



AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to Inquiry into securing the Victorian Food Supply

*Environment and Planning Committee
Victorian Government*

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

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Prepared by:
Jessica Power
AFSA General Coordinator

We thank the Victorian Government for initiating an inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission, as well as all further opportunities to participate in development and implementation of policies to strengthen Victoria's food security. 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, Young Farmers Connect 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 into securing the Victorian food supply. As a farmer-led organisation, AFSA represents over 300 small-scale food producers and allies who are fighting for social and ecological justice for people, animals and ecosystems.

This Inquiry comes at a crucial time for the Victorian Government, to recognise the critical role that smallholders play in the production of food across the state. At the time of writing this submission, Victorian small-scale livestock farmers face increased challenges due to the closure of abattoirs across the state. The corporate capture of food and agricultural infrastructure is already impacting Victoria's food supply, and this Inquiry should seek to remedy this by looking at system transformation, rather than slight improvements to the current industrial model of food production. Given that ABARES estimates that the small-farm sector accounts for ~38% of farms operating in Australia¹, AFSA believes there is no better time for the Victorian Government to consider the role that policy plays in supporting small-scale producers.

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 smallholders need political support to scale out their operations. AFSA welcomes any further opportunity to discuss the evidence provided in this submission to develop policies, regulation and legislation that improves Victoria's food security.

Context

In terms of control of the food system, value chain infrastructure is held in even fewer hands than land in Australia. This consolidation has been happening steadily since the neoliberalisation of policy commenced in earnest in the 1980s, devolving protection of the public good to actors in free markets. The dairy industry is a salient example of what happens when the government abandons social democratic policy in favour of neoliberalism—in 1980 there were 21,994 dairy farms nationally, in 2022 just 4,420 remained, and by 2016 just five companies processed 79 percent of Australian milk by volume. Abattoirs have gone through a very similar consolidation of ownership, leading to many smallholders losing access to slaughter options as large industrial abattoirs refuse to process private kills in favour of their own vertically-integrated operations.

Further downstream, the retail sale of food is even more heavily dominated by just two corporations - Coles and Woolworths - who own 64 percent of the grocery market. The scale, length and complexity of supply chains, and profit motives of these actors leads to pressure on farmers and shameful waste of more food than is needed to feed hungry Australians every day. In the native food industry, just 1 percent of

¹ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/products/insights/snapshot-of-australian-agriculture#daff-page-main>

native foods are sold by First Peoples, as the supply chain is almost wholly controlled by non-indigenous actors. The gig economy is another emerging value chain concern as a mostly unregulated, informal sector comprised often of migrant workers barely earning a livelihood in often unsafe working environments, while small businesses give up another proportion of meagre revenues to corporate profit.

While the government largely leaves regulation of markets to market players, it also invites the biggest players to its decision making tables, reducing opportunities for smallholders and local communities to influence reforms in the processing and distribution sectors of food systems. The [Peoples' Food Plan](#) advocates for greater community control to rebuild local processing infrastructure and self-organised participation in the decision-making processes to get there, proposing that governments have primarily an enabling role in funding collaborative and cooperative projects that benefit local communities. Case studies show thriving examples of on-farm value chain infrastructure and cooperative efforts to feed the local community.

The industrial system proposes to address the cascading crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, hunger and obesity, poverty, and biosecurity threats with more technology and the development of new so-called environmental markets (carbon and biodiversity being the primary markets, but with recent additions of reef credits and plastic credits² joining the list of false solutions). This increasing financialisation of nature is worse than band-aids on cancer, it is fighting cancer *with* cancer. The current economic system is fundamentally inequitable - capitalism is built on the exploitation of land and labour and the endless pursuit of profit (as opposed to livelihood). Agroecology, on the other hand, mends the 'metabolic rift'³ created by capitalism, by healing farmers' and local communities' relations with land and each other.

Overwhelming evidence shows 'that a transition to an agriculture based on agroecological principles would not only provide rural families with significant social, economic, and environmental benefits, but would also feed the world, equitably and sustainably'.⁴ The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has identified the ways that agroecology can bring solutions to several SDGs, including:

- SDG 2: Zero Hunger
- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 3: Climate Action
- SDG 15: Biodiversity
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 5: Gender Equality, and
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.⁵

The evidence base is strong enough that agroecology is now also embedded in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted by nearly 200 countries at COP15 in December 2022.⁶

² Green Collar, 2022

³ Foster 1999

⁴ Nicholls and Altieri 2018 (pg. 1): FAO 2015; IAASTD 2009; IPES-Food 2016

⁵ Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2023

⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022

AFSA members embrace ecologically-sound and socially-just farming practices, with most increasingly aligning themselves with agroecology - a scientifically and experientially justified practice of agriculture that is sensitive to the ecosystems in which it is situated *and* that fosters the democratic participation of all peoples in the food system. Its original and still predominant practitioners are Indigenous Peoples and peasant smallholders the world over.

Degrowth and Connectivity: small-scale farming *already* feeds the world

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,⁷ which are responsible for 75 percent of ecological destruction from farming.⁸ Beyond farming, 20 percent of the world's population uses 80 percent of its resources.⁹ Clearly the Minority World (aka the Global North) is using more than its share, and something has to change.

Agroecology promotes the 'radical abundance' which ensures sufficiency for all possible through degrowth, 'demanding the "end of the scarcity capitalism produces through waste, hoarding, and privatisation".¹⁰ This form of abundance is '*radically* different from the bourgeois form of material wealth that is inevitably based on ever-increasing productivity and endless mass consumption of commodities'.¹¹ 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. A selective degrowth also calls for us to start considering which production and consumption practices need to be prevented and which need to be supported¹².

Inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply

This Inquiry is focussed on the peri-urban food system, which encompasses the production of food on the urban fringe, including:

- the impacts of urban sprawl and population growth on arable land and the farming industry in Victoria
- the use of planning controls to protect agricultural land in green wedge and peri-urban areas
- the resilience of the Victorian food system, including the production of food, its transportation and sale.

⁷ Shiva, 2017

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Friends of the Earth Austria, 2009

¹⁰ Saito, 2022. (p.232)

¹¹ *ibid*.

¹² Kallis, G. (2011). In defence of degrowth. *Ecological Economics*, 70(5), 873–880.

The impacts of urban sprawl and population growth on arable land and the farming industry in Victoria

Melbourne's Foodbowl produces 41 percent of its food, but if allowed to continue unchecked, issues with urban sprawl could see this figure down to 18 percent by 2030.¹³ In Sydney, whose surrounding agricultural areas produce only half what Melbourne's do for its urban population, approximately 60 percent of total food production will be lost by 2031 if peri-urban development is allowed unchecked. Vegetables, meat and eggs will be hardest hit: 92 percent of Sydney's current fresh vegetable production could be lost, 91 percent of meat and 89 percent of eggs.¹⁴ Other capital cities in Australia are facing similar pressures.

In addition to the loss of peri-urban food production, policy which prohibits urban food production inhibits food sovereignty, and therefore also food security. In Australia, policy barriers to urban agriculture relate to state planning schemes, where strategic land-use plans and land-use controls are the two main tools applied to food production.¹⁵ Under planning schemes and policy, some examples that prohibit urban food production include:

- Restrictions on growing food on nature strips or verges;
- Prohibitions on backyard chickens;
- Tightening food safety regulation to mitigate biosecurity risks;
- Funding cuts to community gardens and other urban food commons; and
- Declaration of Priority Development Areas (PDAs) under planning schemes enables the privatisation of public/open space suitable for growing food.

More broadly, there appear to be two main reasons why planning fails to account for urban and peri-urban food production in Australia.¹⁶ Firstly, government policy geared towards industrial-scale agriculture is not suitable for cities and peri-urban areas. Planning schemes and land-use controls make this clear where strict rules for buffer zones and other industrial farming impact nearby residents. Secondly, the global food system's reliance on agricultural imports and exports has led to food systems and design being left out of planning approaches altogether. In Australia, traditional urban planning approaches account for all basic human rights – clean air, water and shelter – except food, which is widely accepted by planners as a rural interest.

To address these impacts, AFSA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Halt negative drivers and meet obligations through policy for the targets of the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*¹⁷ with regard to land-use change and land-use intensification which are major drivers of biodiversity loss.

¹³ Sheridan, Larsen & Carey, 2015

¹⁴ Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2020

¹⁵ Sarker, Bomman & Marinova, 2019

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷Convention on Biological Diversity, 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, 2022. (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>)

- Develop a mechanism to financially account for loss of soil, carbon, and water through industrialised food and agricultural systems by subsidisation of agroecological land management or building this cost into food prices through taxation.
- Integrate food system thinking¹⁸ into planning frameworks, policies and implementation (look to examples in Canada¹⁹, Brazil²⁰, and Ecuador²¹)
- Identify ‘Food Sheds’ by consulting with **Local Governments** and taking into consideration research by Food Futures Sydney, Foodprint Melbourne, and Food Resilient Neighbour Project Brisbane (and others) in relation to peri-urban planning.
- Work collaboratively under planning frameworks to implement food-sensitive planning and urban design (FSPUD)²²²³
- Explore alternative land use models to support the production of food for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes. These could be small-scale and urban-based (e.g. community and/or school gardens) or larger-scale and focused on the issue of access to productive farmland (e.g. Farming on Other Peoples' Land, or FOOPL). In any consideration of alternative models of land access and ownership, First Peoples’ sovereignty must be the primary consideration.
- Support the farming and utilisation of urban land for food production; prioritise green belts at the edges of major cities for sustainable food production over other competing or conflicting uses.

The use of planning controls to protect agricultural land in green wedge and peri-urban areas

Loss of agricultural land through changes in zoning, inappropriate development and resource extraction, carbon and biodiversity ‘farming’ and renewable energy production that take land out of production, as well as loss of soil and water through damaging practices, export, and waste, will have permanent and irreversible negative impacts on the ability of Australia to produce and supply food to its citizens now and in the future. And with approximately 17.3 million people living in our eight capital cities, the issue of food production and protection of agricultural land adjacent to these areas has never been more important.

The pressures of a growing population must be dealt with in the residential suite of zones, not in zones intended to support food production (e.g. Farming Zone, Primary Production, Rural Landscape, and Primary Production in Small Lots zones, to name a few from Victoria and NSW). This is especially critical in the face of the negative impacts of climate change on Australia’s capacity to grow food on the limited arable land available, most of which is concentrated around cities. If governments continue to allow inappropriate development and urban growth onto viable farm land, future generations will become food insecure. A

¹⁸Thinking in Systems, Donella H. Meadows, 2008. Chelsea Green Publishing.

¹⁹ Food Secure Canada, 2015

²⁰ Raffay, 2012

²¹ Giunta, 2013

²² AFSA, 2022 [AFSA_Submission into Food Production and Supply in NSW](#)

²³ Food-sensitive planning and urban design (FSPUD) A conceptual framework for achieving a sustainable and healthy food system Summary Report. (https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/FoodSensitivePlanning_UrbanDesign_Summary.pdf)

food secure and food sovereign future depends on appropriate planning controls that preserve farmland in perpetuity.

To apply appropriate planning controls to protect agricultural land, we recommend that the Victorian Government:

- Introduce a system of government land acquisition to create public land banks through local taxes to prevent agricultural land being developed for non-agricultural uses, such as the *Boulder Open Spaces Tax*.²⁴
- Identify and define ‘Food Lands’ and legislate that they must be used such as, as is the case with agricultural lands protected by SAFER in France (see Case Study below).
- Work collaboratively with local governments to enable dwellings for more farmers to live and work on farms (including under 40ha). This would provide young people with access to farmland and address the issue of an ageing workforce, as well as opportunities to build and share skills. Under this type of policy, local governments could be responsible for approving applications if it is clear that dwellings are being used for agricultural purposes and require a covenant to keep the land in agriculture.
- Map all agricultural land and water catchments, and protect them from resource extraction and housing development, as well as carbon and biodiversity ‘farming’ or renewable energy production that take land out of food production.

The resilience of the Victorian food system, including the production of food, its transportation and sale

Victoria’s food system is facing—and will continue to face—a growing number of challenges such as climate change, supply chain disruption and market instability. AFSA urges the Victorian Government to look at a whole-of-system approach to strengthening the resilience of the food system through agroecology.

This starts with ensuring that smallholders have access to all means necessary to feed communities. The current closure of abattoirs and other vital food processing infrastructure in Victoria and across the country should prompt the Victorian Government to consider its role in alleviating the burden on producers. In recent times, AFSA has been vocal about the need for what we call ‘The Intrinsic Infrastructure of Agroecology²⁵’ to enable smallholders to build micro and mobile abattoirs on their farms and serve as community infrastructure for other local producers.

A 2020 report from a Parliamentary Inquiry on animal welfare in the UK²⁶ outlined the challenges farmers face without access to local processing facilities and the extensive benefits to small-scale farmers, animal welfare, and environmental outcomes from supporting the development of small-scale abattoirs. The issues

²⁴[Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee POSAC - Boulder County](#)

Parks & Open Space Fund - Annual Budget 2023 (<https://stories.opengov.com/bouldercountyco/published/EHcKbc3uc>)

²⁵Jonas, T. 2024. Building the intrinsic infrastructure of agroecology: collectivising to deal with the problem of the state. *Agric Hum Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-024-10549-4>

²⁶All-party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, 2020

and benefits are also highly applicable to the Australian context. One recommendation of particular note addressed planning issues in this way:

2.43 Government should consider low capacity abattoirs processing under 1,000 LSUs and running alongside other farming and processing activities being deemed agricultural buildings with respect to business rates and building control, subject of course to planning conditions necessary for local community protection.

The Canadian province of British Columbia has also recently proposed legislation²⁷ to ease the burden on small-scale livestock producers who slaughter small numbers of animals on farm for sale off farm, an initiative we are interested in discussing further.

In Victoria, in the Farming Zone, 'rural industry' is an acceptable use, however it excludes abattoirs and sawmills. We propose a very simple change to the legislation to enable small-scale on-farm abattoirs with a small throughput of animals.²⁸

We propose that a mix of small-scale local and on-farm abattoirs present an important opportunity to support small-scale, artisanal producers and regional economies through local processing and value adding. A return to far more abattoirs that service small-scale farms in a small radius (1-100km) would dramatically increase the resilience of local economies in the face of climate change and future pandemics, as well as in the seemingly inevitable continued loss of medium-scale regional abattoirs to their large-scale industrial counterparts.

Abattoirs owned and operated by farmers and their communities can escape the profit imperative of corporate models, and instead direct funds into regional jobs and community development, with the potential for a renaissance of associated industries (e.g. tanning, leatherworks, soap-making, more value adding of meat products, and of course local meat for households, local providores and restaurants).

The global food sovereignty movement has advocated for legislative, policy, and financial support for local value chain infrastructure for decades, and the FAO has at least a decade of advocating for connecting smallholders to value chains.²⁹ Our long-expressed concerns at the vulnerabilities of long, highly-centralised supply chains were repeatedly manifested over the series of COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. There really is no time like the present to show support for local food economies.

To build the resilience of the Victorian food system, AFSA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- include a definition for 'micro-abattoir' in the Meat Industry Act, defined as an abattoir processing fewer than 1000 Livestock Units (LSU) per annum, and/or generating less than 200 tonnes of organic waste, processed and retained on farm according to EPA Guidelines.^[2]
- include micro-abattoirs as a Section 1 use (no permit required) in the Farming Zone under Rural Industry, as distinct from large, industrial abattoirs, and in alignment with EPA Guidelines.

²⁷ Mitham, 2021

²⁸ AFSA also supports a change to enable small-scale sawmills, as the use of small, portable mills (e.g. Lucas mills) for sustainable agroforestry of endogenous timber is already quite widespread, and should also be allowed without a permit to support diverse business models, as is common on agroecological farms.

²⁹ Kay, 2016

- Support food value chain platforms, incubators and aggregation mechanisms in which public bodies invest and reward sustainable food producers and the production of public goods, to:
 - Fund the development of community-led local and regional processing hubs and distribution channels that provide greater processing and handling capacities for fresh products from small and medium-sized farmers adopting agroecological approaches and improve their access to local food markets;
 - Provide incentives for First Peoples, young farmers and food producers, women and community-led enterprises that capture and retain value locally, recognizing and addressing their specific constraints and needs; and
 - Adapt support to encourage local food producers, food enterprises and communities to build recycling systems by supporting the reuse of animal waste, crop residue and food processing waste in forms such as animal feed, compost, bio gas and mulch.
- Alter current Agricultural Census data collection to ensure proper representation from small scale farmers and alternative distribution models (e.g. CSAs, farmers' markets, direct sales) to understand how government processes such as scale-appropriate regulation can be amended to support scaling out; the social benefits of alternative distribution models including cohesion and food literacy; and public health benefits through improved access to fresh food.
- Survey the extensive research completed³⁰ on food distribution models during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ascertain how CSAs, farmers markets and other alternative models remained largely unaffected by long chain supply disruption. Research findings should be used to develop policy and regulations that support localised food systems being the strongest pathway to domestic food security. In order to lessen the disadvantage already encountered by communities located in outer regional and remote areas who pay increasingly more for food than their urban counterparts.
- Develop a dedicated grant scheme to support localised distribution models, especially in their initial stages, to help to grow these models and ensure their longevity. Recognising that access to fresh, healthy, and locally produced food is often precluded by geographical location and socio-economic status (which themselves are interlinked), AFSA recommends that grants servicing distribution in low socio-economic areas are prioritised, and that consideration is given to subsidising the price of produce to increase accessibility while maintaining farmer livelihoods.
- Enable/support/fund local communities to develop searchable databases of food producers and alternative distribution models for farmers to connect with other local farmers, and for eaters looking to be matched with local farmers.
- Publish a series of 'how-to' guides to assist in the development of alternative distribution models. These guides should be informed directly by small-scale farmers and civil society to ensure pathways to alternative distribution models are reflected accurately in government resources.
- Provide grants to democratically-constituted farmer organisations that share knowledge and create strong networks to collectivise and develop cooperative production, processing, and distribution infrastructure needed (e.g. farming equipment, abattoirs, boning rooms, grain mills, dairy processing, refrigerated transport and storage).
- Provide infrastructure grants to enable community-controlled construction of new small-scale abattoirs and other processing facilities (e.g. boning rooms, grain mills, dairy processing) in regional areas.

³⁰ See Estrada-Flores & Larsen, 2010 ; Tarkunde, 2021

- Enable zoning for smaller, localised food production and associated processing and distribution infrastructure with targeted reforms of relevant planning provisions.
- Review the consistency of food regulation approaches and make subsequent reforms that are commensurate with the level of risk of different scale food producers and the length and complexity of their supply chains.
- Include democratically-elected representatives of smallholders and civil society in stakeholder groups in the development of food safety policy and regulation. Representation from broader cross-sections of food and agriculture will ensure that food safety regulations are developed at scale of risk to public health.
- Support the setup of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in local areas through scale appropriate regulatory framework. PGS' are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.³¹ These could be developed for many areas of the production, processing, distribution and consumption parts of the food system.

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.

In the case of the Inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply, we urge the Victorian Government to avoid opting for the following false solutions:

- **Native title that doesn't give First Peoples full autonomy.** Only 27 percent of Indigenous people have access to customary lands (not including specific sites).³² Even within those lands, Native Title rights are not without limitations. Land rights given to Traditional Custodians generally only assures access to the land, and the ability to hunt and collect materials, it does not give Traditional Custodians land agency nor does it entail any self-governance rights.³³ For example, during the

³¹ <https://www.ifoam.bio/our-work/how/standards-certification/participatory-guarantee-systems>

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020

³³ de Villiers, 2019

2002 Ward judgement, the High Court dismissed the inclusion of resource ownership, or subsurface minerals, in Native Title rights, reasoning that Aboriginal people 'had not demonstrated laws and customs related to the use of minerals.'³⁴ This means that Traditional Custodians are offered little or no protection from mining companies seeking to extract minerals from Country. With an absence of veto rights against extractive industry or governments, nor accurate representation in political systems to communicate their views, Native Title offers First Peoples a weak and incomplete form of autonomy over land.

- **'Sustainable Intensification'** (SI) approaches to agriculture (e.g. intensive dairy, pig and poultry farms, vertical and hydroponic gardens, etc.) are based on land sparing arguments. This rationale states that intensifying crop and livestock yields on existing agricultural land will protect, or 'spare', the world's remaining natural habitats from further agricultural expansion. However, in reality, there is little evidence to support this argument and plenty of well-documented evidence highlighting its issues. SI -in the form of monocultural GM crops - has led to major losses of farmland biodiversity, such as the decline of farmland bird species across the EU.³⁵ Intensifying livestock production through CAFOs has led to disastrous levels of effluent manure pollution in water systems and the soil.³⁶ For example, reports in 2018 found that a JBS-owned pork-processing plant in Illinois, USA released more than 1,800 pounds of nitrogen a day (or the equivalent to the amount of raw sewage of a city of 79,000 people), on average, into a tributary to the Illinois River.³⁷ Further, by focusing on increasing yield, SI promotes a pathway towards corporate-controlled food systems, thereby failing to promote the food and land sovereignty of millions of smallholder and Indigenous farmers.
- **'Rural conservation zones' and similar approaches to biodiversity conservation** emphasise environmental restoration and preservation in ways that downplay human dimensions and socio-economic relations. They preclude small-scale agriculture and ancillary activities which operate in harmony with nature instead. They also exclude recognition of Indigenous Peoples' food systems which preserve and enrich the ecosystem as a force interconnected with their traditional knowledge, governance and culture. Instead, it involves practices which lock up land as 'protected areas' and displace First Peoples from their cultural heritage.³⁸
- **Agricultural and environmental consultancy.** Increasingly, governments are providing funding for consultants to conduct feasibility studies or build business cases for localised food economies (food hubs, farmers' markets, etc). There are already plenty of working examples to draw from in the development of government policy to support localised food systems, rendering consultancy an unnecessary use of time and money. Farmers and local community members hold a great deal of expertise, and can be paid a stipend to participate in steering committees and advisory groups to direct community-based localisation projects. Farmers can be supported to learn from other farmers through horizontal knowledge exchanges, and provided with direct funding and administrative support to enable their efforts to build local food economies.
- **Funding websites and other interactive platforms.** There are countless government websites and digital platforms set up to assist farmers with marketing produce and other well-intended

³⁴ Strelein, 2002

³⁵ Friends of the Earth International, 2012

³⁶ Hribar, 2010

³⁷ Durbin, 2018

³⁸ Pham et al., 2022

purposes. While farmers do need support for collaborative distribution, most don't need more websites to promote our own websites. We need funding for physical infrastructure (abattoirs, boning rooms, dairy processing, grain mills and distribution centres).

- **Centralisation of distribution systems for efficiency.** The fallacy of global, centralised food systems to increase efficiency fails to recognise the long-term impacts of this approach: reduces resilience of agricultural landscapes and biodiversity; increases the severity and impacts of climate change; and reduces choice and dietary diversity.

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.³⁹

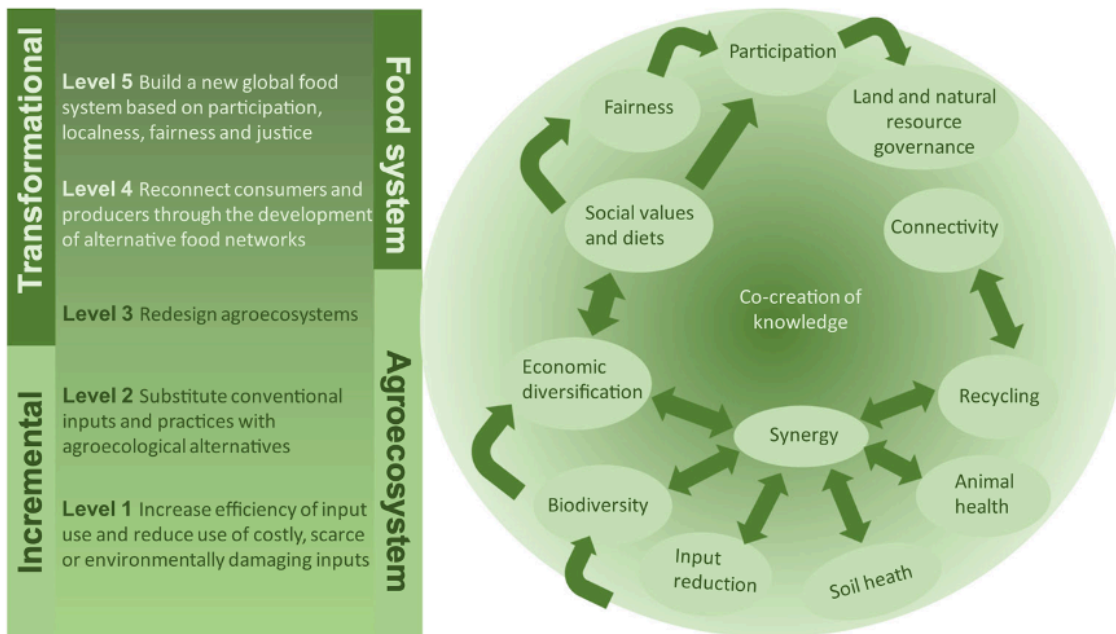
Given that agroecology presents viable solutions to social, ecological, political and economic crises caused by industrial agriculture, it is a pathway toward food sovereignty.

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.⁴⁰ Beyond farming, 20 percent of the world's population uses 80 percent of its resources.⁴¹ Clearly the Minority World (aka the Global North) is using more than its share, and something has to change.

³⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023

⁴⁰ Shiva, 2017

⁴¹ 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.’⁴²

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*,⁴³ Vandana Shiva explains the social and ecological value of localising food systems:

⁴² Wright (2018: 10)

⁴³ 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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Rosset & Altieri, 2017

⁴⁶ González de Molina et al. 2019; Marsden, Hebinck, and Mathijs 2018

⁴⁷ 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