



healthy, equitable, sustainable and resilient food systems for all Australians

Food Plan must be sustainable and ensure good food for all

Food alliances say in submissions on National Food Plan that public needs more input

Thursday, 1 September 2011: A major overhaul is needed to ensure fair, sustainable and resilient food systems in a climate-change affected environment and there needs to be an extended period of public debate on our future food system, food groups will say in their submissions on a National Food Plan due tomorrow.

Sydney Food Fairness Alliance (SFFA) President Elizabeth Millen says: “While we welcome the fact that the Federal Government listened to calls to extend the submissions period, it looks like they are trying to ‘fast-track’ this important issue, rather than taking time to consider a systematic response to limitations on resources such as oil on which agriculture has been traditionally based. We would like to see outlined details of an extensive consultation process, as has happened for example in Scotland, following the current call for submissions, due this week.”

Since 2005 the SFFA has been campaigning for development of a NSW State food policy. Many of the issues that we have raised at a state level are also relevant at a national level and the submission will call for a Food Security Agency/Ministry to be set up with overall responsibility to implement and monitor the plan in consultation with representatives from producers and consumers.

The SFFA submission will read: “The lack of systematic mapping and identification of prime agricultural land has contributed to a situation in which many competing uses for agricultural land such as urban development and mining are valued more highly. For example, in the Sydney Basin, 50% of market gardens lie in the designated growth areas under the Metropolitan Strategy, which barely considers future food needs of this increased population.

Nutritional security and reducing food miles must also be considered, given that Australia is a net importer of fresh fruit and vegetables and is suffering rising food prices. “National surveys consistently show about 5-6% of the population (about 1 million people) experience food insecurity, and in disadvantaged areas this proportion can be much higher – about 20% for households, over 30% for households with children, and almost 50% for single parent households.” Among other things, the SFFA submission will call for protection from contamination of farms that are GM-free and on the topic of foreign land purchases, suggests Australia adopt an approach similar to the NZ government, which scrutinises sales at a much lower level.

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA), which participated in the formal Roundtable discussions recently, reports small farmers, small food businesses, and the rapidly growing community food sector were almost entirely absent. “[Yet it is] smaller growers who

constitute the bulk of Australian farmers (some two in three Australian farmers have gross farm turnover under \$150,000, according to ABS,” says AFSA spokesperson Michael Croft.

He says farmer depression and suicide are double the national average and some five farmers have left the land every day for the past 40 years. But he says, “A perfect storm of peak oil, peak phosphorus and climate change means that food and farming systems will need to be more localised and regionalised. This change will benefit the majority of Australian farmers and our food system.

“The challenge for the Australian Government is to show true leadership in the interests of the country as a whole, and support the hundreds of thousands of Australians who are working hard to create fair, sustainable and resilient food systems.”

On the topic of free trade, AFSA warns against further liberalisation of agricultural commodities. “In the period since the beginning of the Uruguay Round of the Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which subsequently led to the inauguration of the World Trade Organisation, the numbers of malnourished persons in the world have risen by 30-40%.”

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The [Sydney Food Fairness Alliance](#) was formed in 2005 as an alliance of diverse people and organisations with concerns about many aspects of the food system in Australia, and in particular the lack of comprehensive, integrated planning to meet current and future challenges to food security. Members include primary producers, environmentalists, health and welfare workers and major charities, local councils, food activists, ethicists and academics.

The [Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance](#) speaks to the core values and principles of 95 organisations that have signed the August 2010 letter to the then-federal Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, calling for the formation of a democratic and inclusive national food policy. The AFSA is a new player in the Australian national political landscape with the express aim of giving a strong and coherent voice to the very diverse range of groups and individuals around the country working now to create resilient and socially just distributed food systems.