



A People's Food Plan for Australia

Overview

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

September 2012





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.

- Inclusive* All Australians, especially the poor and disadvantaged, have a right to choice of and accessibility to high quality, fresh and nutritious food.
- Collaborative* We work with, network and give voice to the multifaceted fair food movement.
- Professional* We conduct our interactions respectfully and with humility, ready to learn, not lecture.
- Transparent* We are democratically accountable to our members, supporters and the wider public; and our meetings and processes are open.
- Wise* 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.
- Courageous* 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.
- Sustainable* We act in accordance with social, ecological and economic justice, and with the precautionary principle.

Authors: Claire Parfitt, Nick Rose, Michael Croft, and Jen Alden.

Editors: Dr Carol Richards (University of Queensland) and Dr Jane Dixon (Australian National University).

All photos by Joel Catchlove (under Creative Commons licence) except where noted

Layout by Nat Wiseman



The People's Food Plan

Foreword by Costa Giorgiadis



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 Giorgiadis

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/>

