and intra-State fronts, Malcolm and Fahd concluded that:

NSW is a net importer of large volumes of vegetables from other States....[and] Sydney imports the vast bulk of its vegetables from outside the Sydney region.¹⁸

One of their recommendations was for compulsory licensing/registration for all commercial vegetable growers.

2.5 Sarah James et al, [Sydney's Agricultural Lands: An Analysis](#)

Malcolm and Fahd's analysis of the Sydney vegetable industry is described by James et al as "clearly the most up-to-date and detailed study of the size and location of Sydney's vegetable farms".¹⁹ The "obvious limitation" they find with the report is that it "only covers vegetable farms." For James et al, it would require "A study with a broader scope...to deliver a full picture of agricultural land use in Sydney."

James et al review a number of relevant non-ABS reports written between 1993 and 2009. The findings of these reports, specifically in respect to the value of primary production in

the Sydney Basin and the number of producers, are contrasted with those found in the ABS agricultural census data. For example, James et al note that NSW Agriculture produced two reports in 2003, a draft report and a final report, both of which estimated the value of agricultural production in the Sydney Basin, including Gosford and Wyong, to be \$1 billion. According to James et al, "This estimate was more than twice the \$467 million value attributed to Sydney agriculture by the ABS in the 1996-97 agricultural census."²⁰

For James et al, the fundamental issue is that the exact amount of land under primary production in the Sydney Basin is currently not known.²¹

Overall this review reveals a rather patchy picture of reports on Sydney's agricultural industry, full of inconsistencies and contradictions in respect to the current state of Sydney agriculture and its changes over time.²²

The same authors note their long term concern 'about the decline of certain agricultural industries', notably food producing ones as opposed to such areas as turf and cut flowers.²³

3 Sydney's agricultural lands: the development of metropolitan policies

3.1 County of Cumberland Plan: preservation of agriculture

More than 50 fifty years ago, the McGirr Government (1947-1952) oversaw the administrative consolidation of 61 municipalities and 8 shires into a Greater Sydney area. Known as the County of Cumberland Consolidation, this reform sought to facilitate a plan to cover the whole of the Sydney and surrounds.

The significance of the plan was that it covered the area of the Sydney metropolis that was available for housing, industry and primary production. As Hugh Stretton pointed out, "Sydney is boxed in on three sides by the sea and two rugged plateaux."²⁴ The core of the area, that was available for primary and secondary production, as well as for housing, was the Cumberland Plain. Mark Tozer has written that:

the Cumberland Plain forms an elongated ellipse stretching from Sackville [north of Windsor]...to Thirlmere [south of Picton]...with the western boundary marked by the monocline of the Blue Mountains. East of Parramatta the plain is truncated by the Hornsby Plateau in the north and the Woronora Plateau to the south, and terminates near the city centre. The Cumberland Plain comprises gently undulating plains and low hills.²⁵

At the time that the County of Cumberland Plan was introduced in 1951, the two principal areas in outer Sydney where agriculture was extensively practised were the Hills district of the lower Hornsby Plateau (including Baulkham Hills, Castle Hill, Dural and Galston) and the Cumberland Plain. The then total area of land used for agriculture, on the Sydney outskirts, occupied an estimated 281,875 acres (or 128,125 hectares).²⁶

An over-arching principle, introduced through the Plan, was that of "land use zoning". Land use was divided into the following 6 different areas of activity (or zones):

- business centre;
- green belt;
- industrial area;
- living area,

- restricted living area; and
- special use.²⁷

According to Spearritt and Demarco:

The aim of the green belt was to save the metropolis from 'promiscuous urbanisation'. To prevent farming areas from being overtaken by speculative subdivision the Cumberland Plan proposed a minimum subdivision size of 5 acres [two hectares].²⁸

On the other hand, the County of Cumberland Plan also enshrined the position of freeways in the development of outer Sydney, an initiative that was likely to entice greater numbers of people towards the fringes of the city. As Nicholas Low and Imran Muhammad explain:

The radial network of expressways, prepared by the NSW Department of Main Roads between 1938 and 1946, was given formal approval through the County of Cumberland Plan. . .[the] Plan ensured that the radial pattern would guide freeway development for at least half a century.²⁹

3.2 Early erosion of the County of Cumberland Plan

Ironically, by planning for the provision of freeways, the Cumberland Plan sowed the seeds of its own erosion. Over the long term, smallholders on 5-acre lots could sell those same blocks, for example, to people from the inner suburbs who were using their cars to live further from the city. Those same urban purchasers could then demolish the former smallholder's house, and replace it with a new and bigger home, all the while forsaking agricultural production and simply living on "acreage". Writing fifty years after the County of Cumberland Plan was

introduced, Ian Sinclair and his colleagues said of Penrith:

desire for a rural lifestyle within close proximity to the Sydney metropolitan area has the potential to cause problems with the existing agricultural uses. . . in the northern parts of Penrith. . . a large number of lots. . . can be purchased relatively cheaply and which are of a size [that] suits the rural residential lifestyle aspirations.³⁰

Joe Cahill's State Government (1952-59) set in motion the undermining of the County of Cumberland arrangements. In 1959 Cahill's Minister for Local Government, Pat Hills, prevailed on the Plan's advisory committee to identify land that could be released for development. This was in the context of Sydney's growing population and the build up of demand for housing blocks.

In 1964, during the term of Robert Heffron's Government (1959-1964), the County of Cumberland was wound up and replaced by the State Planning Authority (SPA). At the same time, the Heffron Government continued to oversee the rezoning of primary production land, for housing and other purposes. Thousands of hectares of agricultural land, in the Ryde area, were soon released for suburban housing. Macquarie University was built on 109 farms: 59 of which had belonged to Italian growers.³¹

3.3 Sydney Region Outline Plan (SROP) 1968: Downgrading of Agriculture

In 1968, under the Askin Government, the State Planning Authority produced the *Sydney Region Outline Plan 1970-2000: Strategy for Development*. The plan, known as the Sydney Region Outline Plan, proposed a number of corridors for development. Of

particular significance for this E-brief, the plan proposed: a North West corridor (based around Castle Hill, Rouse Hill and Maralya); a West corridor (including the Blue Mountains); and a South West corridor (based around Campbelltown, Camden and Appin).³²

In relation to agriculture, the Sydney Region Outline Plan accorded it relatively little significance. In a chapter headed "The Regional Economy and Employment Distribution", the State Planning Authority remarked that, as far as primary industries were concerned:

only a few thousands of workers in the region, 1%, are so employed.³³

3.4 Whitlam Government and the further expansion of Sydney into agricultural outskirts

During the 1970s, with funds provided by the Whitlam Government's Department of Urban and Regional Development, the expansion of Sydney's urban area continued, this time towards the South-West. The population in the area based on the Macarthur Growth Centre increased by 40,000 between 1976 and 1981.³⁴

At the State level, in 1979 the Wran Government passed legislation which appeared to offer a means of safeguarding agricultural land. The *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* allowed for the making of environmental planning instruments (EPIs) for controlling land use. EPIs could be issued either as State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) or Local Environmental Plans (LEPs).³⁵

3.5 Sydney into its Third Century (1988): renewed focus on primary production

While Joe Cahill's ALP State Government had inaugurated the advance of residential housing into agricultural land during the 1960s, subsequent ALP governments re-affirmed a commitment to retaining primary production on the outskirts of the city. In 1988, during its last months in office, the Unsworth Government produced the *Sydney into its Third Century* plan. Bob Carr, as Minister for Planning, declared that "the bulk of Sydney's population growth will be accommodated in new areas on the fringe." However, he also stated that:

high quality agricultural lands...[should] be kept in use for as long as possible, for the economic benefit of the [Sydney] region.³⁶

The plan also maintained the Sydney Region Outline Plan's North West corridor recommendation, to form the nucleus of a North West Growth Centre.³⁷

3.6 Cities for the 21st Century (1995): endorsement of agriculture

In 1995, in the last month's of the Fahey Coalition Government, the report *Cities for the 21st Century: Integrated Urban Management for Sydney, Newcastle, the Central Coast and Wollongong* was released. This also endorsed the role of agriculture in the Sydney Basin, stating that:

Agriculture..in the Sydney region...[is] worth at least \$1 billion".³⁸

The report declared that a Coalition Government would prepare a plan that would "provide for the long-term future

of the agricultural resource basis of the region".³⁹

Although the Fahey Government acknowledged a place for agriculture, by this stage primary production in outer Sydney was in decline. Chant, Johnson and Kelleher – in a study of the period 1984/85 to 1993/94 – concluded that,

the fruit industry. . .is withdrawing from the [Sydney] fringe. . . [vegetable grower numbers] decline[d]. . .about 30%. . .[and] in the poultry industry. . .the number of operators is also dropping.⁴⁰

3.7 Shaping Our Cities (1998): maintaining agriculture in outer Sydney

A number of initiatives relevant to agriculture in the Sydney region were introduced in the early years of the Carr Government. In August 1996 the Minister for Agriculture, Richard Amery, released an *Issues Paper called Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Basin*, a process that resulted in the release by NSW Agriculture in May 1998 of the report [Strategic Plan for Sustainable Agriculture: Sydney Region](#). Under the heading of "Planning", the report commented:

Agriculture is a significant business in the Sydney region. It is yet to achieve its full social, environmental and economic potential. This will only be achieved if existing and potential producers believe that their investment of time, energy and money, based on best management practices, is financially rational. Investors in environmentally responsible agricultural activities have to be confident of their long term security against external factors such as urban encroachment.

In another initiative, in September 1995, six months after becoming Premier, Bob Carr established the Premier's Taskforce on Market Gardening by People of Non-English Speaking Background. Three years later, the Taskforce produced its report, a key finding of which was that 10,000 hectares in the Sydney Basin were then devoted to market gardening alone.⁴¹

Accompanying the taskforce's acknowledgment of the significance of agriculture in the Sydney Basin, Carr's department of urban affairs and planning produced a new metropolitan strategy, *Shaping Our Cities*, which heralded an attempt to maintain agricultural activity in the Sydney region. The stated intent of the 1998 plan was one of:

protecting primary production...from competing demands on resources and minimising conflicts from the incursion of incompatible land uses.⁴²

Paralleling policy at a State level, a number of councils introduced their own plans to preserve agricultural land. Edge Land Planning wrote that, "Zoning the land for agriculture was introduced in Wollondilly Shire Council in 1996 and Hornsby Council in 2000."⁴³

Indicating the tensions and conflicting priorities at work, according to Bob Fagan, a year before the release of Carr's *Shaping Our Cities* plan, "over three-quarters of designated rural land in Sydney's outer areas was zoned for 'rural residential' purposes rather than productive agriculture". The greatest concentration of rural residential use was in the Hawkesbury Council area, followed by Penrith, Baulkham Hills, Liverpool and Camden.⁴⁴

3.8 Agriculture and housing in 21st Century: Sydney Metropolitan Strategy 2005

In December 2005 the Lemna Government released another metropolitan strategy, called *City of Cities*. The strategy aimed for the establishment of 181,000 new lots to be developed in the North-West (NW), and South-West (SW), of Sydney. Growth in and around the NW Centre was planned to take place in the Baulkham Hills and Blacktown local government areas. Development in and around the SW Centre was designed to take place in the local government areas of Liverpool, Campbelltown and Camden.⁴⁵

Just before the release of the plan, Premier Lemna had written in an article in *The Australian* that "Sydney has to keep growing. . .that's why I've been an unapologetic supporter of new releases on Sydney's outskirts".⁴⁶

Indicating the direction of policy under the new metropolitan strategy, a month before its release the Government announced that two proposed "green zones", one in each of the NW and SW centres, would be scrapped. The two zones together covered 8,400 hectares in the land release areas and a further 14,000 hectares outside the Growth Centres boundary.⁴⁷ As noted earlier, according to Malcolm and Fahd more than half of Sydney's identified vegetable growing concerns are in the State Government's proposed North West and Southern Growth Centres, that is, areas earmarked for release/close subdivision.

In 2006 the Lemna Government introduced the NW and SW Growth Centres by officially gazetting the Sydney Region Growth Centres SEPP.⁴⁸ To complement this, a common structure and syntax was

created for Local Environmental Plans. According to the NSW Department of Planning's *Benefits of the LEP Template*, the State Government's part in proceedings will be "to ensure the plan is consistent with regional or State planning objectives before it becomes operational."⁴⁹

Despite the predominance of housing, in the *City of Cities* plan, provision was nonetheless made for agriculture on the city fringe. The "Environment and Resources" section of the plan stated:

A framework for the sustainable development of agricultural industries and related rural processing will be developed. It will provide for consideration of agriculture in the planning system by clearly demonstrating its importance.⁵⁰

In 2009 a new ministerial direction under section 117(2) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* was issued. According to the direction:

The new direction no. 7.1 requires planning proposals to implement the vision, land use strategy, policies, outcomes and actions of the metropolitan strategy. The direction applies to all local government areas in metropolitan Sydney that are affected by the metropolitan strategy.⁵¹

Harvey Grennan recently reported that, in the North West Growth Centre, the current Keneally Government has already rezoned land for 1,200 homes. The area will also host the 265-hectare Sydney Business Park.⁵² In the South West Growth Centre area, the prospects are similar. Applied Economics wrote that:

Traditionally Camden Council employed a strong urban

containment policy...In its 1999 plan, council determined that the shire population might increase from 50,000 to 70,000 people by 2025..If the SW growth centre reached its target yield, dwellings in Camden would increase nearly fivefold from 18,000 to 85,000 and the population from 53,000 to 256,000.⁵³

3.9 [Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036](#)

Between early 2006 and late 2010 the NSW Department of Planning began making preparations for a review of *City of Cities*. In relation to agriculture, the Department (in association with the NSW Department of Primary Industries) hosted a forum in December 2008 titled, "Sydney's Agriculture – Planning for the Future". Participants in the forum included Joe Elboustani (a tomato farmer); Tally Matthews (a turf grower); Kevin Tolson (Regal Mushrooms); and Alan Wilson (NSW general manager of Inghams). A major concern, identified by the participants, was that:

Agricultural land needs to be definitively identified and protected from development processes through planning policies.⁵⁴

In a power point presentation to the forum, the Department of Planning produced a "Key Action" of protecting "valuable rural activities and resource lands". This would include maintaining "rural activities and resource lands" and protecting "resource lands from inappropriate land uses".⁵⁵

Other interests and perspectives were also in play however. For example, it is reported that "A submission from Walker Corporation...urges the revised strategy be amended to facilitate large-scale efficient residential estates."⁵⁶

Released in December 2010, the review seeks to accommodate these contrasting interests. The relevant section of the *Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036* begins by asserting that "Agricultural lands are vital assets [which]...provide Sydney with fresh, locally-produced food".

On a strategic note, the review continues:

Fringe lands are protected by focusing the majority of urban growth in existing centres and in the Growth Centres. By encouraging a compact urban form, the Metropolitan Plan seeks to enhance sustainability and environmental outcomes across the city.⁵⁷

At the same time the Plan envisages 125,000 new dwellings in "greenfield" sites, as opposed to already developed suburbs.⁵⁸ On the current basis of an average house block size of 550 square metres, this would amount to an excision of around 6,800 hectares of previously agricultural land.⁵⁹

The review presents a number of objectives and actions. The objectives are fourfold:

- *To contain Sydney's urban footprint* – for which the corresponding actions are (a) "focus land release in Growth Centres" and (b) "Simplify the land release process".
- *To maintain and protect agricultural activities and resource lands* - for which the corresponding actions are (a) "Consider development of an agricultural policy for Sydney" and (b) Undertake mapping to inform future strategic policy making with respect to agricultural activities and resource lands".

- *To encourage investment in agriculture and resource lands* - for which the corresponding actions are (a) "Prepare and release guidance on planning for agricultural activities" and (b) "Plan for the sustainable management of construction materials".
- *To maintain Sydney's soil health* - for which the corresponding actions is to 'Finalise and implement the NSW Soils Policy'.⁶⁰

4 Conclusion

Population growth, planning and infrastructure issues are among the key concerns of NSW State politics. All of these impact on the further policy area of agricultural production in the Sydney region. Responding to comments in the current debate about housing developments, Tony McNamara, the President of the NSW Branch of the Planning Institute said:

The big issues are where is the capacity for the infrastructure to service the developments and what impact will they have on the food bowl of Sydney'.⁶¹

This E-brief suggests that successive State governments have tried to maintain a policy retains a place for primary production on the outskirts of Sydney. Major planning strategies, in recent years, have indeed determined that the majority of new dwellings should be in already developed suburbs.

Despite these policy initiatives, however, agricultural land in outer Sydney is clearly under pressure from the advance of residential housing and industry. Nuo Tang wrote that in the western Sydney area, covered by the local government areas of Auburn,

Bankstown, Blacktown, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith:

From 1989 to 2008, a total of 6,289.74 ha of residential land cover were added, whilst there occurred a significant decrease of green area and tree area, with declines of 4,982.58 and 895.88 respectively.⁶²

As far as Camden in particular was concerned, Tang wrote that "Camden LGA, which was covered by green area and trees in 1989, is dominated by residential and non-residential [industrial] land cover in 2008."⁶³

Many of the key issues and dilemmas in this debate were canvassed in the 2010 final report of the Senate Select Committee on Agriculture and Related, [*Food Production in Australia*](#). The report observed:

The land on the fringes of Australia's major cities has been an important food growing area, due to the arable qualities of the land and the proximity to consumers that ensures food freshness and minimal transport costs. However, population growth and associated housing development in major cities is encroaching into land previously used to provide food for their inhabitants.⁶⁴

Just how important is agriculture in the Sydney region, economically and otherwise? ABS 2006 figures suggest that the outer Sydney portion, of total NSW agriculture, amounted to 7%. This estimation coincides with Malcolm and Fahd's observation that most of Sydney's primary produce needs are supplied either from elsewhere in the State or beyond. However, a figure of 7% is far from insignificant. Moreover, a case can be made for the advantages of proximity to the Sydney market.

Beyond any purely commercial or pragmatic argument for the retention of agriculture on the Sydney fringe, there is also the over-arching issue of amenity. Put simply, what kind of city do we want Sydney to be?

- ¹ NSW Department of Planning, *Metropolitan Strategy Review (Sydney Towards 2036): Discussion Paper* (NSW Department of Planning, Sydney, 2010), p.22.
- ² NSW Department of Planning, n.1, p.22.
- ³ Denis Winston, *Sydney's Great Experiment – the Progress of the Cumberland County Plan* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1957), p.49.
- ⁴ NSW Agriculture, [Strategic Plan for Sustainable Agriculture: Sydney Region](#), 1998, p 14.
- ⁵ Sarah James, *Sydney's Agricultural Lands: An Analysis* (Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, 2010), p.12.
- ⁶ James, n.5, p.6.
- ⁷ For Malcolm and Fahd, it is only ABS estimates of vegetable farm numbers in Sydney, and not the extent or value of production, that can be verified by their analysis. P Malcolm and R Fahd, *Ground Truthing of the Sydney Vegetable Industry in 2008* (NSW Department of Primary Industries, Orange, 2009), pp.16, 18.
- ⁸ NSW Department of Planning, *Metropolitan Plan for 2036* (NSW Department of Planning, Sydney, 2010), p.163.
- ⁹ ABS, [Agricultural Commodities: Small Area Data, Agriculture 2005-06](#), ABS Catalogue 7125.0 (Re-issue) (Additional Tables) – Table 1.
- ¹⁰ ABS, n.9.
- ¹¹ ABS, n.9.
- ¹² ABS, n.9.
- ¹³ ABS, n.9.
- ¹⁴ ABS, n.9.
- ¹⁵ Malcolm and Fahd, n.7, p.15.
- ¹⁶ Malcolm and Fahd, n 7, p 15.
- ¹⁷ Malcolm and Fahd, n.7, pp.15, 66.
- ¹⁸ Malcolm and Fahd, n.7, pp.61,71.
- ¹⁹ James, n.5, p.25.
- ²⁰ James, n 5, p 21.
- ²¹ James, n.5, p.7.
- ²² James, n 5, p 27.
- ²³ James, n 5, p 28.
- ²⁴ Hugh Stretton, *Ideas for Australian Cities*, third edition (Georgian House, Melbourne, 1989), p.257.
- ²⁵ Mark Tozer, "The Native Vegetation of the Cumberland Plain, Western Sydney:

- Systematic Classification and Field Identification of Communities" in *Cunninghamia*, vol.8, no.1, p.2.
- ²⁶ M.I. Logan, G.J. Missen and J. Rutherford, *New Viewpoints in Economic Geography: Case Studies from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, North America* (Martindale Press, Sydney, 1966), pp.255, 259, 268.
- ²⁷ Windom Wai Hin Ko, *Land Use Segregation and Mixing through Zoning Controls in Greater Sydney* (Bachelor of Planning Thesis, University of NSW, 2009), p.16.
- ²⁸ P Spearritt and C Demarco, *Planning Sydney's Future* (Allen and Unwin, 1988), p 22.
- ²⁹ Imran Muhammad and Nicholas Low, *Mega Projects in Transport and Development (Background In Australian Case Studies): Sydney Harbour Tunnel* (Australasian Centre for the Governance and Management of Urban Transport, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2006), p.2.
- ³⁰ Edge Land Planning, *Penrith Rural Lands Study* (Edge Land Planning, Bowral, 2001), p.175.
- ³¹ Catherine Kevin and Ros Pesman, *A History of Italian Settlement in New South Wales* (NSW Heritage Office, Sydney, 1998), p.22.
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