

The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By e-mail: tony.burke.mp@aph.gov.au
10 August 2010

Re: National food policy

Dear Minister,

The undersigned organisations and individuals congratulate you on your recent announcement that Labor will implement a national food plan if re-elected.

Given the intimate relationship between contemporary agricultural production and the many urgent challenges we face, the development and implementation of a national food policy is a matter of the highest priority. This is true not only for every Australian now alive, but for all future generations of Australians.

In order for such a plan to be effective, the process of formulating it must be inclusive, participatory, and democratic. The inter-generational ramifications of this policy insist upon the need to set the highest standards in these respects. We believe that it is vital to include stakeholders and participants from across the food and agricultural system, and not only those with the largest economic influence.

The communities, organisations, alliances and enterprises we represent have proposed the need for state and national food policies in forums such as the Hungry for Change summit, held in Sydney in October 2009, and the Plains to Plate Convergence, held in Adelaide in February 2010. As we have been debating and undertaking practical actions in this field over many years, we have a valuable contribution to make to the successful formulation and implementation of a national food policy.

The strengths we bring to an open and participatory, consultative process are the diverse perspectives of consumer and community initiatives and the social enterprise sectors of the food and agricultural system.

In a time of considerable economic uncertainty, experience in the US and elsewhere is demonstrating that strong, local food economies are powerhouses of creativity, innovation and employment.

We believe that our extensive practical experience in these fields complements that of others participating in the process of developing a national food policy, ensuring a balance of views and creative ideas that will further the goal of creating a strong, sustainable and resilient food and agricultural system for Australia.

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

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Policy must address emerging trends

We recognise that Australia's food system faces emerging pressures stemming from climate change, insecurity of the agricultural water supply as well as the growing likelihood of the peaking of global oil production.

These and other factors, alone or in combination, are expected to force up food prices, perhaps significantly. Such considerations are an important context for the food-related issues the undersigned organisations and individuals are already addressing. These include ensuring equitable access to fresh food (particularly for low-income communities), food safety and quality, the loss of agricultural skills and knowledge as the age of the average Australian farmer passes 60, and the protection of agricultural land from urban sprawl and the extractive industries.

We believe that a national policy on food must address these topics as matters of equal priority to the macroeconomic considerations you have already indicated. The enterprises and community food initiatives we represent are themselves responses to some of these issues. They are a growing presence in the national food system.

Towards an inclusive national policy

Our close contact with communities reveals that households, individuals and community-based organisations seek an active role in the formulation and implementation of a national food policy framework. Thus we believe that the purpose of such a policy is not only that Australians have year-round access to a secure supply of safe, nutritious and affordable food, but also that their food is produced in ways that ensures the dignity of farmers and the integrity of our soils, water tables and ecosystems.

Our inclusion in the proposed formulation of a national food policy will ensure that the voices of tens of thousands of ordinary Australians who are working to create their own sustainable and resilient local food systems can be heard in this matter of vital national and global interest.

We firmly believe our inclusion will make the process more open, participatory and democratic and help ensure that it achieves its goal of advancing the wellbeing of all Australians, now and into the future.

OVERPAGE: Signatories to the letter on national food policy