



A People's Food Plan for Australia

**Values, Principles and Best Practice:
A discussion draft**


Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

September 2012



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Authors: Claire Parfitt, Nick Rose, Michael Croft, and Jen Alden.
Editors: Dr Carol Richards (University of Queensland) and Dr Jane Dixon (Australian National University).
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About the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a collaboration of organisations and individuals working together towards fair, sustainable and resilient food systems. Formed in July 2010, the AFSA is an incorporated not-for-profit association in the Australian Capital Territory. For more information visit: <http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/>

Mission

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance is working towards fair, diverse and democratic food systems for the benefit of all Australians.

Values and Principles

These describe the foundational beliefs and attitudes that form the platform from which AFSA operates.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Inclusive</i> | All Australians, especially the poor and disadvantaged, have a right to choice of and accessibility to high quality, fresh and nutritious food. |
| <i>Collaborative</i> | We work with, network and give voice to the multifaceted fair food movement. |
| <i>Professional</i> | We conduct our interactions respectfully and with humility, ready to learn, not lecture. |
| <i>Transparent</i> | We are democratically accountable to our members, supporters and the wider public; and our meetings and processes are open. |
| <i>Wise</i> | Where possible, we seek and develop positions based on fact, not hearsay; but we are open to intuitive understandings of our environment, culture and society. |
| <i>Courageous</i> | We aim to provide strong leadership in setting out a vision and action plan to bring about the necessary transition to new food and farming futures. |
| <i>Sustainable</i> | We act in accordance with social, ecological and economic justice, and with the precautionary principle. |

The People’s Food Plan

Foreword by Costa Georgiadis



There is no time more appropriate than right now to establish a People’s Food Plan. Food is the one activity that brings us all together. Who has not put something in their mouth today? This is exactly where all the questions begin when it comes to creating a vision for our food future that provides everyone in the country access to fresh, affordable, nutritious, locally grown food.

Who grew the food that you put into your mouth and how was it grown? What agricultural processes were used and in what condition did it leave the landscape where it was grown? How was it transported and how far did it travel before it reached you, the person who ate it? Are you as the eater being delivered living produce? Or has it been transformed into a processed product disguised as food? And why is so much of our food – up to 40% - being wasted and ending up in landfill, when a million Australians or more aren’t getting enough good food to eat?

These are questions that must be asked about the system that creates and supplies our food. But then as the eater of food, we must ask the next layer of questions: What was used to grow this food? How sustainable were the practices, and what biocides or harmful chemicals were applied to it? As the final link in the food chain, what am I placing in my body?

This question alone creates the buy-in for change. This makes it personal. When we see ourselves as a sovereign state and question everything that goes into our bodies, then the basis of a real food plan has been created. Labelling becomes the true passport for all food, a full and clear disclosure of food and its history to the person consuming it.

It seems funny to me that the more refined and developed we have become as a nation, the more distant we eaters of food have become from the source of our food. From village-dwelling food producers connected to the cycles of nature and the vagaries of crop harvest, to disconnected urban shoppers sold the merits of convenience, but also an insecure reality of reliance on others. Currently in Australia our food system is dominated by an ever-

smaller group of companies upholding an industrial supply and distribution system that has disconnected the food on our plates with the living produce in a farmer’s paddocks.

And the intimate connection of food as our daily nutrition and health provider has been replaced by a product: a commodity, that has a price at the farm gate, a price to the retailer and a final price to the supermarket shopper.

When we look at food as a health industry then the significance of a real vision around food and the environment is clear. A new vision and a new food system starts with regenerative and holistic agricultural practices based around locally-produced food. This by default creates food security through the broader significance of food sovereignty. You know your food because it is local and in season.

Conscious understanding of our food and its journey gives us the power to change the world around us. Unknowingly, everyone’s food choices are shaping our world, so a very conscious buy-in to a real People’s Food Plan is the vehicle of change, capable of engaging everyone with a new level of environmental understanding and stewardship through personal health and nutrition.

Now is the time to repurpose and refocus as a community. Now is the time to build an economy where growth is valued in annual soil depth and fertility that in turn promotes a health industry, not based on sickness but on living food. Let’s cover the fences and boundaries of a divided world with edible vines and plants that produce new visions and innovations worthy of the potential we have around us. Creativity to drive a world fuelled on regenerative and renewable sources requires new industries, new thinking and less baggage from a world paradigm whose time is passed.

Change requires courage and strength. Change requires fuel, and food is the fuel of our future. The People’s Food Plan is the fuel of the future. Food Freedom begins in the soil that feeds seed freedom.

Now is the time to plant and nurture the seeds of change. I am excited.

Photo credit: Costa Georgiadis

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Food is the very stuff of life

‘Let food be thy medicine, and thy medicine be food’. These words, spoken by the Greek physician Hippocrates (460 – 370 B.C.) remain as true today as when he uttered them. Food – along with water, and air – is the essence of life. So healthy food systems are needed to:

- Feed all people well
- Look after all food producers
- Nurture the land, water and ecosystems from which food is produced.

In this way healthy food systems perform multiple important functions improving the human condition, as has been recognised by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development.

The globalised food system is life-degrading

Being essential to life, food systems must be life-enhancing and life-sustaining. Unfortunately, the globalised food system of recent decades has become all too often life-degrading and life-threatening. More land is cleared every year, and rural communities displaced in a global ‘land and water grab’ to keep the system expanding. Family farmers are squeezed to ‘get big or get out’. Australian dairy and grain farmer numbers have halved in the past few decades.

In the globalised food system:

- Family farmers everywhere struggle to earn a decent living
- Fresh, nutritious food is becoming less affordable for many people
- A billion people, mostly rural women and children, are starving or malnourished
- A global pandemic of 400 million obese and diabetic people is spreading fast
- Agriculture and food production create around 33% of greenhouse gas emissions
- Industrialised agriculture is a major factor in the mass extinction of other species.
- The resources on which industrial farming depends are in sharp decline

Business-as-usual is not an option

A transition to sustainable ecological farming systems is urgent, before resource-intensive agriculture fails due to the end of cheap oil and phosphates, limited water and arable soils, and climate change. Sustainable low-input farms are key to permanently and securely feeding us all.

‘Business-as-usual’ is not an option as most experts – including Olivier de Schutter, the UN’s special rapporteur on food – agree. But ‘more of the same’ is what our Federal Government’s National Food Plan will deliver. In developing the National Food Plan, government has closely consulted with vested commercial interests. As a result, this plan focuses on extending the status quo, backing the drive for corporate profits by ‘seizing new market opportunities’, ‘raising productivity and competitiveness’, and ‘boosting exports’ –using a mining industry model.

In this system, corporate profits will increase while human well-being, ecosystem integrity and access to local, fresh, safe & nutritious food are badly compromised. What’s being proposed is a ‘Midas feast’ – turning all productive resources to ‘gold’ until there’s nothing left to eat. This system is not life-enhancing.

Creating the People’s Food Plan

That is why the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) believes that a People’s Food Plan, which takes as its guiding compass the enhancement of life, is required. We draw inspiration from the development of the Canadian People’s Food Policy, a two-year process that involved thousands of Canadians in hundreds of kitchen-table talks, online discussions, and national conferences. This process transformed the lives of those involved, empowering them as citizens to state their priorities and directly participate in shaping a fair and sustainable food policy for all Canadians.

Like the Canadian process, the People’s Food Plan process will be guided by the core principles of Food Sovereignty. Food Sovereignty is our right, as people and as communities, to work together to decide how our food and agricultural systems can be designed to be fair, sustainable and resilient.

This process is about us as citizens exercising our basic rights, to hold a democratic, inclusive conversation on food issues of fundamental importance to our wellbeing, and that of future generations.

Most Australians want a fair, sustainable and resilient food system and many are taking steps in our own lives to realise that goal. Millions of us grow some of our own food; keep chooks or a beehive; shop at a farmers’ market; participate in a community or school garden; and want to buy, with confidence, Australian-grown, safe, healthy and, where possible, local, seasonal produce.

The People’s Food Plan process will involve ordinary Australians discussing together our values and priorities for the establishment of a new, fair, sustainable and resilient food system. A first round of public forums will be held around the country during September-October, with an aim to launch a first version of a ‘Values, Principles and Best Practice’ statement in November 2012. From there, we want to broaden and deepen the discussion, in order to publish a more developed document, as a contribution to the national debate in advance of the release of the National Food Plan white paper and the 2013 Federal election.

About this document

This discussion draft has been drafted by core members of the Steering Team for the People’s Food Plan process: Michael Croft, Claire Parfitt, Jen Alden and Nick Rose. Dr Carol Richards, Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Research Fellow (University of Queensland), and Dr Jane Dixon, Senior Fellow at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (Australian National University), provided extensive editorial support. The document has been revised and approved by the AFSA management committee. All work on this document, and all work supporting public forums and kitchen table talks around the country, has been provided by teams of volunteers.

The document is for discussion purposes only. It does not presume in any way to set out a definitive ‘solution’

to the profound challenges we all face. Rather, it seeks to articulate a set of values and principles that can ground a framework for developing a fair, sustainable and resilient food system. In addition, and drawing on some examples of best practice in Australia and overseas, it puts forward a number of proposals, as possible strategies that can be adopted by individuals, communities, businesses and governments around the country.

The core principles on which this document is based are to be found in the global movement for Food Sovereignty, led by the family farmer movement La Via Campesina, which embraces hundreds of millions of people in over 70 countries. The concept has been adopted by the United Nations Committee for World Food Security, and the principles include the following:

- Food is a basic human need, so access to good, healthy food at all times for all people is a basic human right, which our Government is obliged to uphold
- Thriving rural communities and viable family farms are basic to a healthy food system
- Agriculture is impossible without healthy land and waterways, so farmers must be supported in their role as environmental stewards caring for soils and landscapes
- Sustainable agriculture for the future will increasingly be based around the principles of agroecology, where knowledge is freely shared amongst farmers and growers
- Our prime agricultural lands are the basis of our future: they need to be identified and protected from suburban sprawl, coal-seam gas mining, foreign ownership and control
- Food systems that are fair to farmers and eaters, and that are environmentally sustainable, are ones that are diversified and decentralised
- Excessive corporate concentration and control over any sector of the food system – seeds, inputs, land, distribution, retail, trade - is inconsistent with the democratic core of Food Sovereignty

For more information visit:

<http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/>





1. SEEDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

With the challenges of farming a dry and arid land with fragile soils, Australian farmers have been at the forefront of innovative farming practices. Farmers have local knowledge necessary to get the best from the land and act as stewards of the land for future generations.

In recent decades, changing global, political and economic conditions have locked many farmers into a ‘treadmill of production’¹ requiring ever-increasing agricultural inputs such as chemical pesticides and fertilisers, whilst at the same time, prices paid to farmers decline. Essentially farmers buy inputs at retail prices but sell their food wholesale. This results in what many farmers identify as a ‘cost-price squeeze’ where the terms of trade are unfavourable and threaten the profitability of family farms.

Industrial-style agricultural production is increasingly viewed as socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable. Rural communities are experiencing severe economic decline and family farmers are leaving the land at the rate of 1% per year, or 25% over 25 years². Environmentally, industrial agriculture is associated with mass vegetation clearing, biodiversity loss, salinity, and soil erosion. In Western Australia, salinity affects over 50 percent of farms³.

Australian farmers deserve a better return for their labour, and need support to identify real solutions to some very serious problems such as decreasing water availability, extreme and unpredictable weather patterns, and global trade asymmetries. We are already seeing losses in production and ecosystem functions, and this is likely to accelerate unless we urgently adapt farming systems to both the climate and global economy.

HARNESSING AUSTRALIA’S INNOVATIONS IN FARMING

WE PROPOSE:

- 1.1. Financial support for farmers to conduct their own localised research and development projects
- 1.2. Funding for independent research projects on agricultural innovations
- 1.3. An ongoing dialogue with farmers and consumers
- 1.4. Protection for farmers whose land is contaminated with GM crops
- 1.5. A return to government-sponsored agricultural/environmental extension services for farmers

Economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture

There are many approaches to a more economically viable and environmentally sustainable agriculture – but they require the support of the Government. For instance, agroecology is cited by 400 of the world’s leading agricultural scientists⁴, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food⁵ as the best way forward for global agriculture. However, agroecology has received little support from the government in the past, and does not feature in the proposed National Food Plan.

“Agroecology is a scientific discipline that uses ecological theory to study, design, manage and evaluate agricultural systems that are productive but also resource conserving. Agroecological research considers interactions of all important biophysical, technical and socioeconomic components of farming systems and regards these systems as the fundamental units of study, where mineral cycles, energy transformations, biological processes and socioeconomic relationships are analyzed as a whole in an interdisciplinary fashion.”
– Miguel Altieri (<http://agroeco.org/>)

Harnessing knowledge and innovations

This means using land, water and energy respectfully and efficiently. It requires observation and understanding of how complex systems operate and the specificities of local conditions. Some basic principles of agroecology include:

- 1. Schnaiberg, A. (1980), The Environment. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2. Gray, I. and Lawrence, G. (2001), A Future for Regional Australia : Escaping Global Misfortune. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2003. Salinity and land management on Western Australian farms. Western Australian Statistical Indicators 1367

- maintenance of water, nutrient, carbon and energy flows within the farm, rather than the introduction of external inputs like fertiliser and pesticide;
- integration of crops and livestock;
- diversification of crops and livestock species; and
- focus on interactions and productivity throughout the agricultural system, rather than a focus on individual species⁶.

A common sense approach

Many individual farmers and farming communities in Australia are already conducting their own research, advancing these ideas and practices. With public support, these developments can have a greater and faster impact.

Misguided government policy means that public investment in agricultural research and development in Australia is declining. Funding for state agricultural departments, the CSIRO and universities is being cut, forcing those institutions to partner up with private companies. Government-funded extension services, which support farmers to innovate and adapt, have been dismantled.

A common-sense food plan for Australia’s future must include a greater independent investment program for sustainable agriculture innovations such as agroecology.

- 4. IAASTD, <http://agassessment.org/> [accessed 18 July 2012]
- 5. DeSchutter, O. and Vanloqueren, G. 2011. “The New Green Revolution: How Twenty-First-Century Science Can Feed the World” The Solutions Journal, 2(4) pp.33-44, <http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/971> [accessed 18 July 2012]
- 6. Ibid.





2. PLANNING FOR FAIR FOOD SYSTEMS

Planning is at the heart of sustainable and resilient food systems. Yet there are very few planning frameworks in Australia that directly integrate food, health and well-being.

The devaluation of food and farming is apparent in many ways, from the increasing corporate control of the food system from seedling to supermarket, to current land use conflicts over food vs fuel and urban sprawl. The controversy over coal-seam gas mining has raged for more than two years across rural communities. Meanwhile, much of the country's best farmland is buried under concrete, as the urban footprint continues to expand into prime agricultural land.

Conscious adoption of strategic spatial planning frameworks are essential to safeguard the vital and irreplaceable resources that guarantee our current and future food security.

Food-sensitive planning and urban design can guard against the proliferation of 'food deserts'. These are areas where fast-food and liquor outlets predominate and where fresh food outlets are scarce; areas which are becoming a feature of Australian towns and cities.

There is strength in diversity, and that's what we should be planning for if we want resilient food systems, capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

INTEGRATED PLANNING FRAMEWORKS: A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

WE PROPOSE:

- 2.1. A national approach to mapping agricultural land across all States and Territories
- 2.2. A comprehensive review of State planning frameworks to incorporate the protection of prime farmland, sustainable food production, and community and ecosystem well-being as guiding principles
- 2.3. A moratorium on coal-seam gas exploration and drilling to protect prime agricultural land
- 2.4. The introduction of farmland and community land trust models to allow retiring farmers to leave the land with dignity, and safeguard it as farmland for future generations
- 2.5. The widespread adoption of Food-sensitive Planning and Urban Design (FSPUD) principles across State and local governments

PLANNING FOR A FOOD-SECURE FUTURE

Identify and protect prime farmland

Mapping and GIS overlays can tell us the location of our best soils. Once prime farmland is identified, it must be protected. An essential first step is to integrate an holistic conception, and prioritisation, of the multiple values of agriculture and food, such as secure rural futures, biodiversity protection and localised food production, into State planning frameworks. Appropriate food and farming zones and overlays should be created, giving local governments the scope to incorporate these into their own Municipal Strategic Statements and Municipal Public Health Statements. Peri-urban farmland can be a dynamic source of regional economic development and food security¹ for existing and future generations.

Moratorium on coal-seam gas, and other forms of mining, on prime farmland

There is mounting evidence of the highly destructive impacts of mining activity, and hydraulic fracturing in particular, on the integrity of agricultural land and watersheds. We support the call for a moratorium on all existing and proposed mining activities in agricultural areas to allow for an independent inquiry to determine the risks of these activities. The results of this inquiry must be widely disseminated to allow for a proper national debate.

Support and promote farmland trusts

Farmland and community land trusts can be used to preserve agricultural land into the future, preventing development for other purposes. There are many well-developed and successful models of such trusts in North America which provide examples for Australia, such as the Vancouver Agricultural Land Reserve².

¹ See for example <http://www.casey.vic.gov.au/bunyipfoodbelt/>

² In 2010 the Land Conservancy of British Columbia published a review of farmland trusts in North America in order to describe, by reference to several case studies, the structure and operation of differing farmland trust models. The report, A Review of Farmland Trusts: Communities Supporting Farmland, Farming and Farmers is

Promote the adoption of FSPUD principles

Supported by VicHealth and the Heart Foundation, the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab (VEIL)³ and David Locke Associates published the Food-Sensitive Planning and Urban Design resource toolkit in 2011⁴. FSPUD aims to help local and state government planners create multi-dimensional and multi-functional food systems that enhance human and environmental well-being. FSPUD sets out ten mutually reinforcing principles to underpin the development of sustainable, resilient and fair food systems.

Some Councils, such as the City of Melbourne and the City of Maribyrnong, already have their own food and food security policies⁵. At the state level, the Tasmanian government has led the way with its Food Security Council⁶ supporting community and council actions. To effect wider institutional change, the FSPUD principles need to be integrated into high-level Council strategic plans, and into State government planning legislation and policy frameworks. The Heart Foundation has already developed training and support programmes for planners from all local government departments. This work should be further supported, and extended into other States and Territories.

available for download at: <http://blog.conservancy.bc.ca/agriculture/publications-2/>.

³ The Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab is 'a collaborative research group within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. VEIL seeks to identify and promote emerging technical and social innovations for future sustainable systems as a response to the critical challenge of our times: the urgent need for fundamental social, technical and structural change to bring about a low-carbon economy': <http://www.abp.unimelb.edu.au/research/veil>.

⁴ See <http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/research/food-sensitive-planning-and-urban-design/417-food-sensitive-planning-and-urban-design-fspud-report-released>

⁵ See <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/CommunityServices/Health/FoodPolicy/Pages/FoodPolicy.aspx> and http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/page/Page.aspx?Page_id=319

⁶ See http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/siu/committees/tasmania_food_security_council





3. BUILDING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Australia's food system, like the food system globally, is dominated by a handful of corporate players. The present situation is radically different to 30 years ago when Australians were fed by hundreds of small to medium sized firms and producer cooperatives including Dairy Farmers, South Australian Fishing Cooperative Limited (SAFCOL), SPC and Ardmona. Cooperative profits were returned to Australian producers who could then reinvest in their businesses.

Today, far from the rhetoric of 'free' and 'competitive' markets, our food economy is governed by an oligopoly of private interests. Cargill, the world's largest grain trader, recently became Australia's largest grain trader when it purchased the privatised Australian Wheat Board. Since deregulation of the dairy industry, the multinational food and beverage company, Kirin, now controls around 80% of Australia's drinking milk market¹, forcing out farmer-run cooperatives like Dairy Farmers. Two companies, Weston Foods and Goodman Fielder, control more than half of the flour milling, bread and bakery markets². Coles and

Woolworths control an estimated seventy to eighty per cent of retail grocery sales in the country³.

Private control of agriculture, food processing and retailing means that decisions about what food is produced, how it is processed and where it is sold are driven by the imperatives of profit and shareholder gain, and not by human needs. Moreover, the huge market share controlled by the small number of companies that dominate Australia's food system makes for extensive anti-competitive conduct.

Farmers feel the impact of this market power keenly. As suppliers to companies like Kirin in the milk market, farmers are forced to accept lower and lower prices in order to win supply contracts. In the milk sector, farmers have seen dropping farmgate prices since deregulation in the early 2000s⁴. Dairy farmers are experiencing even greater downward pressure since the start of the so-called 'Milk Wars' between Coles and Woolworths in early 2011 which pushed retail prices to \$1 per litre⁵.

CONFRONTING CORPORATE POWER IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

WE PROPOSE:

- 3.1. Effective action by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to tackle the excessive power exercised by Coles and Woolworths
- 3.2. In the absence of such action, support for CHOICE's call for a Supermarket Ombudsman
- 3.3. Public sector support for locally-owned & controlled food production & distribution systems including food cooperatives, as alternatives to the existing corporate-controlled system
- 3.4. Public sector procurement of fresh foods for all government run institutions

The impacts of excessive concentration

It is not only farmers who suffer as a result of the enormous economic power of companies like Coles and Woolworths. A survey of hundreds of truck drivers in 2012 found that the majority felt pressure to drive above the speed limit in order to meet the companies' demands⁶. Drivers were also forced to work for hundreds of unpaid hours per year, waiting in delivery lines, loading and unloading cargo as supermarkets use trucking companies as mobile warehouses. Health and safety standards drop and workers' lives are threatened when Coles and Woolworths refuse to allow sufficient time for vehicle repairs.

The community-led renaissance of alternative food value chains

It is unacceptable that the leading grocery retailers and other food companies obtain profits through extracting unreasonable concessions from primary producers. No wonder we are witnessing a renaissance in alternative food value channels – ranging from farmers' markets and community supported agriculture to whole towns turning to culinary tourism through supporting local cafes, farm and wine product outlets, heritage trails, and local branding. Often these initiatives create livelihoods for new producers; and since a dollar spent in a local business circulates many more times than one spent in a non-local business⁷, these initiatives can be a powerful engine of sustainable economic development.



Getting past the stranglehold the supermarkets have over our food system

Supply and distribution mechanisms are also needed for existing producers and processors which enable them to bypass the supermarkets. In New York and Rome, public procurement for schools and other institutions is one such alternative for organic and fresh food producers.⁸

In Brisbane, the Food Connect social enterprise⁹, started five years ago by former Colac dairy farmer Robert Pekin, has shown that it is possible to be fair to both farmers and eaters. Whereas farmers supplying supermarkets get 10 cents or less of the consumer food dollar, at Food Connect the average is 50 cents. This model has inspired similar social enterprises in Sydney and Melbourne¹⁰.

In Italy, a new retailer Eataly was established by a business entrepreneur in collaboration with the Slow Food Movement. It now operates stores in Tokyo and New York offering food that is 'good, clean and fair'¹¹.

Another opportunity for mass producers of foodstuffs is to establish new cooperatives to share risks, technologies and profits. The Victorian Coalition Government has provided \$5 million to help establish food and fibre marketing co-operatives. New or recently established co-operatives or collaborative marketing groups are eligible to apply for grants of up to \$50,000 for legal advice, business plans and other support¹².

1. Durie, J. "Big supermarkets gain fresh food market share at the expense of the small guys" The Australian, 9 March 2011 <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/opinion/big-supermarkets-gain-fresh-food-market-share-at-the-expense-of-the-small-guys/story-e6frg9if-1226018006708>

2. Foreign takeovers continue" The Weekly Times, 7 March 2012 http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2012/03/07/452681_business-news.html [accessed 6 July 2012]

3. Carr, K. "Trend to private-label groceries is no bargain for manufacturers" Sydney Morning Herald, 28 November 2011 <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/trend-to-privatelabel-groceries-is-no-bargain-for-manufacturers-20111127-1o1ie.html> [accessed 6 July 2012]

4. Senate inquiry into pricing and competition in the dairy industry http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=economics_ctte/dairy_industry_09/report/c03.htm

5. "QLD dairy farmers count costs of the milk wars" 26 January 2012 <http://nqr.farmonline.com.au/news/state/dairy/general/qld-dairyfarmers-count-cost-of-milk-wars/2432796.aspx?storypage=0>

6. <http://www.twu.com.au/home/media/major-survey-of-truckies-a-damning-indictment-of-c/>

7. <http://lioninvesting.com/2011/02/the-multiplier-effect-of-local-investing/>

8. Morgan, K. and Sonnino, R. (2008) The school food revolution: public food and the challenge of sustainable development, Earthscan.

9. <http://www.foodconnect.com.au/>

10. See <http://www.sydney.foodconnect.com.au/> and <http://www.ceresfairfood.org.au/>

11. , R., Montagnini, F. And Dall'i, D. (2012) Ethical consumption and new business models in the food industry. Evidence from the Eataly case, Journal of Business Ethics DOI 10.1007/s10551-012-1343-1

12. www.australia.coop/ca/index.php/articles/news/78.../548-foodfibre [accessed 30 August]

4. A RECIPE FOR HEALTHY EATING

Most Australians are not getting what we need from the food system: healthy, safe, nourishing food. Less than one in ten of us eat the recommended daily amount of fruit and vegetables¹; and we don't actually grow enough to meet that requirement². Around two-thirds of Australia's adult population, and about one quarter of our kids, are overweight or obese. Our collective weight gain, which results in many chronic health issues and reduced quality of life, has accelerated greatly since 1980^{3,4}. Also, unhealthy eating is not sustainable, because it depends on continued deforestation, cruel and polluting factory farms, and increasing greenhouse emissions.

At the heart of the 'obesity pandemic' are questions of equity and social justice. Poor quality diets result from a variety of factors including the ready availability of high-energy foods, the high cost of good quality fresh foods, the role of advertising and trends towards over-consumption⁵. Obesity risk

is almost twice as high for people on low incomes compared to people on high incomes in Australia⁶. A healthy diet of fresh foods costs about 28% of a low income, but 6-9% of a high income; and the situation is worse for people reliant on welfare⁷. In remote and rural communities, fresh food prices are up to 45% higher due to transport costs; and housing and cooking facilities are often inadequate⁸.

Despite assurances that 'Australia is food secure', studies consistently show that around five percent of people have run out of money to buy food in the previous 12 months, rising to 20 percent of those on low-incomes⁹.

Australia has become a country of 'rich eaters' and 'poor eaters'. To begin to address this, we need a positive framework for healthy eating, founded on the human right to good food for all, regardless of income or background.

HEALTHY EATING IS SUSTAINABLE EATING

WE PROPOSE:

- 4.1. Encouraging nutritional and food literacy through educational programmes that reconnect children to food and agriculture
- 4.2. Promotion of local access to fresh food through backyard gardening, school gardens, community gardens, city farms, edible streetscapes, and similar food-growing initiatives
- 4.3. Facilitating easy, affordable access to nutritious fresh food through subsidies for production of whole foods, especially fresh fruit and vegetables
- 4.5. Curbing the power of food companies to advertise high-energy foods, especially to children; and raising consumer awareness food labelling.

1. Australia's Health. 2013. The thirteenth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422172&tab=3> [accessed 9 August 2012]
2. Dr Amanda Lee, presentation at the National Sustainable Food Summit, Melbourne, April 2011.
3. Peeters, A. and Magliano, D. 2012. "Mapping Australia's collective weight gain". The Conversation. 27 June 2012. <http://theconversation.edu.au/mapping-australias-collective-weight-gain-7816> [accessed 6 July 2012]
4. Hawkes, C., Blouin, C., Henson, S., Drager, R. and Dube, L. 2010. Trade, food, diet and health: Perspectives and policy options. Wiley-Blackwell, United Kingdom.
5. Egger, G. "What's economic growth got to do with expanding waistlines?", The Conversation, 28 June 2012, <https://theconversation.edu.au/whats-economic-growth-got-to-do-with-expanding-waistlines-6260> [accessed 6 July 2012]

6. Backholer, K. and Peeters, A. "Education, wealth and the place you live can affect your weight" The Conversation, 2 July 2012, <http://theconversation.edu.au/education-wealth-and-the-place-you-live-can-affect-your-weight-7941> [accessed 6 July 2012]
7. Wong, K.C., Coveney, J., Ward, P., Muller, R., Carter, P., Verity, F., Tsourtos, G. 2011. "Availability, affordability and quality of a healthy food basket in Adelaide, South Australia". Nutrition & Dietetics. 68(1), pp.8-14
8. Brimblecombe, J. "Innovative strategies needed to address Indigenous obesity" The Conversation, 3 July 2012. <http://theconversation.edu.au/innovative-strategies-needed-to-address-indigenous-obesity-7099> [accessed 6 July 2012]
9. Friel, S. 2010. "Climate change, food insecurity and chronic diseases: sustainable and healthy policy opportunities for Australia", New South Wales Public Health Bulletin 21(6) 129-133; VicHealth, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/childyouth/catalogue/adolescent/food-ind1.htm> [accessed 9 August 2012]

Food literacy

Our own research¹⁰ and that of others¹¹ clearly shows that we need as a country to raise the importance and awareness of food in the public consciousness. Given the low levels of basic knowledge amongst children regarding the provenance of basic foodstuffs¹², Australians should be supported to achieve much higher levels of 'food literacy', defined as:

"Understanding the story of one's food, from farm to table and back to the soil; the knowledge and ability to make informed choices that support one's health, community, and the environment."¹³

There are many inspiring examples which demonstrate how children can be connected to the source of their food, and how farms can become a 'living classroom'. These include California Food Literacy¹⁴, and the Food Literacy Project¹⁵ run out of Oxmoor Farm in Louisville, Kentucky. There is no reason why similar initiatives should not flourish here.



The power of Community Food initiatives

Around the world it's estimated that 800 million people are involved in community food initiatives in some form¹⁶. As well as reducing food insecurity, these initiatives are multifunctional: they generate employment and business creation; they green towns and cities; they make productive use of organic waste; and they build community and social resilience. Further, research shows that participation in community gardening and similar activities is strongly associated with increased fruit and vegetable intake.¹⁷

Anyone who's ever grown some of their own food, whether in their backyard, in a community or school garden or elsewhere, knows the joys of gardening. In the Yorkshire market town of Todmorden, the whole community has been galvanised by the vision of a few local café owners that the whole town could work together to grow as much of its own food as possible. The result – Incredible Edible Todmorden¹⁸ – is nothing short of astonishing.

10. <http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/blog/2012/07/02/australia-needs-a-food-literacy-campaign/>
11. http://www3.griffith.edu.au/03/ertiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=30542
12. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/breaking-news/kids-think-yogurt-comes-from-plants-survey-finds/story-e6frf7jx-1226289146188>
13. <http://www.nourishlife.org/learn/glossary-d-f/> [accessed 25 June 2012].
14. <http://californiafoodliteracy.org/programs/>
15. <http://foodliteracyproject.org/>
16. <http://www.ruaf.org/node/513>

Make access to fresh food affordable

Not everyone can grow their own food; most people will continue to rely on farmers and growers to do that, which is why looking after them is so important. But access to good food should be available to everyone: it's a basic human right, which Australia has signed up to. Ultimately securing this right means addressing the structural impediments to healthy food access, such as the design of food environments; which is why integrated planning (Chapter 2) is so vital.

The 'Double Up Food Bucks'¹⁹ program in Michigan doubles the value of food stamps (vouchers) held by low income families, and supports local farmers by allowing the 'food bucks' to be spent at local farmers' markets. The Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte (pop: 2.5 million) has perhaps taken the right to food more seriously than any other. Part of its strategy to eliminate hunger²⁰ involved the establishment of 'Popular Restaurants' that served heavily subsidised meals made from local food.

Curb the promotion of unhealthy food

The makers and promoters of unhealthy food must have their freedom to act curtailed, in the interests of society as a whole. The obvious precedent is with tobacco: the Australian government has led the way for decades in regulating this industry, and continues to do so with its plain packaging legislation.

Now similar steps must be taken with the junk and fast food industries. Deakin University's Obesity Policy Coalition²¹ have identified some of the key and effective steps being taken elsewhere, especially in Scandinavia: drastically limit or prohibit the advertising of these products to children; and introduce a 'traffic light' labelling system that tells consumers clearly and simply what they're eating. In addition, Denmark has introduced a 'fat tax'²² and other European countries are considering it. While the issues are complex, this has to be part of our national conversation around healthy eating.

17. Litt, J. S. et al. The influence of social involvement, neighbourhood aesthetics, and community garden participation on fruit and vegetable consumption. *American Journal of Public Health*: August 2011, Vol. 101, No. 8, pp. 1466 – 1473
18. <http://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/blogs/self>
19. <http://doubleupfoodbucks.org/about>
20. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/food-for-everyone/the-city-that-ended-hunger>
21. <http://www.opc.org.au/>
22. <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/chew-the-fat-on-a-sugar-tax-to-trim-waistlines-20120719-22cxw.html?skin=text-only>



5. DIVERSITY IS STRENGTH

Australia's food distribution and food processing infrastructure are heavily centralised and concentrated. Driven by the supermarket duopoly, the logic is 'get big or get out'.

That's the world we've known for the past thirty years, driven by financial gain and the rhetoric of shareholder value. But as we face escalating economic, environmental and other crises, we question: can these trends continue for the next thirty, fifty, one hundred years?

It makes sense to plan for different scenarios about what the future might hold. In an uncertain future,

having many different strategies and options for securing our most essential needs is common sense. Right now, as a society we've put all our eggs in the one basket of a mega-food system dominated by two giant retail corporations. If that system fails for any reason – say, extreme weather conditions or an extended oil crisis – then we are all in serious trouble. It's simply good sense to inject greater resilience in our food systems through investing in diverse processing infrastructure and more localised distribution systems. Especially when there are so many outstanding models of decentralised systems operating; and when they have such positive social, environmental and economic outcomes.

EXCESSIVE CONCENTRATION AND CENTRALISATION = LACK OF RESILIENCE

WE PROPOSE:

- 5.1. A network of local and regional Food Hubs, as incubators of locally-owned and controlled food manufacturing, aggregation, storage and distribution infrastructure
- 5.2. An 'Open Food Web': open source software development platform, facilitating multiple direct relationships between farmers, businesses and eaters
- 5.3. The support of farmers' markets, CSAs, vegie box schemes and other forms of social enterprise aiming for fair returns to producers, fair prices for eaters, and environmental sustainability
- 5.4. Regional branding initiatives and partnerships to foster a deeper appreciation of artisanal local and regional foods and cuisines amongst growing numbers of Australians

A DISTRIBUTED FOOD SYSTEM = RESILIENCE

A 2010 report from Melbourne University's Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab (VEIL) advocates the following characteristics for 'distributed systems'¹:

- **Localised:** 'Systems are designed for and positioned as close as feasible to points of resource supply and demand'
- **Networked:** 'Systems are linked and have the capacity to exchange'
- **Modular:** 'Critical resources...are generated by the collective capacity of multiple systems that can operate autonomously but also in connection with each other'
- **Open:** 'Ownership and responsibility for the operation of systems is more democratic'

A distributed food system incorporates 'diversity, redundancy and modularity', which are 'critical to the flexibility and robustness of complex systems'. Existing and emerging examples in Australia include:

Farmers' markets and CSAs

By the end of the 20th century, markets for farmers and growers selling their produce directly to patrons had virtually disappeared. In recent years, however, there has been a dramatic turnaround: by 2009, there were more than 120 farmers' markets across the country, with new ones emerging every month². Another form of direct farmer-eater exchange – community-supported agriculture – has also experienced strong growth, led by the award-winning Food Connect social enterprise.

Local and regional Food Hubs

A challenge for farmers' markets and CSAs is to 'scale up' and achieve an impact beyond 'niche' markets. Multi-functional Food Hubs³, which network many

farmers with institutional and business customers, provide one solution, with more than 100 now operational across the United States. In Australia, workers, growers and community members in Girgarre, Victoria, have formed a co-operative food hub⁴ to restart and transform a food processing plant that was closed by the Heinz corporation in 2011. Local councils in Victoria and elsewhere are now looking to establish pilot food hubs; and an Australian Food Hubs Network⁵ has been formed to support and promote these efforts.

Regional branding and food cuisines

Strong and innovative branding and marketing has been crucial to the revitalisation of many farming regions in the US, such as the farmer-chef partnership called the 'Vermont Fresh Network'⁶. The Hawkesbury Harvest⁷ has pioneered a similar approach in Australia. A multi-stakeholder partnership (councils and water authorities) is promoting the Bunyip Food Belt⁸ Project on Melbourne's south-eastern growth corridor. If successful, this project will represent both multi-million dollar infrastructure investments in Melbourne's food and water security, and generate thousands of new, sustainable jobs in food manufacturing through enhanced agricultural production.

Open Food Web

Revolutions in information and communications technology are at the cutting edge of the paradigm shift to distributed, networked systems. In Australia, the Open Food Web is a collaboration of individuals and enterprises who have agreed to pool their collective resources, and work with software developers here and abroad, to promote and share design solutions that facilitate direct exchanges between farmers and their customers (see <http://www.eaterprises.com.au/openfoodweb/> for more info).

1 Biggs, C., Ryan, C., and Wiseman, J., 2010, 'Distributed Systems: a design model for sustainable and resilient infrastructure', VEIL, available at: <http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/research/distributed-systems/305-distributed-systems-research-paper?catid=94%3Adistributed-systems-briefing-notes->
2 <http://www.farmersmarkets.org.au/news/media-release/3rd-national-farmers%E2%80%99markets-conference-market-growth-%E2%80%93farmers%E2%80%99markets-one-dec>
3 <http://www.localfoodhub.org/>

4 <http://gvfoodcooperative.com/>
5 <http://www.facebook.com/AusFoodHubsNetwork?ref=ts>
6 <http://www.vermontfresh.net/>
7 <http://hawkesburyharvest.com.au/>
8 <http://www.casey.vic.gov.au/bunyipfoodbelt/>



6. FOOD DEMOCRACY

To achieve the goal of a thriving food system, we need our institutions to think and function in ways that support the system as a whole. This is notoriously difficult, since the governance of the food system in Australia, like elsewhere, is fragmented across many government departments (primary production, health, planning, education, trade); across different tiers of government (federal, state and local); and across different sectors of the food system (agriculture, processing, transport and distribution, retailing, health). Increasingly, corporations such as food retailers are engaged in the governance of others, such as farmers, through their systems of private standards.

Achieving an integrated approach to food policy will require challenging and overcoming deeply entrenched cultures of 'silo-ing' in the Australian bureaucracy at the local, state and federal level. Areas of the food system that have been subject to 'de-regulation' in favour of the 'invisible hand of the market' have been placed at the mercy of big business. Thoughtful re-regulation will help even out the playing field and better protect small-scale producers.

Fortunately, we have, in the 100-plus North American food policy councils, models of democratic and inclusive, whole-of-system food governance that we can draw on¹. These councils 'work to increase collaboration across government [departments], social sectors and geographies; develop and implement multi-level organisational structures; recognise and support initiatives contributing to 'diverse economies'; and include community—based, traditional and scientific knowledge'²

Food policy councils are new forms of governance that are beginning to permit the redesign and reorientation of food systems, so they serve the needs of human well-being and ecosystem integrity. They are an important step in a positive direction.

1 Schiff, R., 2008, 'The Role of Food Policy Councils in Developing Sustainable Food Systems'. Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition 3(2), 206-228.

2 People's Food Policy Project, 2011. Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada. Summary, available at: <http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca/policy/resetting-table-peoples-food-policy-canada>.

A DEMOCRATIC FOOD SYSTEM = A FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

WE PROPOSE:

- 6.1. The establishment of local and regional food policy councils, with participation from all stakeholders in local food systems – farmers, processors, distributors, food retail businesses, chefs, local government, health workers and community groups
- 6.2. Inclusive and 'whole-of-government' food policies at the State level, overseen by multi-stakeholder food policy councils, with equality of representation for family farmers, community and health sectors, especially those representing vulnerable and marginalised sectors; and informed by the work of local and regional food policy councils
- 6.3. An inclusive National Food Council, charged with oversight of the National Food Policy, and with equality of representation for non-commodity exporting farmers, community groups, and health workers, especially those representing vulnerable and marginalised sectors; and informed by the work of state, local and regional food policy councils

PRINCIPLES FOR DEMOCRATIC FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

1. **People & community-centred:** Our food system must be shaped around the needs of families and communities.
2. **Equity and access:** food, as a fundamental human right, should be accessible to all based on needs, not ability to pay.
3. **Shared responsibility:** recognising that eating is an agricultural and environmental act, all Australians share responsibility for our food and the system that generates it.
4. **Promoting well-being and strengthening resilience:** we need a comprehensive and holistic approach to how we organise and fund our food system to provide improving outcomes for all Australians.
5. **Comprehensiveness and interconnectedness:** meeting the full range of people's dietary, social and health needs over their lifetime requires a system to be built on understanding the interconnectedness of all parts of the system from field to fork, paddock to plate. This systems approach requires the current silo mentality of Federal and State governments to end.
6. **Money for values:** in a world of limits with finite resources, money spent in the food system should be directed towards securing positive health, social and environmental outcomes. This is more likely to happen via decentralised and localised food economies.
7. **Providing for future generations:** we need a comprehensive vision of what sustainable diets are, based on the principle that future Australians will be able to feed themselves well from the natural and human resources we bequeath them.
8. **Taking the long-term view:** food system governance must be strategic, with a focus on improving resilience.
9. **Quality and safety:** citizens and advocates have a central role to play in identifying quality and safety issues, and must be empowered accordingly.
10. **Transparency and accountability:** responsibility across public and private sectors must be clearly delineated; and there should be regular reports on the status, quality and performance of our whole food system.
11. **Public voice and community engagement:** multiple opportunities for engagement should be provided across the food system.
12. **A respectful, ethical system:** the food system should strive for the highest standards.
13. **Responsible funding:** funding should be open and transparent, support best practice, and promote resilience.
14. **Incorporate animal welfare principles,** whilst also reflecting upon the social, environment and health impacts of meat-rich diets.
15. **A culture of continuous reflective improvement and innovation.**





7. FAIR TRADE, NOT FREE TRADE

The free trade agenda has not delivered the promised prosperity for all as we were told it would do. Levels of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, dietary-related ill-health, and inequality are rising almost everywhere.

In any competition, there are always winners and losers; only in this case, we have billions of losers, and a handful of big winners. Grain processing and meat packing transnational corporation Cargill, for example, has increased its profits by 500% in the last decade.

The main beneficiaries are the larger corporations, and especially the supermarkets, which can take advantage of the economies of scale that trade liberalisation offers. Ordinary Australians seem to get the benefit through lower prices at the checkout, but at what future cost? Thousands of small-scale farmers continue to leave the land every year, and they're not being replaced.

The out-moded concept of 'comparative advantage' is leading to a social and environmental race to the bottom. While those at the sharpest end of the struggle over free trade are small-scale farmers and landless workers (women especially) in the Global South, Australia's smaller-scale and family farmers are also feeling the effects of cheap imports.

The free trade agenda was relevant in an era of cheap fossil-fuel driven globalisation, which is coming to an end as these forms of energy become depleted. Just as the new economy of the future will be increasingly powered by renewable energy sources, so the engines of economic development will increasingly be regionalised and localised. Trade will continue, but on a fair and transparent basis, grounded in relations of reciprocity and solidarity.

FAIR TRADE, GROUNDED IN SOLIDARITY AND RECIPROCITY

WE PROPOSE:

- 7.1. A comprehensive social, economic and environmental audit of all existing free trade agreements, to determine their net impacts on the food sovereignty aspirations of each participating country
- 7.2. A shift away from competitive free trading arrangements, towards the development of fair, transparent and co-operative trading relations between peoples and countries, in which the benefit of all is paramount
- 7.3. The pursuit of policies that safeguard family farmers' access to and control over biodiversity

TRADING IN CO-OPERATION, NOT COMPETITION

"The bottom line [of the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, TPPA] is that there is no US commitment to free trade. It is really a commitment to getting other countries to give access to American producers to their markets, and the US reciprocates when it is convenient."

Joseph Stiglitz, former economist of the World Bank

Free trade undermines food sovereignty

The entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 saw a flood of cheap US corn enter Mexico. This forced nearly 3 million Mexican small farmers off the land. The country is now chronically food import-dependent¹, and is a major 'exporter' of 'illegal immigrants', many from rural areas, to the United States.

In our region, while Japan's farmers currently produce 40% of the country's food needs, the Japanese agriculture minister has estimated this will drop to 13% if Japan signs the TPPA. A trebling in Japan's rice import requirements will in turn undermine the food sovereignty of other rice-producing countries; and is estimated to swell the ranks of the hungry in Asia by 270 million.

Free trade is not a level playing field

Rather, it is a legal charter of rights for the most powerful economic stakeholders to further flex

¹ <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k74756&pageid=icb.page414562>

their muscles. Australia is currently party to six free trade agreements (FTAs), and is in the process of negotiating a further nine. These FTAs favour the more powerful countries, as Mexico saw with NAFTA. While Australia lowered its tariffs for US exporters under the Australia-US FTA, that agreement has made no impact on the very large US farm subsidies, and gained very little additional US market access for Australian producers. Australian growers argue that cheap imports are taking away their domestic markets.

Review all Free Trade Agreements

That FTAs work to the benefit of ordinary farmers is a myth promoted by governments and big corporate agri-business. Consumers may, in the short term, enjoy the benefits of cheaper imports, but this is at the cost of long-term food sovereignty. An independent review of these agreements is long overdue and the Australian people should have the opportunity to debate its findings and recommendations.

Support fair, transparent and co-operative trade

Food sovereignty doesn't mean the abandonment of trade and the pursuit of total, absolute food self-sufficiency. Enjoying the foods from other countries and cultures is one of life's pleasures, and enriches us all. But trade should be conducted on the basis of some fundamental principles that genuinely work to the universal benefit: solidarity, transparency, respect for human rights, and ecosystem integrity. Trade, in other words, that is fair.



Appendix - National Food Plan vs People’s Food Plan

A comparison of founding approach, attitudes and principles

Key message: The draft National Food Plan is an ideologically-driven document, selective in its evidence and data, that is designed to meet the needs of large corporate agri-business and the big supermarkets. What Australia needs is an approach that prioritises the needs of people and ecosystems, and which is solidly grounded in the best available evidence and practices. That is what the People’s Food Plan process aims to achieve.

| Approach / Attitude / Principle | National Food Plan | People’s Food Plan |
|---|--|---|
| Time-frame | 20 years | 100+ years |
| Main stakeholders | ‘The food industry’, especially corporate agri-business and major retailers – National Food Policy Advisory Working Group | Ordinary Australians |
| Vision | ‘Sustainable, globally competitive, resilient food supply, supporting access to nutritious and affordable food’ | A food system that delivers fairness for family farmers and food system workers; health and well-being for all Australians, irrespective of income or other status; and which sustains and restores to health and fertility soils, waterways and ecosystems |
| Key objectives | Ramp up commodity production of grains, livestock and dairy to ‘seize market opportunities in Asia’ Bring in foreign investment and ownership of Australian land and agricultural to boost exports (p 128, 187) | Re-orient the food system so the over-riding objectives are human health and well-being, dignified livelihoods for food producers and food system workers, thriving local and regional economies, and ecosystem integrity |
| Consultation process | Top-down, questions pre-determined, key issues (e.g. free trade, commodity focus) not up for discussion, lack of transparency, lack of public engagement | Bottom-up, community-led; all questions open, process open-ended, starting in August 2012, finishing date not determined |
| Understanding of functioning of current food system | ‘Stable, secure’, efficient, productive, high quality – current food system is working well | System highly dysfunctional – 70% or more of family farms dependent on off-farm income Over 75% of Australians overweight / obese by 2025 Over 90% reduction in irrigated agriculture in Murray-Darling Food Bowl because of climate change Over 23% of GHG emissions come from the food system Land and water systems severely degraded High dependence on fossil fuel – 10 calories of crude oil to produce 1 calorie of food System not sustainable, fair or resilient |
| Scope of change required | Incremental, piecemeal reform | Transformational, root & branch reform |

Comparison continued:

| Approach / Attitude / Principle | National Food Plan | People’s Food Plan |
|---|---|--|
| Understanding of ‘sustainability’ | Narrow and economistic: “Australia’s food businesses have opportunities over the long term, arising from global trends and Australia’s comparative advantages” (p48) | Holistic, systemic and integrated: A sustainable food system is one which can continue to reproduce itself over the long-term, fulfilling its basic objectives of feeding us well, providing dignified livelihoods for farmers and food system workers, and caring for the soil and living ecosystems. |
| Attitude towards Australia’s food security, sustainable production and distribution systems | Australia is food secure because it exports two-thirds of what it produces, food system is stable and high-quality Climate change acknowledged as a risk, but assumption is that ‘innovation’ and technology will deal with it, i.e. neither climate change nor any other risks (e.g. peak oil, peak phosphorous) demand a shift to more sustainable agricultural systems Australia assumed to be energy-secure (p70) | Food insecurity is widespread amongst vulnerable and low-income groups in Australia Over 90% of Australians don’t eat recommended intake of veg, and the country doesn’t produce enough greens / orange veg Impacts of climate change and peak oil, plus highly centralised and long-distance food distribution system, means that there are serious risks and vulnerabilities; hence there is an urgent need for transition to sustainable agricultural systems |
| Attitude towards global food security | Global food insecurity is the result of poverty, waste, trade distorting policies, and low agricultural productivity Australia’s role is a) boost exports b) transfer technology &expertise to developing countries c) promote free trade (p 250) | Global food insecurity is the result of a corporate-dominated & oligarchic food system that is anti-small & family farmer, anti-poor, dispossesses rural communities and entrenches inequalities Fundamentally its resolution requires a democratised global food system in which sovereignty is returned progressively to national governments and to local communities Further trade liberalisation will feed corporate profits but it won’t feed people well |
| Attitude to family farmers | No vision for family farmers – their numbers will continue to decline and they will be replaced by corporate farming models (p 159) | Thriving family farms are at the centre of thriving rural communities, and have a vital role to play in the transition to a sustainable, fair and resilient food future |
| Attitude to the market | Market-led approach is the best, no or minimal intervention required, either as regards land management and use, or as regards food product development and marketing (p 133) Govt does not propose a shift to sustainable production systems (p201), even though it favours the national application of genetically modified organisms | Market-led approach has demonstrably failed in terms of healthy food for all, sustainably produced, and providing dignified livelihoods for producers and workers. Intervention is necessary – to protect prime farmland, to ensure the right to farm for family farmers, to ensure diversity in the retail sector, to encourage sustainable farm practices, to control the junk and fast food industries |

Comparison continued:

| Approach / Attitude / Principle | National Food Plan | People’s Food Plan |
|--|--|---|
| Approach to tackling obesity pandemic | Obesity individualised, seen as issue of ‘poor food choices’ Business-as-usual, reliance on food industry self-regulation, educating consumers about health choices – a failed strategy No new proposals to reduce prevalence of obesity No recognition of the need for a fundamental shift to a healthy and sustainable diet | Obesity is a structural issue, its roots lie in power of food companies to shape food choices – ‘the obesogenic environment - & structural subsidies to the junk food industry Experience elsewhere (e.g. Scandanavia) shows that regulation and intervention is required, including strict controls on advertising to children, and implementation of a sugar / fat tax National Preventative Health Taskforce (2009) recommended these measures as a matter of urgency Must be coupled with comprehensive and national food and nutrition literacy education |
| Attitude to GM and new technologies | Enthusiastic – develop national strategy for its consistent application, to overcome moratoria in some states, and low consumer acceptance (p153-4) | GM is fundamentally about corporate profit and creating further dependencies for farmers. It has failed to deliver on its promises of increased yields, and has instead delivered super-pests and super-weeds |
| Approach to food governance and leadership | Decision-making powers reserved to DAFF, with proposed advisory Ministerial Food Forum, Stakeholder Committee on Food and Australian Food Council to ‘facilitate dialogue between stakeholders’ (p 53) Likely outcome is that the voice of agri-business and food retailers will dominate the Stakeholder Forum and marginalise those of other stakeholders (Food Alliance brief, p5-6) | Key principles for food governance include: people- and community-centred; food as a human right; promoting wellness and strengthening resilience. Food policy at the Federal level should be led by the Department of Health, not DAFF, and with a National Food Council that accords equal participation and real decision-making powers to the community, health, environment, family farming, consumer and diverse food business sectors, as it does to corporate agri-business and large retail. The work of the NFC should be informed by a diversity of local and regional Food Policy Councils with multi-stakeholder representation, facilitated by local government and accountable to their local communities. |

What’s missing from the National Food Plan?

• **Any acknowledgement that the industrialised food system is socially and environmentally destructive, and that a paradigm shift based on a new set of values and principles is required.** No target is set or proposed for reducing the GHG emissions that the food system generates. No target is set or proposed for reducing its fossil-fuel intensity, nor for transitioning as a matter of urgency to more sustainable agricultural systems.

• **Any real recognition of the thriving fair food movement in Australia.** Permaculture is not mentioned. Transition initiatives are not mentioned. Local food networks and economies are not mentioned. Urban agriculture is not mentioned. Innovative farm practices, such as pasture cropping and no till, are not mentioned. Social enterprise gets one mention, in a brief paragraph about the Tasmanian Government’s ‘Food for All’ strategy (p51). Community gardens and backyard gardens are mentioned once, in relation to possible ways to support food security in remote indigenous communities – but the green paper says that the ‘cost-effectiveness [of these initiatives] are yet to be been demonstrated’ (p 87). Farmers’ markets do get some recognition, but only in the context of ‘changing consumer demand’ (p 114).

• **Any recognition that the profit interests of corporations do not inevitably equate to the well-being of people, and the integrity of ecosystems.** The National Food Plan is guided throughout by the assumption that ‘the market’ knows best and will look after us all. The idea that ‘the market’ may be responsible for the fact that, as one food activist put it, the ‘globalised industrial food system is the most destructive force on the planet’, cannot be contemplated within the government’s worldview, as set out in this Plan.

The ‘National Food Plan’ is actually a misnomer. This is an ‘Industry Food Plan’. It began life at the urging of big business, those interests have guided and shaped its formation, and we can now see the result. The idea that this is a plan for all Australians is disingenuous. It isn’t; it’s a Plan to meet the needs and priorities of agri-business and large retailers.

Food isn’t an optional extra in life. In a very material, as well as spiritual sense, what we eat is who we are. That’s why food is far too important to be left to impersonal ‘market forces’ which are fundamentally not concerned with human or ecosystem well-being. It’s time for all of us to take responsibility for our food system, to exercise our democratic rights as citizens, and to participate in working out, together, what sort of food system we want. That’s what the People’s Food Plan is about.

For more information, visit:
<http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/>,

or contact:
Nick Rose (nick@foodsovereigntyalliance.org),
Claire Parfitt (claireparfitt@gmail.com) or
Michael Croft (michael@mountaincreekfarm.com.au)

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance
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