



MEDIA RELEASE

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Cook Shire food sovereignty pilot builds momentum

From Wednesday 23rd September to Friday 25th September, Cook Shire hosted Dr Nick Rose, Executive Director of Sustain: The Australian Food Network, and Kym Kruse, Director of RegenAG®, for three days of meetings, farm visits, presentations and film screenings to explore the potential for a food sovereignty* pilot project in the Cook Shire.

The visit was a resounding success. In Cooktown, Endeavour Valley and Lakeland, Nick and Kym observed high levels of enthusiasm for the Cook Shire Council's initiative to put in place policies and programs that support agriculture as a pillar of economic development for the region, while enhancing the long-term sustainability, fairness and resilience of the region's food and farming system.

There are huge opportunities for partnerships and collaborations amongst producers both large and small, chefs and local business owners, indigenous elders, community members, and institutions such as the Cape York NRM and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The region is blessed with abundant land that is suitable for a diverse range of crops, grazing, mixed livestock and horticultural production. With recent improvements in road infrastructure, the potential for agriculture to be a driver of economic development and generate local employment and business opportunities is clear.

The Cook Shire Council has a critical role to play in enabling and facilitating such partnerships, and in creating positive policy frameworks and leveraging opportunities for resourcing that will make change happen on the ground.

"We are delighted that bringing Dr. Rose to the region has initiated such excitement and significantly catapulted the conversation forward. It has set in motion the development of a whole shire, community driven plan, to revitalise its local food economy and secure its food future." Mr. Kruse said.

The Council already has plans to transfer the local Saturday morning produce market to a larger and more scenically prominent location on the foreshore, making it a weekend highlight for locals and visitors alike. As part of the nationwide Fair Food Week (www.fairfoodweek.org.au), the Cook Shire Council will work with the newly opened Botanical Gardens Cafe during Fair Food Week starting on October 16 that will be featuring local produce and innovative dishes.

A critical next step will involve working with local producers and food businesses – above all those operating at a relatively small-scale and selling into local and regional markets - to comprehensively map the regulatory issues related to food safety and planning that are impeding the viability of their businesses. This mapping exercise will inform the development of a Cook Shire Food Sovereignty By Law that will, to the extent permitted by State and Federal laws, ease the regulatory restrictions on food produced locally and marketed directly to the end consumer. This follows the example of 16 similar by laws enacted across the US State of Maine, as well as the recently passed Wyoming Food Freedom Act.

Other significant opportunities include the re-launch of Cooktown Food Connect, a direct food marketing enterprise; and consideration of a local food hub located at the Cooktown Community Centre, utilising the commercial kitchen already installed.

“I congratulate Cook Shire on its vision and leadership in embracing the challenge of working with all community stakeholders to re-create a fair, sustainable, resilient and thriving food system for the shire and for Far North Queensland. I believe this will send a signal to other municipalities in Queensland and beyond, setting the standard for best practice in food system policy and implementation in Australia”, said Dr Rose.

* Food Sovereignty is a grassroots global movement for a participatory, democratic food that works for the long-term benefit of all. Now recognised as an increasingly important approach to address the complex issues of persistent hunger and malnutrition, declining terms of trade for most of the world’s producers, the growing burden of dietary-related ill-health, and multiple severe environmental challenges, food sovereignty emerged in the mid-1990s out of discussions amongst farmers from many countries around the world, which led to the formation of the global farmer movement, *La Via Campesina* (‘the Farmers’ Path’). The food sovereignty movement now includes more than 250 million people in 80 countries, spans city and country divides, and has been enshrined in constitutions as well as national, state and local laws.

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