AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to the Victorian Inquiry into Pig Welfare

Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Victorian Government

Submitted to: pigwelfareinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

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We thank the Victorian Government for initiating an inquiry into pig welfare. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission, as well as all further opportunities to participate in development and implementation of improved welfare for pigs and other livestock in future. We hope the Government will facilitate robust and meaningful stakeholder engagement across all aspects of the agricultural and food sector, prioritising the voices of First Peoples, rights holders and those with lived experience within our food system.

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About the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer-led civil society organisation of people working towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems. The democratic participation of First Peoples, small-scale food producers and local communities in decision-making processes is integral to these efforts.

AFSA provides a balanced voice to represent small-scale food producers and local communities' interests at all levels of government. We connect small-scale food producers for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, assist local, state and the federal government in instituting scale-appropriate and consistent regulations and standards, and advocate for fair access for small-scale food producers to local value chain infrastructure and markets.

We are part of a robust global network of civil society organisations involved in food sovereignty and food security policy development and advocacy. We are members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), La Via Campesina (the global movement of peasant farmers), and Urgenci: the International Network for Community-Supported Agriculture. We also support the Australasian representative on the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM), which relates to the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Our vision is to enable agroecology-oriented farms to thrive. This has taken on an added salience in the face of the increasing impacts of the climate crisis, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and rising food prices as a result of ongoing droughts, fire, flood, and war. Australians care more than ever about the way their food is produced and how and where they can access it, with a growing awareness of its social, environmental, and economic impacts. Nutritious food produced and distributed in socially-just, ethical and ecologically-sound ways is increasingly in demand.

Governments must facilitate and encourage the emergence and viability of agroecology embedded in localised food systems with short and direct supply chains, thereby protecting the environment and human and animal health. Inextricable to this vision is the need to honestly and truthfully account for the land's needs. As such, AFSA works to increase understanding of and appreciation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' connection to and care for Country and the ongoing impacts of colonisation and development on Country. We aim to put First Peoples' knowledge first as best practice for healing Country and sustaining life, and as an organisation we are committed to decolonial futures for food and agriculture systems, and just relations between settlers and First Peoples.

We work extensively with primary food producers and eaters across every state and territory in Australia. The National Committee has consisted of farmers from every state, and local advocates and campaigners such as Open Food Network, Food Connect, Southern Harvest Association, Friends of the Earth, Fair Food Brisbane, and the Permaculture Network, as well as academics from the University of Melbourne, RMIT, Deakin University, University of Tasmania, University of Sydney, SCU, QUT, UQ and UWA.

Executive summary

AFSA thanks the Victorian Government for the opportunity to provide this submission to the inquiry on pig welfare in Victoria. As a farmer-led organisation, AFSA represents over 100 small-scale food producers who are fighting for social and ecological justice for people, animals and ecosystems. Animal welfare has been a core focus of AFSA's updated Peoples' Food Plan, which urges governments at all levels to enact a range of policy instruments to move towards agroecology, and away from industrial agriculture.

An important distinction in livestock farming is the difference between intensive or industrial livestock practices, and agroecological practices that AFSA small-scale farmers follow. Intensive systems, where confined animals are destined to live out their days in sheds, are responsible for the serious harm to animal, human and planetary health that is usually associated with the umbrella view of 'animal agriculture'. On the other hand, small-scale farmers following agroecological practices grow animals according to the natural capacities of ecosystems and enact a custodial ethic of care where all life is respected. Industrial systems value efficiency at the cost of the environment, human health, local communities and animal welfare. In the case of pig welfare, we firmly believe that sufficient outcomes will never be achieved under these intensive systems.

This submission draws upon over 10 years of government engagement to overhaul the regulatory system to ensure that animal welfare standards and guidelines are determined by farmers, particularly small-scale livestock producers who promote agroecology-oriented practices. Although AFSA has long advocated for improvements to animal welfare standards and guidelines, we have been particularly vocal over the past 12 months, due to media reports that have exposed the inhumane treatment of pigs at slaughter, using CO2 stunning. The closure and subsequent consolidation of abattoirs across the country has restricted small-scale farmers' access to slaughter and forced them to engage with the industrial system that prioritises profit over welfare. In response, AFSA has publicly called for government support to establish vital infrastructure, such as micro and mobile abattoirs, to enable farmers with greater autonomy of their value chains and protect the welfare of animals during slaughter.

In addition to providing evidence-based responses and recommendations to the terms of reference outlined in this inquiry, AFSA has also provide four key recommendations to the Victorian Government to transform food and agriculture systems in Victoria: 1) transition to agroecology; 2) transition to a degrowth economy; 3) transition to localised food systems and 4) transition to democratic knowledge production.

We commend the Victorian Government for prioritising this inquiry, at a time when pig welfare is a subject of concern for both farmers and eaters in our food system. AFSA welcomes any further opportunity to discuss the evidence provided in this submission to develop policies, regulation and legislation that improves pig welfare in Victoria.

Context

AFSA has long been vocal about its stance against industrial livestock management and practices, providing evidence-based submissions on animal welfare standards and guidelines and the prevention of cruelty to

animals in addition to our public outreach. The welfare of livestock in Australia has been supported by a series of Model Codes of Practice for the past 20 years. As community values and expectations change, the relevance of these codes have been intermittently called into question, revised and developed.[1] There has been general agreement about the desirability of having national standards of livestock welfare that are consistently mandated and enforced in all states and territories.[2]

Animal welfare is now caught in a crossroads of conflicting modes of agricultural production; one road is defined by highly efficient, intensive production and the other by regenerating landscapes and rearing animals on pasture. Animal welfare is typically calculated based on several factors, including health, conditions of lighting, humidity, ventilation, feed, water quality, stocking density and stock management skills, and now increasingly, welfare issues around transport and slaughter.

The *Animal Industries Advisory Committee* in Victoria noted in 2016 that:

> broader community awareness and interest in farming practices has also risen. Consumers are more vocal in their expectations around animal welfare standards and environmental impact. The community is not only interested in local developments, but also the ethical and environmental standards of production as a whole. For example, an application to expand a dairy in Gippsland attracted objections from across Australia and from as far-afield as the USA, with the primary concern being animal welfare and foreign ownership.

To enhance animal welfare in farming systems, we must shift away from commodity-based, export-focused agriculture. Our current dominant modes of farming and the animal welfare outcomes the community is calling for are inherently incompatible. Climate change and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have brought to the fore the key arguments AFSA has historically made against industrial livestock. Large numbers of animals kept in confined spaces are a breeding ground for emerging zoonotic diseases. The increase in public concern over animal welfare has also called into question whether animal agriculture is able to adapt to and mitigate climate change and to address cruelty. AFSA's role in this discourse has been to raise public awareness about alternatives to industrial farming such as agroecology and regenerative agriculture, to enhance animal welfare and restore degraded agricultural land. We advocate on behalf of pastured livestock farmers, where animals are managed in ways that respect their natural instincts, and that actively enhance pasture by allowing animals to graze and disturb an area, which is then left to recover before animals are reintroduced.

This approach underscores the value of all life on land and in water under agroecological farming systems. Every being within an ecosystem plays a critical role in healing Country and nourishing communities through the provision of food that is grown and produced in a way that is ethical, socially-just and ecologically-sound. Australian agriculture and water policy has a long way to go to enhance animal welfare on land, as well as marine and terrestrial waters. We believe the opportunity should be taken to explore ways to protect freedom of speech and animal welfare to reflect the change in social licence in this area,

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[1] http://www.agriculture.gov.au/animal/welfare/aaws, Australian Government, Department of Water and Agricultural Resources, Australian Animal Welfare Strategy – AAWS.

[2] http://www.agriculture.gov.au/animal/welfare/aaws, Australian Government, Department of Water and Agricultural Resources, Australian Animal Welfare Strategy – AAWS.

and note that this is an issue that is being debated across a number of Australian jurisdictions and internationally.

Animal agriculture has come under fire in the past decade, largely due to harrowing information about the treatment of intensive livestock and live exports. In addition, concerns about animal agriculture's impact on climate change linked to rising Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs) has prompted a rise in plant-based diets and veganism. In some cases, calls to end all animal agriculture have emerged from animal activist groups. For small-scale livestock farmers, being tarred with the same brush as industrial-scale animal agriculture fails to recognise the root causes of the destruction caused by commodity agriculture, the important role of animals in agro-ecosystems and everyone's right to culturally-determined foods.

We assert that industrial livestock production is often cruel, and governments must recognise that intensive livestock farming is not conducive to ensuring animal welfare. Previous studies[3] have determined that 95% of Australians view farm animal welfare to be a concern and 91% want at least some reform to address this.

The table below summarises the key animal welfare issues for different species, and we have highlighted pigs as most relevant to this inquiry into pig welfare.

Key issues for intensive livestock management and practice in Australia[4]

Livestock (animal)	Number produced and volume consumed each year	Animal welfare issues (intensive)	Exported to other markets (%)
Meat Chickens	650 million slaughtered 46 kg chicken meat per person	• Bred to grow rapidly leads to deformities, morbidities • Breeders in cages • Crowded housing • Catching & transport	4%
Layer Hens	16 million hens 262 eggs per person	• Cages • Osteoporosis • Handling • Inhumane slaughter of male chicks	Unknown
Pigs	5 million slaughtered 20 kg pork per person	• Farrowing stalls • Cramped confinement & stress • Routine tail docking and eye teeth removal	9%

[3]file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/190129-Commodity-or-Sentient-Being-Australias-Shifting-Mindset-on-Farm-Animal-Welfare-v.-7.0.pdf

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023; RSPCA n.d.; Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2020; https://www.statista.com/statistics/1240754/australia-meat-consumption-by-type/

		• Inhumane CO2 stunning	
Cows	1.7 million dairy cows 5,500L of milk per cow 92L per person 22.3 million beef cattle 20 kg beef per person	• Mastitis (disease related to nutrition, hygiene & milking procedures) • Male bobby calves slaughtered at about one week old • Feedlots with no grass for ave. 50-120 days • Live export	Dairy: 40% Beef and veal: 70%
Seafood[5]	166 kt seafood harvested[6] 15kg seafood per person	• Handling • Stocking density • Antibiotic use • Feed ingredient sourcing • Poor water quality • Inhumane slaughter	35%[7]

Inquiry into Pig Welfare in Victoria

The Government has asked for stakeholders and the public to comment on the following areas.

1. the scope, application, compliance with and enforcement of relevant existing regulatory frameworks and their ability to promote pig welfare outcomes

The ***Victorian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Pigs*** **(Pig Welfare Standards)** set out the minimum standards and guidelines for pig welfare in Victoria. AFSA submits that they are indeed a minimum standard rather than any semblance of best practice care for living creatures. AFSA considers the space allowances for confined pigs to be much too small (e.g. a farrowing crate of not less than 3.2 sqm), and asserts that there is no 'need' for tail docking nor clipping of 'needle' teeth if pigs have sufficient space and opportunity to engage in instinctive behaviours.

[5] https://goodfish.org.au/resource/seafood-in-australia/

[6] https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/fisheries/fisheries-economics/fisheries-forecasts#rise-in-seafood-prices-boosts-production-value-in-202122

[7] RSPCA, n.d.

2. the ability of the most common methods used to stun pigs before slaughter (including electrical stunning and exposure to high concentrations of carbon dioxide gas) in Victorian slaughterhouses to minimise pain, suffering and distress and prevent injury, and available alternatives

AFSA's members want to see a flourishing of more small farms with increased autonomy, access to and control of local processing infrastructure including abattoirs. They are opposed to the methods of industrial food production such as confining pigs and poultry in sheds, and using what they believe to be inhumane methods from tail docking right through to CO2 stunning. But in the case of slaughter, most smallholders' options are limited as consolidation over several decades to a dwindling number of mostly large-scale abattoirs has left them no say in how far they have to transport animals or in the method of slaughter. Lauren Mathers is a pastured pig farmer and Chair and Director of the Murray Plains Meat Cooperative, which is nearing completion of a small-scale abattoir in Barham, NSW to service local farmers. Mathers says, 'I personally do not believe that gassing pigs is humane, but it is an approved RSPCA process. This is one of the biggest reasons why small abattoirs are crucial.'

While large-scale abattoirs prefer CO2 stunning because it allows for a higher number of animals to be killed in a day, small-scale abattoirs use captive bolt or electric stunning. CO2 gas has been known to be aversive and to cause pain and distress in pigs for over 20 years, a point made by Dr Ellen Jongman in the 2023 Four Corners episode on CO2 stunning. A 2004 EU report found that 'inhalation of carbon dioxide in high concentrations has been found to be aversive to pigs and poultry (chickens and turkeys) and induces severe respiratory distress prior to loss of consciousness'[8], and another paper published in 2019 found that 'the use of carbon dioxide (CO2) for stunning and killing animals is considered to compromise welfare due to air hunger, anxiety, fear, and pain.'[9] Rather than more research into less aversive gases in large abattoirs, the best alternative according to AFSA is for state and local governments to support a revival of small-scale local abattoirs owned and controlled by local communities.

Industrial agriculture and the global meatpacking industry have long demonstrated a lack of commitment to action on animal welfare, biodiversity loss, and climate change, with a business model built on feed-lotted and shedded animals, low-paid and dangerous labour, and reliance on deforestation to grow grain feed to intensively raised livestock. Australia needs to prioritise resilience, to rethink core assumptions such as 'efficiencies' that undermine animal welfare and rural economies, and to encourage the development of localised production and distribution systems.

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[8] Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing the main commercial species of animals, *The EFSA Journal* (2004), 45, 1-29.

[9] Steiner, A. R., Axiak Flammer, S., Beausoleil, N. J., Berg, C., Bettschart-Wolfensberger, R., García Pinillos, R., ... & Gent, T. C. 2019. Humanely ending the life of animals: Research priorities to identify alternatives to carbon dioxide. Animals, 9(11), 911.

'The ethics in treating animals at the end of their life really are something we should all be thinking about if we are to eat meat,' said Lauren Mathers of the Murray Plains Meat Cooperative.

3. the outcomes of the 2017 industry-led phase out on the use of sow stalls

4. current industry breeding and housing practices particularly the use of different forms of confinement

Around 80 percent of the Australian sow herd is now in 'sow stall free' production systems, and 'sow stall free' marketed and labelled products are widely available in supermarkets (APL 2017)[10]. However, 'sow stall' means only gestation stalls, and the majority of sows in Australian pork production are still confined in farrowing stalls for up to a week before farrowing, and then in farrowing crates with their litters until weaning. Group housing for dry sows is required to provide at least 1.4 sqm according to the Victorian pig welfare standards, a very small space for any animal to be expected to spend its time, but especially for pigs, who must sort out complex social hierarchies, which can lead to aggressive behaviour that is difficult to escape if you aren't the top pig.

Farrowing stalls are justified by industry to reduce piglet mortality, predominantly from squashing. Yet the industry reports an 11.5 per cent pre-weaning mortality rate on average amongst intensively-raised pigs[11], whereas several of AFSA's members who raise pigs outdoors on pasture report an average of just 10 per cent, belying the need to confine sows in the first place. Whereas intensively reared pigs suffer more losses from disease (e.g. PRRS and leptospira[12]), pastured pig systems are vulnerable to occasional predator attacks (primarily foxes), but rarely suffer respiratory diseases caused by poor air quality in sheds. Both systems experience still-births.

AFSA therefore urges the Victorian Government to work towards greater freedom of movement, better air quality, and more opportunities for pigs to express their natural behaviours in outdoor environments for much higher welfare outcomes.

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[10] 2017.Australian Pork Ltd Annual Operating Plan Summary 2017/2018. Canberra: Australian Pork Ltd. http://australianpork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/AOP-2017-2018-Master-FINAL-Summary.pdf; Carey, R., Parker, C., & Scrinis, G. 2020. How Free Is Sow Stall Free? Incremental Regulatory Reform and Industry Co-optation of Activism. Law & Policy, 42(3), 284–309. https://doi.org/10.1111/lapo.12154

[11] APL Benchmark Report, Australian Pig Industry Benchmarking Report, Australian Pork Limited, Canberra, Australia (2021)

[12] https://www.pigprogress.net/topic/pre-weaning-mortality/

5. international comparisons to determine industry adherence to best practice standards

'Prophylactic use of antimicrobials is not allowed under Danish law. Use of antimicrobials must be therapeutic or metaphylactic; all antimicrobials must be administered under the supervision of the herd veterinarian within the incubation period of any infection known to have occurred.' Further, all use of antimicrobial growth promoters (AGPs) in food-producing animals was banned by December 1999.[13]

CO2 stunning is not used in Aotearoa / New Zealand.[14] The EU has invested 2 million euro in research into alternatives to move away from CO2 stunning in pig abattoirs.[15]

In other regions, research has shown legislation is not sufficient to ensure animal welfare. In the EU, despite laws requiring pigs have access to adequate bedding and their tails are not routinely docked, regulations are widely ignored.

> CIWF has found numerous and persistent cases of non-compliance with EU legislation for animal welfare in member states across the EU. In 2009, CIWF found that 100% of farms visited in the Netherlands and Spain had a significant number of tail-docked pigs present. A follow up report in 2014 found that problems still persisted in the two member states, as well as the UK, Poland, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland and France.[16]

Small-scale farmer organisations and unions the world over are echoing the same critique and promoting the same solutions as AFSA: that animal welfare will not be achieved by tinkering industry standards, it requires a fundamental shift in how we do agriculture. These organisations include other members of La Via Campesina (the global movement of small-scale food producers fighting for food sovereignty), such as the Land Workers Alliance in the UK, who assert governments must "support localised food systems and put control in the hands of farmers, not large corporations", as from agroecological farms there are "environmental, public, social and welfare outcomes from this more multifunctional land use system."[17]

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[13]

[14] https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/46018-Code-of-Welfare-Commercial-slaughter

[15] https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/news/high-concentration-co2-stunning-pigs-european-parliament-approves-funding-move-away-cruel

[16] https://farmsnotfactories.org/the-true-costs-of-factory-farming#section2

[17] https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Digital-Soy-No-More-.pdf

6. Any related matters

While this inquiry is focused on animal welfare, one cannot consider the well-being of animals raised for food production without considering the impact of production systems on broader ecosystems and public health. Animal wellbeing, ecosystem outcomes, and human health are intrinsically linked. That is why we urge the Government to consider: 1) the growing threat of zoonotic diseases emerging from intensive livestock production; and 2) the use of antimicrobials, as antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing threat to human and other-than-human health and lives.

Perhaps the greatest biosecurity (and public health) threats of our time are the rise of zoonotic diseases. According to Jonas and Trethewey (2023):

> Many if not most emergent diseases such as novel porcine and avian influenza are directly born of intensive livestock production, a model that evolutionary epidemiologist Rob Wallace et al. (2021: 195) assert produces 'food for flu'— because 'raising vast monocultures removes immunogenetic firebreaks that in more diverse populations cut off transmission booms'. Wallace (2016: 306) further explains:
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>> Pathogen introgressions are oft-related to trade or more gradual expansions brought about by climate change and shifts in land use. Finally, the emergence of pathogens with novel traits by virulence jump or antimicrobial resistance has been connected repeatedly to intensified husbandry and preventative antibiotic use in livestock.

Long, complicated supply chains and free trade agreements are contributing to the rapid spread of diseases (such as African Swine Fever and Foot and Mouth Disease), while small-scale pastured livestock production in agroecological systems selling meat in direct supply chains reduces the risks of disease emergence and spread, while also being far more able to adapt to climate change (itself also a known contributor to the rise and spread of zoonoses, such as Japanese Encephalitis Virus' appearance in southern Australia for the first time in 2021).

False Solutions

False solutions are measures that propose to address climate change, biodiversity loss, hunger, poverty, pandemics, and other global crises that fail to address the economic, social and ecological roots of the crises caused by colonial capitalism. They may offer a short-term improvement, and are often framed in a way that deceives people with high tech and undemocratic approaches. These failures have the potential to create further social and ecological destruction, felt by marginalised communities first and foremost.

False solutions include technologies and policies at a global, national and sub-national level, that:

- Fail to reduce emissions or biodiversity-damaging practices where there is a continued focus on growth and exports;

- Generate environmental, social, economic and political problems and consequences, and result in the violations of human and collective rights; or
- Distract people and policy makers from real solutions; and direct public financing, infrastructure and institutional support away from the actions needed for systemic changes.

Examples of false solutions include: carbon and biodiversity markets; ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives and lab meat; the digitalisation of agriculture; genetic engineering; Green Economy and Blue Economy.[18]

- **Stop all animal agriculture.** There is a vast difference in animal welfare outcomes for intensive vs. pastured livestock (see case studies). In recent years, arguments from vegan abolitionists to end all animal agriculture is a direct conflict to food sovereignty principles, particularly with regard to ensuring peoples' right to culturally-appropriate food, and the importance of animals in agro-ecosystems.
- **Animal Welfare organisations setting guidelines for farmers.** Animal welfare organisations play an important role in advocating on behalf of animals subject to abuse in domestic and industrial settings. However, guidelines to improve the welfare of livestock set by many animal welfare organisations are often at the bare minimum, resulting in stresses and traumas for animals. For example, the RSPCA's recommendations[19] for stocking density for meat chickens is significantly off ethical animal quotas put forward by AFSA's pastured poultry farmers (e.g. 15 hens per square metre compared with 1 hen per 6 square metres).
- **Lab meat.** Currently, in most instances, the by-products of the dairy industry are invoked in the development of lab meat when laboratories require foetal bovine serum, an input which is extracted from unborn foetuses in slaughtered pregnant cows.[20] Further, proliferation of ultra-processed foods contradicts the notion of food as medicine. Lab meat is also a high tech solution divorced from agro-ecosystems that further consolidates control of the food system into fewer hands.
- **Plant-based diets promise human and planetary health.** While there is evidence of the valuable role of plant-based foods for human nutrition and health, these are best eaten in minimally-processed forms (e.g. whole vegetables, legumes). Heightened concern about climate change and livestock welfare in intensive production settings has led to increased demand for and production of plant-based meat substitutes; however, many of these alternatives belong in the ultra-processed foods category (and may contain high levels of added ingredients, particularly salt, that increase their palatability but also their likelihood of contributing to diet-related diseases). In addition, crop-based food systems assert misleading claims about emissions produced by crops vs. livestock. When crops are grown at an industrial scale, their impact on the environment is still significant (e.g. biodiversity loss, pesticide use, soil erosion) compared to small-scale, localised production that includes agricultural biodiversity of animals and plants. Ultra-processed foods are not even

[18] https://focusweb.org/false-solutions-instead-of-just-solutions/
[19] https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-much-space-does-a-layer-hen-need/
[20] van der Valk, J. et al., 2018. Fetal bovine serum (FBS): Past-present-future.. *ALTEX- Alternatives to Animal Experimentation,* 35(1), pp. 99-118.

nutritious, thus also contributing to an unnecessary amount of resource depletion and packaging waste.

Recommendations

- Include democratically-elected representatives of smallholders and civil society in stakeholder and advisory groups responsible for improving animal welfare.
- Sign and adopt the Universal Declaration of Animal Welfare as a rights-based framework to underpin all policies that impact animals in Australia.
- Implement a One Health[21] approach to agricultural policy, animal welfare standards and guidelines, and livestock.
- Set a clear target to phase out battery systems in all pig production models over the next 3 – 5 years and phase out all cage systems in the next 10 years. This should be done using a strategy to transition the industry such as that used in Austria (where battery cages were prohibited in 2009), and supporting long-term management of cage-free systems as done across the EU.
- Set a clear target to phase out CO2 stunning of pigs over the next 3-5 years.
- Require agricultural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) such as Australia Pork Limited (APL) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) to direct a majority of funding derived from government grants to R&D to enhance animal welfare, and reduce environmental and public health impacts and risks.
- Abolish mandatory levies paid by farmers to RDCs and make them voluntary contributions.
- Ensure broad representation on an animal science and community ethics advisory committee – and also ensure any scientific approach includes a terms of reference that insists upon scale-appropriate examples.
- Undertake an inquiry into intensive livestock[22] to examine the growing threat of emerging zoonotic diseases on animal welfare and public health.
- Establish an independent non-governmental body that oversees the development of animal welfare regulation and represents all relevant stakeholders including small-scale farmers' organisations and representatives of local communities.
- Fund participatory action research through state institutions, partnered with small-scale farmers, drawing on international research on agroecology, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits of pasture-based livestock systems integrated with plant production and silvi-agriculture.

[21] One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines and communi- ties at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and eco- systems, while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change and contributing to sustain- able development. (OHHLEP)

[22] AFSA, 2022 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Q5wMF91Q7dK5_jlVazY6fHHKV7iIBUgCU_lkRsSFzSw/edit?usp=sharing

Transition to Agroecology

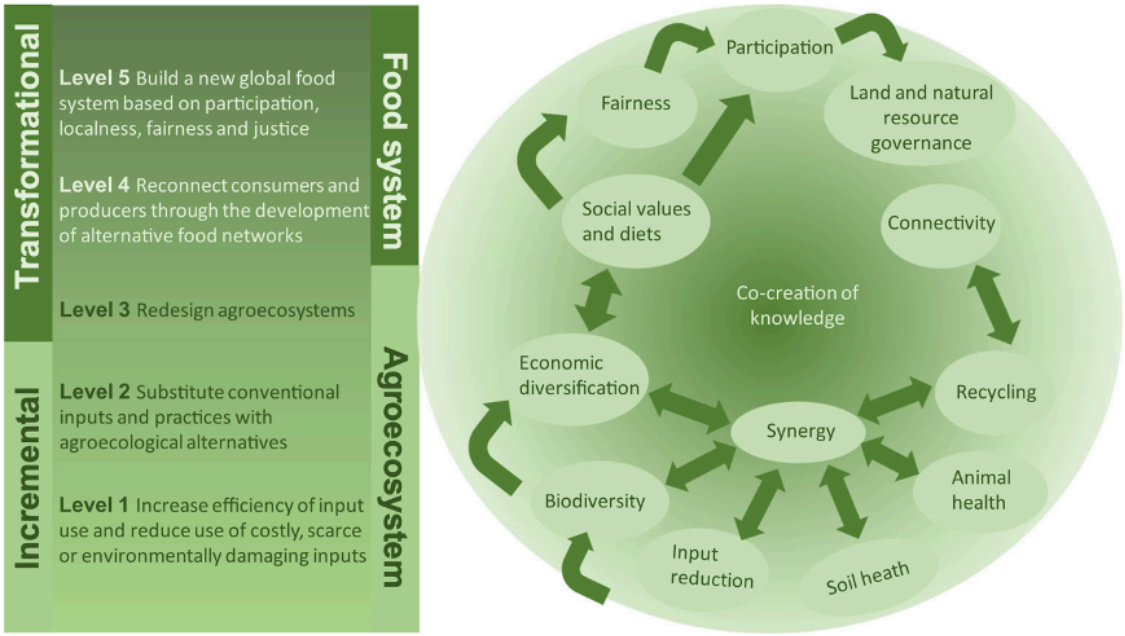
Instead of false solutions peddled by corporates and investors, AFSA calls for agroecology as the *real* solution to ethical and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems, while also addressing social, political and economic inequities in food systems. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) provides a clear definition of agroecology as both a science and a social movement:

> *Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. It seeks to optimise the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where it is produced. Agroecology is concurrently a science, a set of practices and a social movement and has evolved as a concept over recent decades to expand in scope from a focus on fields and farms to encompass the entirety of agriculture and food systems. It now represents a transdisciplinary field that includes the ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption.*[23]

Given that agroecology presents viable solutions to social, ecological, political and economic crises caused by industrial agriculture, it is a pathway toward food sovereignty.

Around 70 percent of food in the world is grown by small-scale food producers on small plots of land, with the remaining 30 percent grown by large-scale industrial farms, which are responsible for 75 percent of ecological destruction from farming.[24] Beyond farming, 20 percent of the world's population uses 80 percent of its resources.[25] Clearly the Minority World (aka the Global North) is using more than its share, and something has to change.

[23] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023
[24] Shiva, 2017
[25] Friends of the Earth Austria, 2009



Transition to a degrowth economy

The Victorian Government needs to consider degrowth in agriculture and land sectors if it wants to safeguard Australia from climate and pandemic risks and related food insecurity. Degrowth does not mean less production of food, but rather a shift away from the policies and practices that support increased productivity and growth for the purpose of exporting food, ergo water and soil, to other markets. Central to degrowth is the principle of connectivity, which ensures proximity and trust between producers and eaters through fair and short (often direct) supply chains, and by re-embedding food systems in local economies. Degrowth can assure intergenerational justice, because 'future generations should have access to the social and material means to live flourishing lives at least at the same level as the present generation.'[26]

Transition to localised food systems

Against the social and ecological crises brought on by agricultural systems that are geared towards productivity and exports, localisation is considered the antidote for many of the current and future challenges we face to feed growing populations under an increasingly volatile and inhospitable climate, and the increased threat brought by intensive livestock production in globalised markets.

In her book *Who Really Feeds the World: The Failures of Agribusiness and The Promise of Agroecology,*[27] Vandana Shiva explains the social and ecological value of localising food systems:

[26] Wright (2018: 10)
[27] Shiva, 2016

> *Two principles have shaped the evolution of food systems across the world. The first is that everyone must eat. The second is that every place where human beings live produces food. Between these two principles, the food systems that have evolved to nourish people are, by their very nature, local. These systems of food production nourish both biological and cultural diversity. The localisation of food is not only natural but vital, because it allows farmers to practise the Law of Return, produce more food through biodiversity, create food systems adapted to local cultures and ecologies, and nourish themselves, their communities and the soil that they give back to.*[28]

For governments and corporations, viewing food systems through the lens of localisation is in direct contrast with how they understand the generation of profits that inform policies to scale up farming using competitive incentives, technology and other market mechanisms. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, biodiversity loss, and climate change in Australia reveal the fragility of a globalised food system, and should prompt policymakers to consider how agricultural policy should support localisation and solidarity economies to safeguard food security.

Transition to democratic knowledge production

Where productivist food and agricultural policy encourages farmers to specialise, scale up, and outsource knowledge and inputs, localised economies support *scaling out* and diversifying through horizontal knowledge sharing farmer-to-farmer. Agroecology-oriented farming supports producers to effectively feed their local communities with healthy, nourishing foods, with clear boundaries where production puts a strain on ecological, social and economic limits.

> *The fact that agroecology is based on applying principles in ways that depend on local realities means that the local knowledge and ingenuity of farmers must necessarily take a front seat. This is in contrast to conventional practices, where farmers follow pesticide and fertiliser recommendations prescribed on a recipe basis by extension agents or sales representatives.*[29]

For a major change toward sustainability in food systems, there is a need to promote assemblages of farmers groups, food security and consumer networks, public policies and authorities, and non-human actors and infrastructures, in order to provide access for civil society organisations and agroecology-oriented farmers to the decision-making process.[30] Agroecology appeals to farmers in part because it diminishes their dependencies and builds their autonomy. Thus, agroecology grows best when it is not overly dependent upon external structures originating from NGO projects, research institutions, or public policies.[31]

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[28] ibid.
[29] Rosset & Altieri, 2017
[30] González de Molina et al. 2019; Marsden, Hebinck, and Mathijs 2018
[31] Mateo Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho, Omar Felipe Giraldo, Miriam Aldasoro, Helda Morales, Bruce G. Ferguson, Peter Rosset, Ashlesha Khadse & Carmen Campos (2018): Bringing agroecology to scale: key drivers and emblematic cases, Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems