

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE
SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025**

SUBMISSION FROM AUSTRALIAN FARMERS' MARKETS ASSOCIATION

Submission to the Parliament of Australia
Standing Committee of Environment and Heritage

Sustainable Cities 2025

**Creating Space and a Place for
Farmers' Markets in Australian Cities**

Attachments

- Australian Farmers' Markets Association Inc Charter
- Real Food Revolution, The Bulletin, 18 May, 2002

Further information please contact

Jane Adams, Chair, Australian Farmers' Markets Association
PH (02) 9360 9380
Email: jacom@bigpond.net.au

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OVERVIEW

This submission is predicated on two incontrovertible and basic facts:

- Food is fundamental to the survival of cities and their residents.
- Existing food systems and food policies do not necessarily offer the most sustainable options for feeding Australia's citizens.

And a realisation – market places are as old as mankind.

It seeks recognition of a place for farmers' markets in contemporary and future Australian cities, and policy frameworks that facilitate the establishment of farmers' markets in urban and rural cityscapes.

FARMERS' MARKET DEFINITION

A farmers' market is defined as:

'A predominantly fresh food market that operates regularly within a community, at a focal public location that provides a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell farm-origin and associated value-added processed food products directly to customers.'

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FIRST CROP –

CHARTING THE EVOLUTION OF FARMERS' MARKETS IN AUSTRALIA

The first farmers' market in Australia started trading in 1999. At last count there were 70-plus operating in all states with at least another ten flagged to start before the 2004 autumn harvest.

The movement is quintessentially a grassroots creation where likeminded individuals have banded together in varyingly formed and constituted groups to start community-based markets. They have sprung up in shopping malls, showgrounds, racetracks, warehouses, and car parks where a motley collection of tents, trestles and trucks collect on specific half-days (mostly mornings) in the month, the temporary infrastructure that allows farmers, their families and artisan producers to directly sell their edible wares to shoppers hungry for fresh food straight from its source. It is this direct through-chain relationship – food sold directly from producer to consumer, the market's food focus, and the prominence of fresh food that essentially defines a farmers' market.

The drivers for the rapidly growing farmers' market movement have varied from state to state but encompass stimuli as varied as food groups, church organisations, main streets committees, state development departments, local government, health promotions, farming associations, organic growers, agribusiness networks and commercial private market operators.

The Bulletin cover story in May 2002 was a critical turning point – finally the 'Real Food Revolution' was out there on newsstands. Subsequent media coverage including ABC *Landline* followed and Australian shoppers began to discover there was an alternative way to buy food, other than pushing shopping trolleys mindlessly along supermarket aisles.

The other critical 2002 milestone was the inaugural farmers' market conference, 'Market Forces' hosted in Bathurst, New South Wales. Attended by 75 delegates, it provided an umbrella for people active in the movement, or wanting to discover the benefits of farmers' markets. At the time there were approximately 30 markets trading regularly. At the plenary session the delegates agreed to create a national body, the Australian Farmers' Markets Association (AFMA) and adopted a generic charter. Since then AFMA has launched an informational website: www.farmersmarkets.org.au

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SECOND CROP – CONTRIBUTIONS AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The evolution of farmers' markets has taken at least four years to gather real momentum and establish a recognised social footprint. There are various markers for this status which include:

Government

This Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage 'Sustainable Cities 2025' enquiry accepted this submission from the Australian Farmers' Markets Association. The Victorian Department of Primary Industry is commissioning national research into farmers' markets. The department has also facilitated the publication of a generic model for farmers' markets in Victoria. This document was an extension of a Victorian agribusiness network commissioned feasibility study that sought to establish the viability of farmers' markets on the fringes of western Melbourne. Victoria's Department of Regional Development is funding two 2004 training workshops for market managers and market vendors.

Rural and Urban Development

Evidence suggests that some property developers are considering incorporating market spaces into development plans for public and urban space. The Wangaratta Council has undertaken a community development that includes a purpose-built market space. Waverley Council in Sydney has elected to operate various markets in its redeveloped shopping mall; a weekly farmers' market operates already and is to be joined by a regular organic market.

The University of Western Sydney workshop on the 'Future of Rural Land in Sydney' recently invited the participation of AFMA to discuss the role of farmers' markets in the preservation of urban fringe farmland.

Wauchope, the host town of the Hastings Shire Farmers' Market, has undergone noticeable economic and social renewal since the advent two-plus years ago of the local farmers' market which has stimulated the local economy. New retail business starts and invigorated community pride have been recorded.

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Economic Development

The facilitation role of state and local government has been a significant driver in the growth of farmers' markets, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales.

Preliminary research into the economic impacts of farmers' markets has elicited some initial data. Significantly, the bi-monthly Hume Murray Food Bowl Farmers' Market in Albury-Wodonga reports an annual \$1.5 million input to the local economy.

The Hastings Shire (Port Macquarie) operates a monthly market at the Wauchope showgrounds. Two years down the track the economic development officer reports achievements that include a half-million dollar investment in a hydroponic tomato business undertaken after the grower successfully trialed tomatoes at the farmers' market. Agricultural diversification projects are reported, at least five small farmers moving on from the market to the commercial sector. Notably too, several dairy farmers have moved into horticulture, particularly potatoes and avocados. A community kitchen is to be developed to support small value-add food businesses.

Health and Nutrition

Farmers' markets deliver fresh food to urban and rural communities. They have the capacity to educate people about healthy eating, and can contribute to a reduction in obesity through education and changed eating patterns. They can underpin food security networks and can act as the hub of local food systems. The farmers' market can be the focal market place which connects community supported agriculture (CSA) farms with consumers, which provides a commercial outlet for the output crop of community and school gardens. Farmers' markets can promote food groups, food trails and farmgate fresh food outlets and can vitally connect isolated farmers with their peers and new customers.

The Carnarvon Farmers' Market in northwest Western Australia operates weekly for six months of the year (the northern winter) and regularly attracts over 1000 of the city's 6000 residents. A 2002 survey reported 39% of the polled shoppers were eating more fruit and vegetables, 40% had tried new varieties and 86% had increased knowledge of local product.

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Tourism Impacts

While farmers' markets are not primarily established to be tourist attractions they do attract non-residents when operating and can augment the food footprint and wine food tourism offer of a region. Farmers' markets are also a vibrant attraction in cityscape locations, best evidenced by the Pyrmont Growers Market in Sydney.

The only existing research on the relationship between farmers' markets and tourism was conducted in South Gippsland. Over 200 visitors to Drouin and Koonwarra markets were surveyed by self-administered questionnaire in 2003. Results show that shoppers were predominantly middle-aged educated females; visitors travelled up to 40km to shop, most primarily motivated by a desire for farm fresh produce. The survey claims that farmers' markets do attract tourist visitation and provide host regions with benefits, particularly visitor participation in allied food wine tourism activities in the host region.

The benefits of farmers' markets to the host community are complex, encompassing rural and urban economics, social cohesion, nutrition and public health.

**CREATING THE SPACE – INCLUDING FARMERS' MARKETS IN
AUSTRALIAN CITYSCAPES**

This submission proposes there is a permanent place for farm direct food markets in Australian urban and regional cityscapes.

Facilitation of the inclusion of farm direct food markets in urban and rural environments relies partially on the vision, understanding and support of various government agencies including government agriculture and development departments, planning bodies, food health and safety regulators, and local government.

Market places can be planned into new urban developments, or simply 'bumped in' to existing or modified streetscapes or public space including recreational facilities like showgrounds, racecourses, parks, and car parks. Required infrastructure ideally includes power, water, sealed even road surfaces, all-weather protection, adequate parking provision and access to public transport.

There are already Australian precedents for both scenarios – purpose-built and temporary installations which are essentially low impact and low cost.

Effective urban environment and food policy planning needs to provide frameworks that will encourage such developments, while recognising both the impact of competing influences and the threat of urban development on the productivity and maintenance of valuable urban fringe farmland.

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CONNECTING PEOPLE

Farmers' markets provide a nucleus and vital network between farmers and food producers, a meeting place for growers and artisan food processors with common interests and needs. Their primary customers are household food shoppers out to fill the fridge.

But the commercial relationships do not stop there. The farmers' market acts as a fulcrum providing farmers access to chefs, caterers, food service buyers, food processors, independent food store and supermarket buyers, and even food exporters who use farmers' markets to research new products and customers. A vibrant farmers' market network can underpin local food policy.

Farmers' markets can also facilitate the development of cohesive communities, and nurture the notion of 'village' or 'neighbourhood', providing both a 'taste of country' and positive social connections, two values with high currency in contemporary Australian society.

A VISION

Imagine a cityscape where roundabouts are planted with kale and coloured lettuces, and public herb gardens, where flower boxes flourish with edible plants, and rooftop gardens are routinely designed into high-rise buildings. Imagine a society where children and the aged tend community kitchen gardens, and vacant land is transformed into greenspace gardens, where property developers are bound to plant fruit trees in median strips, and developers and planners routinely incorporate focal market places into developments and cityscapes.

Imagine a society where rural and agricultural land is valued equally or more highly than urban development, where sprawling cityscapes encompass farms, market gardens and orchards, where food continues to be grown locally, within essential reach of major population centres.

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Imagine bustling market days when farmers and artisan producers arrive in market squares, malls and parklands with trucks and trolleys loaded with freshly grown and value-added seasonal food with flavour – new season apples, juicy ripe peaches, freshly dug spuds, snap green Asian vegies, golden yolk eggs, crusty sourdough bread, washed rind cheeses, thick-cut grain-fed Wagyu beef steaks and plump free-range chickens, potted herbs and fresh-cut flowers for the dinner tables.

This is not a pipe dream, such market scenes happen already in cities across Australia but the continued evolution of local food systems will be facilitated by intelligent and sustainable land use planning, the application of common sense to regulatory issues, and the commitment to the incorporation of local food policy in future urban planning.

APPROPRIATE ACTION

Government departments of agriculture, environment, economic development and health can play significant facilitation roles to support the spread of farmers' markets. The Sustainable Cities 2025 Blueprint for ecologically and economically sustainable patterns of city development is requested to consider appropriate strategy, policy and mechanisms that will complement and facilitate this vitally important, vibrant grassroots community movement.

REFERENCES

- Australian Farmers' Markets Association Inc. www.farmersmarkets.org.au
- A Guide for the Establishment of Farmers' Markets in Victoria, Jane Adams Communications, Department of Primary Industry Victoria, 2003
- Market Forces, Conference Proceedings, Bathurst 2002.
- Real Food Revolution, Anthony Hoy, The Bulletin, 18 May 2002.