

THE AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE (AFSA)

MANIFESTO FOR A POSITIVE FOOD FUTURE

Good food, shared with family and friends, is one of the supreme joys of life. For many years, we've taken our food, and the people who grow, make and sell it, for granted. Yet all is not well in our food and farming systems. Far from nourishing us, our food often makes us ill. Instead of rewarding farmers for their knowledge and dedication, our food systems force them to rack up debt and leave the land. Rather than storing carbon in the ground, agriculture reliant on fossil fuels is a prime source of emissions.

We need to change our food and farming systems, and we need to do so urgently. We are farmers, community gardeners, writers, business-people, chefs, academics, and, most of all, citizens; and we are calling for a fair, safe, and resilient food future for all Australians based on the following principles:

We are what we eat

Every one of us wants to lead healthy and contented lives. Every one of us wants such lives for our children, and for future generations. Our food is the life-giving sustenance that makes this possible.

We all have the right to good, safe, clean food

We are working for high quality, fresh and nutritious food for everyone, at all times, irrespective of income status or background. This is the basis for human flourishing.

Food Shapes our World

We are building diverse ways of producing food that sustain and renew all the elements of healthy, resilient life on Earth. We are supporting living soils, clean waterways, thriving biodiversity, and a stable climate. We envision food systems whose vitality increasingly comes from the power of the sun, and so which don't wholly rely on expensive and non-renewable external inputs.

Food connects us all

We owe food a great debt: thanks to it, we are all part of the magnificent web of life, which is as much social as it is natural. We are working for thriving ecosystems *and* thriving societies. When we place a proper value on food by paying farmers a fair price, we create healthy and diverse local and regional economies. We see a future of celebratory local and regional food cultures around Australia and around the world – built on a fair deal for the farmers and food workers of the world.

Waste Not, and End Want

No natural system has waste, because waste is unsustainable. It is morally unacceptable to waste food in a world with a billion people under-nourished, and that hunger persists in an era when enough food is produced to feed 12 billion people. Our international trading system must work to eradicate hunger through social justice, not entrench it through subsidised wasteful over-production. Our food systems must ensure that unavoidable waste is recycled appropriately, preferably as fertility for the soil.

Paying due respect

When we eat meat, we must do so with conscious regard for the innate dignity of all living creatures. We urge a transition away from factory farming to the many humane alternatives for raising livestock.

Resilience in diversity

We need diverse food systems able to withstand future shocks. From seed to supermarket, food and its profits are increasingly owned by a handful of multinational corporations, making our current food system fragile. As an alternative we see a vigorous food future based in diversified farming, thriving social enterprises, and expanding community food systems: from backyard gardeners to Community-Shared Agriculture. What we are talking about is a transition towards *distributed food systems*, characterised by: a) the *decentralisation* of infrastructure, ownership and responsibility, b) the *cyclical movement* of inputs, resources, produce and waste, and c) the *flexible interdependence* of all actors in diverse and resilient systems.

Let's reclaim our Food Sovereignty!

Food is too vital to be governed only by international trade rules and the hidden hand of the market. We say that our food systems, from the global to the national to the local, should be open and democratic spaces of

debate, discussion and the widest participation possible. We are building mutually supportive local and global relationships around food, and advocating for trade in food that is fair, transparent and that does no harm to the food sovereignty ambitions of any other nation or people. A vital part of this is ensuring indigenous food sovereignty and the continuity of indigenous food traditions.

For AFSA, the sovereignty we speak of is about our freedom to choose the food we want, produced in ways we support, by people who earn a good living from its production. We are forging a path towards conscious food citizenship based on a democratic and resilient national food system.

If you are passionate about a delicious food future with integrity for Australia and the world, join us!

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

The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty

1. Focuses on Food for People:

- *insists on the right to nourishing food for everyone*
- *insists that food is more than a commodity*

2. Values Food Providers:

- *supports the right to produce food*
- *supports sustainable livelihoods*

3. Localises Food Systems:

- *places providers and consumers at the centre of food-related decision-making*
 - *rejects food dumping and inappropriate food aid*
- *resists food system dependency on remote and unaccountable corporations*

4. Localises Control:

- *places control in the hands of local food providers*
- *recognises the need to inhabit and to share territories*
- *rejects the privatization of 'natural resources' and the protects the global commons – water, air, land, seeds, climate*

5. Builds Knowledge and Skills:

- *builds on traditional knowledge*
- *uses research to support and pass this knowledge to future generations*
- *rejects technologies that undermine or contaminate local food systems*

6. Works with Nature:

- *uses nature's contributions in the design & management of sustainable food systems*
 - *builds and maintains resilience*
- *rejects energy intensive, monocultural, industrialised, and destructive production methods*

A lightly edited version of the 'Pillars' developed at Nyéléni 2007, reproduced from Food Secure Canada: <http://foodsecurecanada.org/six-pillars-food-sovereignty>

New Food Pathways for Australia: The Guiding Principles

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance has no prescriptive formulas for the development of food pathways, which should be the outcome of inclusive and participatory debates and forums. We offer some guiding principles, based on the inspirational work already underway by farmers and communities around the country and around the world:

* **Relocalisation:** Food should be eaten as close to its source as possible. Long supply chains are wasteful of energy, hinder communication between farmers and city folk, and obscure the provenance of food. In Australia, while major grain and livestock operations are typically located at some distance from the large urban centres, there is great potential for relocalisation of fruit and vegetable supply through optimising the use of available urban and peri-urban land. For example, 50% of all NSW vegetable farms are in the Sydney basin, but many are under threat through the expansion of residential development. These urban and peri-urban centres of production should be protected as cornerstones of resilient urban foodsheds for future generations.

* **Fair trade and social justice:** Food citizens need food choices that are affordable, support their wellbeing, and give pleasure, without degrading the environment that is the foundation of all health and wellbeing. In exchange for supplying food that meets these criteria, farmers need a return that allows them to live in comfort and dignity, to maintain the productive capacity of their farm and to undertake the necessary activities to support its ecological integrity. In addition, food and food producing must be socially re-valued, so that agricultural labour is no longer dangerous and low-paid, and that new and young farmers can enter agriculture with a genuinely sustainable livelihood. Any system that fails to deliver these outcomes is fundamentally unsustainable.

* **Resilience:** Highly centralised and monolithic structures, like our current food system, are vulnerable to shocks. Diverse food pathways mean that no single shock can catastrophically disrupt the whole food supply.

* **Keep close to nature:** Given the intimate linkages between human health and ecosystems health, our wellbeing is served by eating food that is produced to be naturally nutritious (synonymous with "tasty") rather than bred solely for properties like high yield, or alternatively highly processed purely in order to prolong shelf-life.

High input agriculture, increasingly dependent on short-term technological fixes, has become the norm. The new food pathways seek to have synthetic inputs as tools of last resort, rather than the main management tool.

Farm production methods and technologies which are based on regenerative methods of developing soil fertility, and use natural ecological checks and balances against pests and diseases, are less likely to have detrimental consequences on the environment -- fertiliser leaching into waterways, chemical toxins in groundwater and food -- than methods which rely on high levels of synthetic inputs.

In livestock production, free-range methods recycle nutrients, usually from pastures grown on-site. By contrast, intensive livestock methods create large concentrations of manure, requiring extra energy for disposal, and rely wholly on imported feeds. As seen

in recent years, big factory farms are also potential breeding grounds for dangerous pathogens such as swine flu.

* **Energy efficiency:** The current food system is characterised by long supply chains, synthetic inputs, and mechanisation that reduces labour demands while increasing reliance on fossil fuel energy. Cumulatively, these factors make food production one of the largest single contributors to climate change, which in turn is the largest single threat to future food production.

The new food pathways seek to have a much smaller energy footprint, lessening reliance on dwindling energy resources. Reduced carbon emissions are facilitated by Food Sovereignty's emphasis on context-specific agricultural methods, premised above all on the development and maintenance of healthy and living soils. The active sequestering of atmospheric carbon in soils by perennial plants reduces farmers' dependence on expensive imported fertility; chemical fertiliser imports are estimated to cost Australia's farmers in the vicinity of \$3 billion per annum. Soil carbon sequestration and reduced emissions from food systems have the potential to lower the food sector's emissions profile, possibly to the extent of being neutral or negative.

* **Less waste:** The current food system is highly wasteful. For example, over 40 per cent of household residual rubbish sent to landfill in Melbourne is food organics (DSE 2009, Metropolitan Waste and Recovery Strategic Plan, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne). At the same time, enormous quantities of finite mineral resources like phosphorus, all of which is imported, are excreted and flushed out to sea.

Minimising waste in the first place, and where possible the redistribution of any surplus produce, then recycling as much discarded organic nutrient as possible back to the land, must be a priority for any food system that aims for sustained soil fertility.

* **An ethic of care:** of land, of watersheds, of soil, of air, of animals – and of each other.

Everyone must play their part in the transition to resilient, nourishing and sustainable food systems

Developing new food pathways will require participation of everyone involved:

- Governments and policy-makers will have to establish new policy frameworks that encourage and support innovation outside the existing food system. Minimum local procurement provisions in publicly-funded contracts, as has been legislated for example in Illinois, is one example of creative policy making that can build resilient and socially just food systems. The establishment in 2009 of a Food Security Council in Tasmania, and the leadership that the Council is providing in supporting diverse food supply chains, is an example that should be followed in other states.
- Farmers will need to start forming new market relationships and be prepared to respond to different market signals. The expansion of farmers' markets in the past decade, and the recent emergence of community-shared agriculture, are examples of the sorts of new exchanges that should be nurtured and strengthened.
- Food retailers will need to begin to persuade shoppers of the merits of new ways of valuing food and not simply using cost as a measure. Food co-ops and wholefood

stores around the country have for many years pioneered ethical approaches to food value chains that can serve as models for others.

- All of us will need to begin looking beyond the narrow self-interest of price and convenience, and start to make food choices based on the understanding that how we eat shapes our world, and most importantly the world of our children and grandchildren. In other words, we will need to become consciously-acting *food citizens*.

What we are talking about is the transition towards *distributed food systems*, characterised by: a) the *decentralisation* of infrastructure, ownership and responsibility, b) the *cyclical movement* of inputs, produce and waste, and c) the *flexible interdependence* of all actors (VEIL, Distributed Systems: A design model for sustainable and resilient infrastructure, March 2010, Che Biggs, Chris Ryan and John Wiseman).

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA)

Who are we?

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance is a Civil Society Organisation), not for profit and speaks to the core values and principles of 88 organisations that have signed our August 2010 letter to the then-federal Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, calling for the formation of a democratic and inclusive national food policy. AFSA speaks to the aspirations of the many hundreds of thousands of people directly involved in building and supporting Resilient Food Systems in Australia.

The AFSA emerged as 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.

What is our vision?

Moving beyond the rhetoric of party politics, the AFSA is focused on shaping policy according to the experience and innovations of the hundreds of thousands of Australians who are already creating practical, resilient and exciting food pathways in their towns and communities. In the AFSA vision, small is beautiful yet big has its place too, providing all systems maintain a balance that equitably includes people, planet and profit.

The AFSA is rapidly becoming a national voice for a resilient, reliable and socially just food system, comprised of a diversity of new food pathways. The AFSA speaks to the core values of participants in **resilient food systems**: openness, transparency, local control, fairness, social justice and equity, honesty, and integrity. When combined, these values can produce democratic, healthy and successful economic, social and environmental decisions, policies and outcomes.

We should be aiming to create food and agricultural systems that can withstand systemic shocks. These systems should be of diverse scale and scope, be autonomous yet interconnected, and create a flexible, stable and fail-safe whole.

Speaking to the values of the players in the emerging resilient, durable food systems – from farmers' markets, community gardens, community-shared agriculture, agro-ecological farming, Transition Initiatives, permaculture groups and Slow Food convivia - the AFSA requests seats at the table in any negotiations which involve food policy at local, State and Federal levels. The number of practitioners and supporters of these food systems is estimated to be growing at 20% per annum. These dedicated and innovative individuals represent a big part of the future of food and agriculture in Australia, deserving the full support and respect of government and policy-makers.

The AFSA also embraces the recent development of Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) by indigenous peoples from the Americas and the Pacific, as a policy framework responding to the specific food needs of indigenous people. We are collaborating with the Indigenous peoples of Australia in jointly creating the inclusive, democratic, resilient and life-enriching future that all of us need and are capable of creating.

About this Manifesto

This Manifesto sets forth a vision and a programme for transformative political change of food and farming in Australia. We make the case that the current system is failing us badly in many respects, and articulate the alternatives, based on the existing daily practices of thousands of Australians.

The Manifesto for the AFSA was prepared by Michael Croft and Nick Rose, during October & November 2010. Thanks to the critical supportive reading provided by Claire Nettle, Stuart Hill, Penny Scott, Jennifer Alden, Kathy McConnell, Bob Phelps, Fran Murrell, Madeleine Love and Russ Grayson.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: WHAT IS IT?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food that is produced through ecologically sustainable methods, and to participate in decisions about our food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, rather than letting these be determined by the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of future generations. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems so that they can be determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability, and the wellbeing of all life. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples, and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food and care for landscapes. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.”

A lightly edited version of the 27 February 2007 Declaration of Nyéléni, following the **Forum for Food Sovereignty** in Sélingué, Mali, which was attended by over 500 delegates from more than 80 countries:

www.nyeleni.org

“Food Sovereignty is...the right of peoples and sovereign states to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies.”

From the April 2008 report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, compiled by 400 of the world's leading agricultural scientists and development experts, and sponsored by the United Nations and the World Bank: www.agassessment.org

A similar definition of Food Sovereignty now appears in the Constitution of the Republic of Venezuela, and also in the Constitutions of Nepal, Mali, Senegal, Bolivia and Ecuador.

“Indigenous Food Sovereignty [is based on] sacred or divine sovereignty – food is a gift from the Creator; in this respect the right to food is sacred and cannot be constrained or recalled by colonial laws, policies and institutions. Indigenous food sovereignty is fundamentally achieved by upholding our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food”

From the Canadian-based Indigenous Food Systems Network:

www.indigenousfoodsystems.org

The case for change – the current Australian food and farming system is failing

Our current food system evolved for complex reasons. For over 50 years, it has been remarkably successful at producing cheap, plentiful food, producing enough food to support a population three times the size of Australia's.

Yet the current system is now failing in many ways due to the manner in which it has developed over time. Amongst such failures, which affect all economic sectors, we need to consider the following:

- depleted soil carbon levels and declining soil fertility
- loss of biodiversity in terrestrial, marine and aquatic ecosystems
- rising salinity
- obesity and chronic illnesses
- the total commodification of food, resulting in farmers being 'price takers', unable to set the terms of exchange in contracts with buyers which this leads to depressed prices and depressed farmers
- monocultures that offer little resilience against price fluctuations, pests and diseases
- environmental damage
- unsustainable water extraction from aquifers and rivers
- two corporations controlling 4 out of every 5 food purchases
- every major town and city in Australia having no more than 2 days of staples and 5 days of all foods in reserve
- urban sprawl facilitated by a lack of prime agricultural land protection
- short-term mining gains at long-term food producing land losses.

Cumulatively and collectively, these failings point to a fundamental *lack of resilience* in the current food and farming systems. They can all be directly linked to the unbalanced pursuit of 'single bottom line' profit without consequence facilitated by an economic rationalist approach to government policy. These outcomes impact directly, and negatively, on public, ecological and social health:

Public health

“Recent trends predict that the life expectancy for Australian children alive today will fall two years by the time they are 20 years old...It is unacceptable that we as a nation are leaving this legacy to our children and grandchildren.”

National Health Preventative Taskforce Report on Obesity, September 2009

Everyone needs to eat. With air and water, food is the most basic of human necessities. Food is what nourishes us, repairs our cells, gives us energy, protects us from illness and heals us when we are ill. The buying and selling of food, and the cooking, eating and sharing of it, connects us with each other. Food is central to building healthy and resilient communities.

At least, that's what food, and relations around food, should be. In modern Australia, and world-wide, food products have become the causes of disease, suffering and premature death. Unhealthy eating is irrefutably linked to the development of obesity and chronic disease conditions including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and dental disease. The most recent official figures (from 2003) show that high body mass was the third major cause of disease in Australia, ranked just behind tobacco and high blood pressure. According to some estimates, nearly 70% of Australians – including 25% of all children - are overweight; and nearly a third of us are obese. Indigenous Australians are three times as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to be morbidly obese, i.e. at risk of serious disease. The direct and indirect costs to taxpayers, and the wider economy, run into the tens of billions of dollars annually. Some experts, such as Professor John Coveney of the Flinders University School of Medicine, warn that if present trends continue in a state like South Australia, the health

budget will exceed the whole of the state budget by 2032.

Then there is food insecurity: not being certain of having access at all times to adequate, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food. One would think that in a country as wealthy as Australia, no-one – and certainly no child – would be allowed to go to bed hungry. But according to the non-profit hunger relief organisation FoodBank,

“Each year, two million Australians will rely on food relief, and around half of them will be children. These children will often go to school without breakfast, or to bed without dinner.”

Our food system should keep us healthy and provide us all with enough good, high-quality, nutritious food. Many Australians are concerned about the levels of synthetic chemicals present in our foods, the safety and ethics of meat obtained from animals raised in factory farming conditions, and the unknown impacts on human and environmental health of the increasing genetic modification of food products and other emerging new food-related technologies such as nanotechnology.

Ecosystem and environmental health

The way we produce food should be in balance with surrounding ecosystems: ensuring the integrity of water catchments, preserving biodiversity and the fertility of soils, and avoid depleting non-renewable resources and altering our climate.

Placing the profit motive above all other considerations has allowed economics to shape and determine food production priorities. Environmental costs have been 'externalised', not included in the check-out price of our food. The accumulated debts that the system owes nature are beginning to fall due. In effect, as author Raj Patel says, it's not cheap food, it's 'cheat food'. But nature's no fool, and will not be deceived indefinitely.

Our major national river system is in crisis, and billions of tonnes of topsoil have been eroded since European occupation. The high-input monocultural agriculture of the current food distribution system is estimated to be Australia's single largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for up to 39% of emissions. This system is heavily dependent on fossil fuel inputs, from the most elementary of farm machinery to delivery, storage and retailing mechanisms at the expense of the potential to capture carbon.

The system's dependence on fossil fuels helps explain why wastefulness is endemic in the current food system. The impacts of such waste and profligate resource usage are severe: about half of our personal ecological footprint in Australia is food-related. This is a major reason why Australia is amongst the top ten most unsustainable nations in the world.

Social health

Having transformed the global economics of food, the current food system is failing economically. Its basis was the Green Revolution equation of productivity gains based on cheap inputs. The gains have stopped, the inputs are no longer cheap, and farmers' terms of trade have shifted into the negative.

There are many reasons for this; some global, some national. Globally, the 'free trade' model promoted bilaterally and under the World Trade Organisation has largely benefitted multinational conglomerates at the expense of farmers and rural communities worldwide. For example, since the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force in January 1994, millions of small Mexican corn farmers have been forced to leave their land, unable to compete with the cheap, heavily subsidised imports from the United States (David Bacon, *Displaced People: NAFTA's Most Important Product*, NACLA, <https://nacla.org/node/4980>).

In Australia, the growing power of the supermarket duopoly since the early 1970s, combined with the globalization of trade, has meant that prices for basic commodities have fallen by around 80 per cent in real terms during the past few decades, according to the National Land and Water Resource Audit (<http://www.anra.gov.au/topics/economics/pubs/national/anrm-report/scene.html>). It's all about economies of scale, and the message is 'get big – get enormous - or get out'. In essence, our farming

systems are built on the shaky basis of ever-increasing yields for steadily diminishing returns: Australian farmers now produce four times the volume of agricultural commodities to earn around half what their forebears did in 1950 (Ted Henzell, *Australian Agriculture: Its History and Challenges*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood). The devaluing of food production is further reflected in the conditions of the 370,000 agricultural workers, who are the lowest paid and most insecure workforce in the country, according to the Productivity Commission's 2005 report *Trends in Australian Agriculture* (<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/commissionresearch/agriculture>).

Combined with natural catastrophes such as prolonged natural and human-made drought, the social impact of these processes on farmers and rural communities has been, and continues to be, devastating. Rates of suicide and depression amongst farmers are around double the national average. According to some estimates, as many as 80,000 Australian farmers have left the land since 1965; an average of 5-6 farmers a day (ABS, *Agricultural Commodities*, 2007/8; Pestana B 1993, *Australian agriculture: the complete reference on rural industry*, National Farmers Federation, Canberra).

Due to the unjust global trade system, farmers and landless rural workers – the majority of them women - make up more than half of the 925 million currently malnourished people in the world (Food and Agriculture Organisation, *State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2010, <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/>). This human-induced impoverishment in turn leads to unnecessarily high levels of infant mortality and waves of migration. It is a form of structural violence in which 'the mass movement of food is leading to the [forced] mass movement of people', as the global small farmers' movement, La Via Campesina ('The Farmers' Way), explains it.

Global and national food systems with rules skewed in favour of large corporations have an impact on social health and are anti-democratic in nature and design. The rules are often made behind closed doors, with minimal public discussion, and at times – as is the case with the introduction of genetically-modified food products without mandatory labelling – contrary to the clearly expressed wishes of a majority of the population. The implications of this for the future of our children and our society are that everyone has a stake in the food system of the future, and everyone should have a say in shaping it. Yet when governments and big corporations dogmatically insist, in spite of mounting evidence to the contrary, that 'free markets' will always deliver the 'cheapest' and the 'best' outcomes for everyone, ordinary citizens find they are excluded from the debate.

The justification – the big picture of global hunger

The expansion of 'big' globalised agribusiness, food processors and supermarket chains rests on the claim that it's only through big commodity export volumes, large distribution systems and the fulsome embrace of all new technologies that we can achieve global food security, i.e. 'feed the world'. The Malthusian equation that underpins the belief that the world will have to double food production by 2050 in order to feed an anticipated population of 9 billion people has implicit in it the idea that there's a shortage of food at the moment.

But that's simply not true. In fact, when we take into account the levels of waste, inefficiencies and inequities of the current system, the world today produces enough food to feed 12 billion people, nearly double the current global population.

In Australia an estimated 47% of municipal waste sent to landfill is organic (food and green waste), not only creating greenhouse gases but also a waste of nutrients (EcoRecycle Victoria (2005), Information Sheet 2 - Waste Facts, last modified March 2005, <http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/2039-waste-and-recycling-information-sheets.asp>). In the competition between 'food for the poor' and 'fuel for the cars of the rich', as much as a third of the huge US corn crop is diverted to ethanol, which both critics and independent expert reviewers describe as a 'non-solution' to climate change (UK Renewable Fuels Agency, Gallagher Review of the Indirect Effects of Biofuels, 2008, <http://www.renewablefuelsagency.gov.uk/reportsandpublications/reviewoftheindirecteffectsofbiofuels>). Tragically, food rots in the open and in warehouses because the poor lack money to pay for it.

At its root, the persistence of the scandal of mass hunger in an era of food abundance is a matter of equity and social justice, not production. In fact, it's actually the *over-production* – principally of corn and soy, which form the basis of the great mass of energy dense and nutrient poor foods - that is creating a world that is simultaneously 'stuffed and starved', in Raj Patel's words (Patel, 2007, *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power, and the Hidden Battle for the World's Food System*, Black Inc, Melbourne).

A growing global alternative – Food Sovereignty

Millions of people are outraged by the persistence of hunger and the forms of malnutrition that have produced the obesity epidemic, and are determined to create more resilient, distributed food systems that can withstand the systemic challenges of climate change and peak oil. Building alternative food systems provides new food pathways that recognise the fundamental role food plays in determining the quality of our lives and environment.

Ecologically, these pathways are grounded in the principles of successful natural ecosystems:

- diversity
- resilience
- adaptability
- re-cycling and waste minimisation.

Ecosystems evolve in response to local conditions. Local ecosystems are unique, form an interconnected, resilient whole, comprising efficient users of energy and recyclers of waste.

Politically, these pathways broadly subscribe to the principles of *food sovereignty*, a concept developed by La Via Campesina. This global movement of over 300 million people in 70 countries is dedicated to promoting and defending small and family farming. It recognises that the complex of issues surrounding food are an interlinked and inseparable whole.

Food Sovereignty is strongly grounded in the principles of equity and social justice, recognising that access to adequate, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food is a basic human right, as acknowledged by 160 countries.

As a policy framework, Food Sovereignty argues that producers within bioregions or 'foodsheds', regions and nations should be free to produce food using techniques that serve the long-term good of the land and society, rather than short-term corporate profit. As a matter of equity and of resilience, it argues that consumers – *food citizens* - should be able to preferentially eat food grown close at hand, rather than be pressured to consume according to the economic forces of globalisation.

Food sovereignty resists corporatisation of the food supply, through which ownership of the means of producing and distributing food is being monopolised by a handful of companies. It is a principle of Food Sovereignty that the basic building blocks of a nation's foodshed – its seeds and germplasm – are a matter of fundamental national interest and therefore should – with few exceptions - be kept in public ownership. Thus, on the basis of the precautionary and democratic principles, the AFSA supports the calls made by farmer and consumer groups around the world for:

- an immediate moratorium on GM crops and imports
- the immediate mandatory labelling of products fully or partly derived from GM crops or processes
- a full, transparent and participatory national debate on all issues concerning GM crops and food products; such national debates should also embrace emerging new food-related technologies such as nanotechnology

In valuing local knowledge and traditions, food sovereignty argues that publicly-funded research should be directed to develop and sustain local knowledge, facilitating its transfer to future generations.

Food Sovereignty insists that food systems and food policy must be transparently and democratically debated and determined by the whole of society, in order to serve the interests of the whole of society: 'by the people, for the people'. Food Policy cannot simply be demanded by the largest corporations, nor developed to suit their interests.

AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES – RESPONSES TO THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE, Sep-Oct 2010

What do you think the purpose and goals of the AFSA should be?

“The main objective should be to eventually make a high level of food sovereignty knowledge the mainstream. Every Australian should take care to only purchase quality food, that has minimal food miles, is fresh and organic, and does not put profits in the hands of large corporations, but in the hands of primary producers (not including factory farms) where it belongs.”

What are the most pressing food / farming-related concerns for you / your organisation?

“Sowing seeds, growing and harvesting food, cooking and sharing food is one way that ALL human[s] can connect with each other and our mother earth. This [is] a right for everyone...I also think our current food system is making us all time poor - the producer and the consumers. Food is a basic need. By having to work so many hours just to make ends meet, you have less time to live life. If food was more readily available through local growing networks - networks that people were in some way a part of, food would not be as expensive, it would be healthier and more readily available and we would have more time to live life.”

What are your / your organisation's aspirations for food / farming in your area?

“[I want to see] nutritionally adequate foods available and accessible to all. Reduce the amount of junk foods available at cheap prices. Reform labeling laws, don't give in to the big food producing companies: we need a clear labelling system such as the traffic light system recently rejected in the EU. Ban junk food advertising to children. Ban sponsorship of children's sports clubs by junk food producers. Support local and national growers of fruits and veg. Don't carve up all of our great farm land for urban development.”

“I would like to see a local food supply system with expanded diversity of produce that provides people with food choice throughout the year, and that people become articulate in using...There is much work to do to inform people about the seasonality of fresh produce. As a farmer it is part of my work to discuss seasonality and the range of options available to my consumers. I am working on broadening the local range of seasonal produce, so that customers can have choices in the food they eat without needing to rely on produce transported huge distances.

What should we say to the Greens & Independents about food & farming in Australia?

“What is food security - at an individual level and at the societal level? Government[s] should be addressing food security at a societal level, with the collective good of the community (both physically and ecologically) as their goal, and not be allowing corporations to address food security at the individual (consumer) level to satisfy economic goals.

What is food sovereignty and why is it important? The 'right to farm' is actually the right of a community to feed itself, it is a global social justice issue based on the premise that food is a need, not a want.”

“This is not an issue of 'left' or 'right' wing politics. The solutions we seek and are developing make sense for greens, independents, regional communities etc. Truly free markets full of diverse participants (not controlled by supermarkets and large agribusiness) strengthen local livelihoods and innovation. Sustainable food production, reducing reliance on non-renewable inputs and improving ecological health, can increase farmer profitability and improve the quality of our soils, river systems and biodiversity. This is not about 'greenies' vs 'farmers' - the solutions we seek work for urban consumers (and producers) and for diverse and vibrant regional communities and economies. The common ground is calling!”