



AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to: Reforming Victoria's animal care and protection laws

*Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Victorian Government*

Submitted to: legislationreform@agriculture.vic.gov.au

25 March 2024

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We thank the Victorian Government for initiating feedback on reforming animal care and protection laws. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission, as well as all further opportunities to participate in development and implementation of improved welfare of animals and 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 feedback on the draft Bill to reform Victoria's animal care and protection laws. As a farmer-led organisation with a strong track record of advocating on behalf of small-scale livestock producers, we have long called for legal reform that ensures the welfare of all animals in our food system. We have worked closely with the Victorian Government on the development of animal welfare policies, standards and guidelines that acknowledges the inherent risks posed to animals and human health in intensive animal agriculture.

As such, we use this submission to draw from past submissions as well as AFSA's updated Peoples' Food Plan to provide feedback on the draft Bill.

Ultimately, we believe that systemic transformation of Victoria's food and agricultural systems will lead to improved outcomes for animal care and protection laws. Recent issues have come to light regarding the physical¹ and sexual abuse² of animals in Victorian abattoirs that call for more robust measures to ensure livestock are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. Although AFSA acknowledges that transparency is key to achieving this, we note concern with proposed measures such as increased surveillance in abattoirs and other facilities that will only act as a band-aid to the wider problems associated with intensive animal agriculture.

Rather, we call for legislative and policy reform³ that puts an end to inhumane slaughtering practices, such as the use of CO2 stunning, as well as measures to enable small-scale farmers with access to micro and mobile abattoirs so that they have control over how animals are cared for and treated from farm to slaughter.

We provide examples of how the Bill can support transformative reform throughout this submission and welcome any opportunity to provide further evidence.

Context

Caring for and healing Country through the principles of agroecology extends to all life on land, as well as marine and terrestrial waters. AFSA has long been vocal about its stance against industrial livestock management and practices, writing submissions to governments on animal welfare standards and guidelines and the prevention of cruelty to animals in addition to our public outreach. In addition, we've voiced a strong position for the conservation, protection and restoration of fish populations and the ecosystems that sustain them for their intrinsic value in the web of life, as well as for their centrality to maintaining the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities.

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

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-27/pork-industry-carbon-dioxide-stunning-hidden-cameras-730/102094548>

² <https://www.farmtransparency.org/news/368-undercover-investigation-into-victorian-piggery-captures-animal-cruelty-bestiality>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-03-30/small-pig-farmers-call-for-end-of-co2-stunning/102157884>

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. Climate change and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have brought to the fore the key arguments AFSA has made historically against industrial livestock where 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 comes full circle to underscore the value of all life on land and in water intrinsic to agroecology. 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, and note that this is an issue that is being debated across a number of Australian jurisdictions and internationally.

Issue: Industrial livestock production is animal abuse

Animal agriculture has come under fire in the past decade, largely due to harrowing information about the treatment of intensively reared 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 important role of animals in agro-ecosystems and everyone's right to culturally-determined foods.

We assert that industrial livestock production is animal abuse, and governments must recognise that intensive livestock farming is not conducive to ensuring animal welfare.

Table 1: Key issues for intensive livestock management and practice in Australia⁴

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/>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cages • Osteoporosis • Handling • Inhumane slaughter of male chicks 	Unknown
Pigs	5 million slaughtered 20 kg pork per person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farrowing stalls • Cramped confinement & stress • Routine tail docking and eye teeth removal • Inhumane CO2 stunning 	9%
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling • Stocking density • Antibiotic use • Feed ingredient sourcing • Poor water quality • Inhumane slaughter 	35% ⁷

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-boost-s-production-value-in-202122>

⁷ RSPCA, n.d.

Reforming Victoria's animal care and protection laws

The Government has asked for stakeholders and the public to comment on all areas. AFSA has responded to areas of our particular interest and relevance to our members below:

Part 3 - Animal Care and Protection Obligations

Under Division 1–Care requirements, AFSA believes many of the requirements are not currently met in confined animal production systems, particularly pig and poultry sheds. Sows confined to farrowing stalls are barely able to lay down and stand back up, lacking access to ‘appropriate areas in which the animal may rest’. They also lack ‘appropriate space in which the animal may stand, lie, stretch and change position’.

We therefore recommend the inclusion of a definition for ‘appropriate’, which requires a ‘reasonable person test’ or similar to determine whether the ‘areas’ or ‘space’ are ‘appropriate’.

AFSA further submits that an appropriate measure to ensure care, health and wellbeing of animals should also consider the downstream consequences of their treatment and living conditions on human health.

Three out of four of all new and emerging human infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin, and a study in the journal *Nature* found that conventional agriculture was associated with half of all the zoonotic pathogens⁸ that emerged in humans in that time.⁹

Highly pathogenic strains of what Bulach et al. (2010) reported are monophyletic H7N3, H7N4, and H7N7 were documented on large broiler and layer poultry operations in Victoria and Queensland as far back as the 1970s (Cross 1986/2003, Westbury 1998). An on-site increase in the virulence of an avian influenza H7N4 strain from low to high pathogenicity in 1997 was documented on a large commercial broiler-breeder operation of 128,000 birds (Selleck et al. 2003).¹⁰

Perhaps the greatest biosecurity (and public health) threats of our time are the rise of zoonotic diseases. 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

⁸ Rohr et al. 2019

⁹ Whalen, 2021

¹⁰ Wallace, 2018

rise and spread of zoonoses, such as Japanese Encephalitis Virus' appearance in southern Australia for the first time in 2021).

It is worth quoting a 2021 FAO thematic paper on One Health at length, which categorises the three major anthropogenic drivers of zoonotic disease emergence as below (these are also aligned with Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019-2030).¹¹

- **Modifications to natural habitats.** These include climate and land-use changes, development (urban or agricultural), dams, extractive industries, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem services, natural resources and habitat, encroachment on natural habitats, and environmental contamination;
- **Changes in agricultural practices.** These include agricultural intensification and expansion of crop, livestock and aquaculture farming, changes in food value chains (global or across country/regional borders), waste management (of water, faeces, antimicrobials, runoffs), unregulated use of antibiotics, globalised value chains, and marketing; and
- **Human behaviour and choices.** These include increased utilisation/exploitation of wildlife for exclusive food consumption in urban centres (wildlife, bushmeat), traditional medicines using animal body parts or organs, and exotic pet ownership.¹²

Ultimately, the health of animals and humans are inextricably linked and AFSA believes that the draft Bill must consider this if it wishes to ensure animal care and protection laws.

Under Division 2—Acts of Cruelty and aggravated cruelty, AFSA asserts that the acts of cruelty set out in the draft Bill describe many of the routine practices used in intensive livestock farms and abattoirs (please refer to Table 1). However, we note that the draft Bill attributes such offences to a **person**, rather than the corporations which uphold acts of cruelty and aggravated cruelty against animals. For example, Brazilian corporation JBS is the world's largest meat producer and is rapidly consolidating its stronghold over meat processing facilities in Australia¹³, despite the fact that it has an appalling track record of inflicting suffering on an estimated 80 million animals globally¹⁴ due to inhumane confinement and slaughter. To understand the behaviours of the lowest-paid workers in an inhumane system, the law must turn to the businesses whose model is built on animal cruelty, and the **persons** responsible for offences must therefore include the CEOs, owners and shareholders.

We recommend that the wording under this Part of the draft Bill be amended to include a person or persons or business responsible for such offences. In doing so, the punishment for offences should be reflected in line with the scale and social responsibility of the persons and/or business.

¹¹ Australia's Nature Hub, 2019

¹² Alders, 2021

¹³ https://afsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/210926_AFSA_Submission.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/english/jbs-profitting-from-cruelty-and-killing-our-world-report.pdf>

Part 4 - Control and Regulation of Certain Uses of Animals and Related Practices

Under Part 4, Division 3—Controlled procedures, the draft Bill states that a person must not carry out a range of practices including declawing of cats and docking the tail of a dog, horse or cow. However, we note that under the latter offence, docking the tail of a pig is not included in this list, and is a routine procedure in confinement piggeries. **We recommend that this be included in revised wording of the Bill, to ensure that pig welfare is adequately covered under legislation.**

While we agree with the other offences listed here, we ask that the wording here is also amended to include **a person or business**, to ensure that large-scale, intensive animal agriculture is held accountable for inhumane practices that occur on their premises.

In addition, AFSA has called for governments to set clear targets to phase out the CO2 stunning of pigs and battery cage systems in the next 3-5 years. A bold action for the State Government to take to achieve this would be to include both practices in the list of offences outlined in the draft Bill. **We recommend inclusion of ‘confinement of animals in cages or crowded pens’ and ‘methods of stunning that are not instant’ in the list of offences.**

Part 5 - Control and Regulation of Specified Classes of Conduct

Under all Divisions of this part of the draft Bill, AFSA notes that there is little to no mention of exceptions for First Peoples and traditional practices to hunt and kill animals for food. We ask that this be considered as an exception to offences listed in this part.

Part 6 - Licences for Certain Conduct Controlled and Regulated under Parts 4 and 5

Following on from the recommendation in Part 5 of the draft Bill, we note that including a Licence to First Peoples to carry out traditional methods of hunting and killing animals for food may not be the best method for recognising First Peoples’ food sovereignty, although this should be subject to consultation with local First Peoples.

However, AFSA reiterates that there should be further exemptions listed in this part of the draft Bill, with the purpose of:

- Recognising First Peoples' right to relate to Country by providing unfettered access to Country - starting with all public lands.
- Enacting legislation to ensure First Peoples have access to cultural food provisioning practices on Country;
- Include First Peoples' input through culturally-appropriate engagement practices in the development of land and water resource management and planning.

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 improve animal welfare, or 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 to animal welfare issues include: ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives and lab meat; genetic engineering; provision of 'enrichment' items in confined animal production systems.¹⁵ We share more false solutions in detail below:

- **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 recommendations¹⁶ 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).

¹⁵ <https://focusweb.org/false-solutions-instead-of-just-solutions/>

¹⁶ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-much-space-does-a-layer-hen-need/>

- **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.¹⁷ 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 nutritious, thus also contributing to an unnecessary amount of resource depletion and packaging waste.
- **Increased surveillance in farms, abattoirs and processing facilities.** While AFSA believes that transparency is key to ensuring animal care and protection are maintained, surveillance only applies to the least powerful actors in industrial systems - the lowest-paid workers on the floor in intensive sheds and abattoirs. There is an urgent need to zoom out and surveil the system and those who profit from it to fundamentally change the production environments to improve animal welfare.

Recommendations

- Include a definition for ‘appropriate’, which requires a ‘reasonable person test’ or similar to determine whether the ‘areas’ or ‘space’ provided to livestock are ‘appropriate’.
- The wording under Part 3 of the draft Bill be amended to include a person ‘or persons or business’ responsible for such offences. In doing so, the punishment for offences should be reflected in line with the scale and social responsibility of the business.
- We recommend pigs be included in revised wording of the prohibition on tail docking in Part 4 of the Bill, to ensure that pig welfare is adequately covered under legislation.
- In Part 4, we recommend inclusion of ‘confinement of animals in cages or crowded pens’ and ‘methods of stunning that are not instant’ in the list of offences.
- 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.

¹⁷ van der Valk, J. et al., 2018. Fetal bovine serum (FBS): Past-present-future.. *ALTEX- Alternatives to Animal Experimentation*, 35(1), pp. 99-118.

- Implement a Structural One Health¹⁸ 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 livestock¹⁹ 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.

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

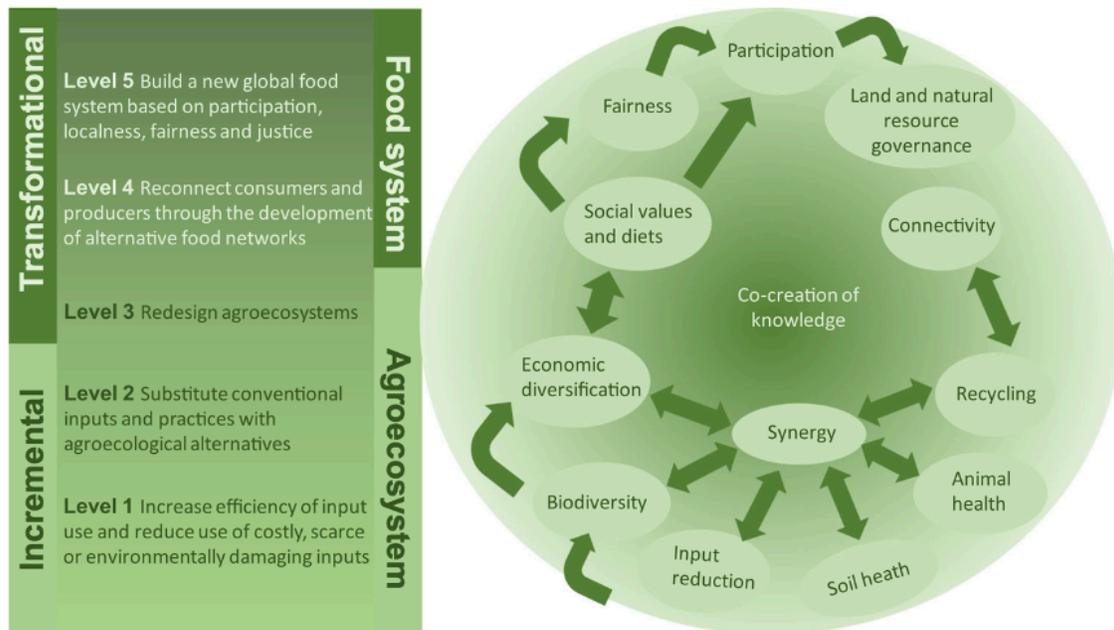
¹⁸ One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent. The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems, while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change and contributing to sustainable development. (OHHLEP)

¹⁹ AFSA, 2022 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O5wMF91O7dK5_jlVazY6fHHKV7iIBUgCU_IkRsSFzSw/edit?usp=sharing

*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.*²⁰

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.²¹ Beyond farming, 20 percent of the world's population uses 80 percent of its resources.²² Clearly the Minority World (aka the Global North) is using more than its share, and something has to change.



²⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023

²¹ Shiva, 2017

²² 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.’²³

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*,²⁴ Vandana Shiva explains the social and ecological value of localising food systems:

*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.*²⁵

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.

²³ Wright (2018: 10)

²⁴ Shiva, 2016

²⁵ *ibid.*

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.*²⁶

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸

²⁶ Rosset & Altieri, 2017

²⁷ González de Molina et al. 2019; Marsden, Hebinck, and Mathijs 2018

²⁸ 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