AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to the Inquiry into food security in Victoria

Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee
Victorian Government

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

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We thank the Victorian Government for initiating an inquiry into food security in Victoria. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission, as well as all further opportunities to participate in development and implementation of policies and plans that support food security in Victoria. 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.

Table of Contents

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 represents small-scale farmers and allies' interests at all levels of government. We enable farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, assist the state in instituting scale-appropriate and consistent regulations and standards, and advocate for fair access and decision-making control for small-scale farmers to local value chain infrastructure and markets. We also support members to navigate scale-inappropriate legislation with individual advice and state legal guides.

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 Vía 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 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 environmental, 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, Monash University, 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 food security in Victoria. 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.

Food insecurity is a growing crisis globally, and Victoria is no exception to this. The burden of our unjust political, economic and social systems that underpins food (in)security are felt disproportionately by marginalised groups. These systems combine to form the *food system*, which is the web of actors, processes, and interactions involved in growing, processing, distributing, consuming, and disposing of foods.[1] As food security is shaped by the condition of our food system, food (in)security needs to be understood as a *symptom* rather than a *problem* within itself.

In Victoria three key interrelated approaches must be addressed to transform our food system, in turn improving food security. First, the Victorian Government needs to move away from the liberalisation agenda that has dominated Australian agricultural policy making for the better part of the last fifty years. A liberalised policy approach to agriculture orients the food system toward maximising production and efficiency instead of fostering social or environmental goods, and this is self-evidently an ineffective way of ensuring society is sufficiently fed with nutritious and safe food. Second, people have declining means of access to food within this market-based system. Increasing corporate concentration, stagnating wages and inflation, alongside insufficient social security, have forced an increasing number of people to choose between food and other basic human needs. Third, the interest groups with the most influence on agricultural policy making do not authentically represent farmers and others who are adversely affected by the liberalised food system (which, importantly, the same interest groups have advocated and defended to protect their own private interests). We have all witnessed the fragility of this system through bushfires and flooding, COVID-19, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and now is the time for the state government to show leadership in taking new policy directions. It is widely agreed among progressive political leaders, international experts, and civil society that old solutions to contemporary challenges will not suffice. Civil society is not short of effective policy solutions, it is instead a matter of political will and the unequal power that actors exert on the food system. AFSA therefore puts forward the following key recommendations that will be elaborated in this submission:

Key recommendations

1. **Support small-scale farmers and ensure their produce is made accessible:**
    - **a.** Explore options to ensure small-scale farmers are able to earn a livelihood from producing food by (i.e subsidising local production by paying small-scale farmers full price for their produce, or directly paying small-scale farmers recognising the environmental and social goods they produce).
    - **b.** Subsidise the sale of this food to low-income households, such as through food hubs, local greengrocers or independent grocery stores, and/or through cooked meals at dedicated

[1] IPES-Food, 2015

venues (similar to Belo Horizonte's 'popular restaurants', where lunch is $1 no matter who is buying it).

2. **Enable civil society to have greater influence on policy making and within the food system:**
    a. Form new policymaking institutional arrangements for addressing food security and food sovereignty that cross policy siloes, including a Minister for Food that takes directive from a Food Council. A Food Council must include democratically-elected representatives of smallholders and civil society, and no representation from the private sector.
    b. Work with elected representatives of smallholders and civil society to develop a Victorian Food Security Plan.
    c. Further, ensure *all* advisory and stakeholder groups for food-related policymaking includes democratically-elected representatives of smallholders and civil society.
    d. Fund grants to democratically-constituted farmer organisations 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).

3. **Address imbalances for citizens to have greater power in defining their relationship with the food system:**
    a. Fulfil the obligations of the *UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1975)* to ensure all people have the Right to Food, by legislating the right to food, and implementing recommendations of the World Health Organisation and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.
    b. Acknowledge and actively support the contribution of culturally significant traditional knowledge, law, practice and food production by First Peoples to the health and wellbeing (physical, emotional, cultural) of people and Country.
    c. Remove reliance on food charities (outside of acute emergency/disaster situations, where relief should also be provided within a food sovereignty framework), enabling all people to access food via socially acceptable and empowered means, such as through a Universal (or Unconditional) Basic Income (UBI).
    d. Ensure that the Basics Card is eligible for spending at farmers' markets, box schemes, CSAs, and other direct distribution channels providing nutritious, socially-just and ecologically-sound food. This is an opportunity to incentivise the purchase of healthy, local food by lower-income communities and also support the livelihoods of small-scale farmers.
    e. Audit the locations of public drinking water in remote areas and Aboriginal communities (e.g. bubblers, drinking fountains and taps) to identify gaps, and subsequently install public drinking water stations in areas of most need, as identified by local residents.
    f. Turn over unused urban land (tiny verges on street corners, vacant car parks and large empty lots waiting for development etc.) for community gardens. These developments must be public infrastructure.
    g. Make available healthy food and drinks and restrict unhealthy food and drinks at all food outlets and vending machines in facilities managed by the government (e.g. local government early childhood centres, train stations) and government office/operational buildings.

4. **Amend the planning scheme to support an agroecological transition:**
    a. Empower and enable local governments to make planning decisions based on the health, social and ecological interests of residents - e.g. being able to reject development applications from fast food outlets without being taken to court.
    b. Incentivise the use of unused urban land (verges on street corners, vacant car parks, large empty lots waiting for development, etc.) for community gardens and public food system infrastructure.

5. **Strengthen government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food:**
    a. Engage with local food systems actors to see how they can support the public procurement of institutional food (food which is locally/regionally sourced, ethical, and sustainable) as a public good and a right. See Towards a Healthy, Regenerative, and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement[2] for a model of food systems transformation.
    b. Introduce a universal school lunch or breakfast program with food procured from local producers that would provide a level of basic food security for every Australian child, and avoid the stigma associated with accessing 'food relief' charity in schools.
    c. Allocate funding to small farms and food gardens in prisons to ensure that incarcerated people a) have access to fresh food and b) provide them with food skills and knowledge that can improve mental health and wellbeing, as well as increase employment opportunities once they are released from prison.

6. **Reform Victoria's housing and property policies:**
    a. De-incentivise ownership of more than two properties (e.g. through taxation) to reduce the incidence of housing investment for short-term rental income, speculation, and landbanking causing much of Australia's housing stress, which is a major factor in peoples' ability to allocate a sufficient proportion of household budgets towards food.

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 food insecurity has been increasing for several years, with serious implications for Victorians' physical and mental health and rising rates of poverty. AFSA welcomes any further opportunity to discuss the evidence provided in this submission to develop policies, regulation and legislation that improves food security for all.

Inquiry into food security in Victoria

The Victorian Government has asked for stakeholders and the public to comment on

[2] ibid.

(1) the impact of food insecurity in Victoria, on —

(a) physical and mental health;

(b) poverty and hardship; and

(2) options available to lower the cost of food and improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

Context

Interrogating the root causes of food insecurity necessitates an examination not only of the structures of the food system, but of society itself. It demands we ask why society as a whole does not take responsibility to ensure that everyone can live a dignified life. Untangling the power relations that are stopping the vast majority of us who do believe everyone should be assured a dignified life, AFSA's Peoples' Food Plan offers systemic and pragmatic ways to assure food security for all. We ask the committee to refer to the Peoples' Food Plan for additional solutions to address the problems of our food system. These are problems that are not 'choices', but instead structural barriers (economic, environmental, social, cultural, geographic, political) imposed on individuals and households.

Despite producing most of our food for domestic consumption and exporting approximately 72 percent of our agricultural produce, the vulnerability of Australia's supply chains was laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic and recent flooding events. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that extreme weather events will become more frequent and severe in Australia,[3] and this demands a more resilient food system. 'The average storage capacity of a supermarket is only one day's worth of fresh products'.[4] This supply chain needs a buffer and governments can no longer rely on corporations to shore up supply chains or relief agencies to provide emergency food.[5]

An accurate picture of food security in Australia is hampered due to inconsistent and infrequent data collection, but the prevalence of food insecurity is growing. The *Foodbank Hunger Report* (2021) includes a spectrum of experience from reductions in the quality, desirability and variety of diet to disruptions in food intake and eating patterns. On this basis a quarter of Australian adults (28%) can be categorised as food insecure. One in six Australians (17%) are severely food insecure, skipping meals, cutting down on the size of their meals and sometimes going a whole day without eating at least once a week, and 1.2 million children are living in food insecure households.[6]

The rate of food insecurity increased throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] Research based on lived experience and community feedback in Aboriginal communities across NSW found 'in some rural and

[3] IPCC, 2022
[4] Jan Willem van der Schans, senior researcher of new business models at Wageningen University and Research.
[5] Shveda, n.d.
[6] Foodbank Australia, 2021
[7] Louie, Shi & Farinelli, 2022

remote areas, local shops are pushing up their prices, and people are left with no choice but to buy cheaper (and often less healthy) options to feed their families. Increase in government payments has resulted in the one and only shop in the community providing food, jamming their prices up.' There has been an increase in food insecurity in cities and urban areas evident[8] by an increase in demand for food relief. Australians aged 18-25 years comprise 65% of Australians experiencing food insecurity, as the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted individuals who typically work casual part-time jobs, which will have long-term repercussions on their employment and career prospects.[9]

Alongside the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), global civil society and leading academics, AFSA asserts that food security, in line with its widely accepted six dimensions (availability, access, utilisation, stability, agency and sustainability), will not be achieved without a transition to agroecology and the realisation of *food sovereignty*. Colonial capitalism has shifted power in the governance of food systems into the hands of corporations as food and agricultural public policies take market-based approaches. As a remedy, food sovereignty is a rights-based framework that asserts the welfare of farmers, eaters and the environment must be at the core of public policies, not the market, thus shifting the power back into the hands of farmers and communities. Without recognising that people and ecosystem-centred approaches are necessary in food system reform, solutions for food security will simply reproduce the problematic political, economic, and social structures that are creating Victoria's growing food insecurity problem. Addressing power imbalances and enabling alternative food production and distribution systems (i.e agroecology) is therefore at the core of addressing food insecurity.

The impact of food insecurity in Victoria on physical and mental health

An ongoing state of food insecurity can result in chronic diseases in later life including diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, hypertension, obesity, nutritional deficiencies including iron deficiency anaemia and poor mental health.[10] These conditions diminish individuals' and families' quality of life, hamper community participation, and contribute to a burden on the health system and higher health care expenditure.[11]

Nutrition and sustainability of diets are inextricably linked. Sustainable diets are those with low or positive environmental impacts, which contribute to food and nutrition security and to a healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while respecting and benefiting farm and food system workers.[12] Notably, a sustainable diet should be healthy by definition, whereas a 'healthy diet', by most definitions, need not have any relationship with environmental sustainability in any of its forms.[13]

[8] Craven and Meyer 2020

[9] Foodbank Australia 2020; McKay and Lindberg 2019

[10] Crawford et al. 2015; Larson, Laska and Neumark-Sztainer 2020; Yii, Palermo and Kleve 2020

[11] Farahbakhsh et al. 2017; Gallegos, Ramsey and Ong 2014; Martinez et al. 2019; Rewa, Devine and Godrich 2020

[12] FAO, 2011

[13] Burlingame et al. 2022

The impact of food insecurity in Victoria on poverty and hardship

We assert that food production and supply and the intended social, economic and environmental outcomes should be based on a human rights framework. The ability to achieve food sovereignty requires people to have access to fresh, ethical and ecologically-sound, localised food production, distributed through short and decentralised supply chains, and full democratic participation in the food system. States including South Africa, Kenya, Switzerland, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and Brazil have made constitutional provisions guaranteeing the right to food,[14] albeit with varying success.[15]

Brazil has a long-standing 'food-as-a-right' policy, and in Belo Horizonte (a city of 2.7 million people) a city agency was created to oversee systemic innovations, weaving together interests of farmers and eaters to assure that every citizen had the right to food.[16]

> *Within six years, initiatives such as the Bolsa Família cash transfer scheme for low-income families, free meals in every public school, and support to small-scale family farming had reduced the number of people facing food insecurity from 50 million to 30 million. Many of the programmes implemented under Zero Hunger were pioneered in the 1990s in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte.*

Presently, the failure of Australia to achieve the right to food is exemplified by:

- Incomes that are inadequate for covering the costs of living. The initial Coronavirus Supplement received by JobSeeker recipients ($550 per fortnight in addition to the base $560) brought these people out of poverty – as defined by an income greater than the poverty line of $457 per week (the poverty line is defined as 50% of median household income). Reduction of this supplement to $250 a fortnight in September 2020 and further to $150 from 1 January 2021, followed by complete cessation on 31 March 2021 was detrimental to food security for those on social security payments. Subsequent increase by $50 per fortnight does nothing to once again bring these people out of poverty;[17]
- High rates of diet-related diseases due to availability, marketing, pricing, and overconsumption of poorly nutritious food. Diet-related diseases (e.g. hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease) are the leading cause of death and disease in Australia.[18] Approximately one-third of daily energy intake is from discretionary (or 'junk' or ultra-processed) foods; and
- Water being undrinkable in many remote communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[19]

It must be noted that emergency food relief does not provide food security, often failing to satisfy nutritional requirements or cultural food preferences. Food relief agencies in 2021 reported insufficient quantities of vegetables (44%), quality foods (55%), foods for special dietary requirements and cultural

[14] FIAN International, 2023
[15] Mann, 2016
[16] Chappell. 2018
[17] Australia's Right to Food Coalition, 2021
[18] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021
[19] Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA), 2022

groups (23%).[20] Emergency food relief is not a dignified way of addressing food security and does not meet international obligations to ensure the human right to adequate food.

Options available to lower the cost of food and improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food

The price of food in supermarkets does not reflect its production costs or quality of nutrition, but rather the profit margins of the multinational corporations who control processing and the duopolistic retailers in Australia. Therefore, any approach to lower the cost of food available through supermarkets must tackle power and consolidation of the food system first and foremost, while supporting Victorian farmers and the public through targeted subsidies of local food production. Subsidies can be in the form of direct payments to every citizen to ensure they can afford fresh, whole foods, or through public procurement strategies such as those detailed in the case study of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, below.

Prices in supermarkets also do not reflect the externalised costs of ultra-processed food (UPF), which now constitutes over 50% of what is sold in supermarkets. These costs include a crisis of diet-related diseases adding to Australia's public health burden, and ecosystem degradation from monoculture commodity production of grains and seeds destined to become ingredients in UPFs (or animal feed or biofuels). From the annihilation of microbial life in soils to the destruction of human microbiomes, UPFs fail to nourish land or people at any stage, while constituting as much as 42 per cent of the average Australian diet.[21]

Implement a Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Increased government funding and support for initiatives that improve access to and affordability of local, nutritious, culturally-appropriate, socially-just and ecologically-sound food (e.g. local growers' markets, food procurement that prioritises local growers) have the potential to prevent or reduce the significant burden diet-related non-communicable diseases place on the Australian population and health care system. A Universal (or Unconditional) Basic Income (UBI) is one obvious way to address structural economic inequalities that lead to food insecurity. A UBI is not widely canvassed (yet) in Australian policy debates due to the 'common sense' that conflates work with paid work, which is 'specific to the western world of the last 100 years or so'.[22] We are in the midst of an evolving crisis in which the market for paid work only values certain groups of people, leaving the rest to a growing population dubbed the 'precariat' due to the uncertain and intermittent, often underpaid work options. A UBI is a policy response that responds to this crisis, 'expanding the potential space for social power within the economy'.[23] UBI could accomplish three things:[24]

- Mitigate the worst effects of inequality and poverty generated by marginalisation, contributing to social stability;

[20] FH McKay, Bastian and Lindberg 2021
[21] Lifting the lid on ultra-processed foods | Deakin https://www.deakin.edu.au/research/research-news-and-publications/articles/lifting-the-lid-on-ultra-processed-foods
[22] Wagenaar & Prainsack, 2018: 53
[23] Olin Wright, 2021: 108
[24] ibid.

- Self-creation of jobs to generate discretionary income for people;
- Make many self-employment (so increasing autonomy) opportunities more attractive even without a liveable income.

  One can imagine, for example, that more people would be interested in being small farmers and commercial gardeners if they had a UBI to cover their basic costs of living.[25]

Support small-scale local food production - agroecology

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'.[26] 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.[27]

The evidence base is strong enough that agroecological principles are now also embedded in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted by nearly 200 countries at COP15 in December 2022.[28]

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 political, 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/or undemocratic approaches. These failures have the potential to create further social and ecological destruction, felt by marginalised communities first and foremost. False solutions distract people and policymakers from real solutions, and direct public financing, infrastructure and institutional support away from the actions needed for systemic changes. Below are false solutions to assuring the Right to Food:

- **Liberalisation of agriculture.** The Australian Government is a strong supporter of promoting liberalised free trade in agricultural goods, however, its potential benefits far outweigh the costs.

[25] ibid.
[26] Nicholls and Altieri 2018 (pg. 1): FAO 2015; IAASTD 2009; IPES-Food 2016
[27] FAO, 2023
[28] Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022

The economic welfare costs on Australia of 'trade-distorting' agricultural policies elsewhere amounts to approximately $3 billion AUD.[29] This sounds like a lot, but when considering the total production value of Australian agriculture, removing trade barriers would only grow it a mere 3.6%. These benefits would also be mostly realised by a minority of the farming population. From the mid-1970s large farms have grown from a population of 3%, making up 25% of output value, to a population of 14% that accounts for 59% of output value.[30] In contrast, small farms make up 59% of the farming population but only realise 6% of total income that goes to the sector. Over the same period agriculture has largely contributed to land clearing, ecological degradation, loss of soil health, and the decline of rural communities. Although increasing production and efficiency, the liberalisation experiment has shown it will not deliver the social or environmental goods needed in the context of food insecurity and a climate, cost-of-living and ecological crisis.

- **Marketing of First Food Formulas.** While we fully support the notion that first foods are a complex and sensitive issue for parents and their children, and breastfeeding is not always a viable option, the marketing of first food formulas should ensure that parents can make informed decisions about the implications of using breastmilk substitutes.

- **Reductionist nutrition advice.** Nutritional advice, through the mediums of food labelling and nutrition/dietetics practitioners, are a major source of health and dietary information for the public. When this dietary advice is holistic - based on principles of sustainable and democratic food systems - it can play a key role in protecting the right to food. It is when nutritional advice becomes reductionist and rejects these principles that it becomes a false solution. For example, nutricentric front-of-package labelling featuring reductive health star ratings ignores much about the nutritional quality of the food, and completely disregards the level of processing involved, and the food's ecological and social impact. Another example includes health advice which frames malnutrition and non-communicable diseases (type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer) as a nutritional issue to be solved by nutrient specific, technical solutions, such as food fortification and supplements. It represents a commodified, rather than a structural, approach to human health.[31]

- **Bio-fortified foods and supplements.** Food fortification and supplements are marketed by big corporations as a necessity to address the health needs of different populations. Such marketing is founded on projections that populations in all regions will face deficiencies in nutrients such as vitamin D, calcium, iron, potassium, zinc, folate and vitamin E.[32] However, studies[33] reveal that there is no 'gap' in terms of global supply versus nutritional requirements. Such a reductionist demand-and-supply framing of food security ignores poverty and poor access to food as key structural barriers to the right to nutritious food. It frames global conglomerate producers of UPFs, bio-fortified foods and supplements as saviours delivering the 'techno-fix' to global nutritional deficiencies. It also obscures the central role of these global capitalist producers in destroying ecosystems and displacing agroecological small-holder farmers. Such an argument distracts

[29] Anderson and Valenzuela, 2021
[30] ABARES 2023; Australian Productivity Commission 2005
[31] Scrinis, 2013; 2020
[32] IPES-Food, 2022
[33] Sexton, 2018

communities from the nutritional bounty that these farmers have been historically delivering through their diverse range of sustainably and ethically-sourced organic produce. Food fortification and supplements also represent a reductive framing of health issues being the cause of single nutrient deficiencies, as discussed above.

- **Lab meat.** Lab-grown alternative proteins (APs) are expensive, particularly due to the culture, media and technology involved in cell-based production. It is estimated that cell-based AP production could cost around twice as much as chicken production.[34] It is also found that all the substrates used to grow the meat cells or the microbes require nitrogen in the form of ammonium (sulphate or nitrate), which is currently manufactured off natural/fossil gas[35].
  Further, the expansion of large lab-meat producers in the Global South might displace the small-scale livestock producers already operating ecologically sustainable agroecological 'default' livestock systems.[36] Such production raises concerns over the antidemocratic pathway towards cell-based meat.

- **Ultra-processed plant-based foods.** While there is evidence of the valuable role of plant-based foods for human nutrition and health, it is necessary to focus on minimally-processed forms (e.g. whole vegetables, legumes). Heightened concern about climate change and livestock welfare in intensive/industrial 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[37], that increases their palatability but also their likelihood of contributing to diet-related diseases). Ultra-processed foods, as an unnecessary element of diets, thus also contribute to an unnecessary amount of resource depletion and packaging waste.[38]

- **Corporations asking people to 'round up' for food charity.** Increasingly, large corporations are asking customers at the checkout of supermarkets and other businesses to 'round up' the total cost of their shopping bill to the nearest dollar, as a donation to food charities. Although local food charities and other community-led organisations do vital work to feed disadvantaged people, we must question why supermarkets are doing this. The answer lies in greenwashing, where mounting pressure on corporations to fulfil social responsibility (CSR) often leads to false solutions. The rising cost of food in supermarkets, due largely to supply chain disruption in a global food system, actively contributes to food insecurity for disadvantaged people. In addition, charitable donations made by large corporations often seek to alleviate tax burdens and increase their profits.

- **Sponsorship from food corporations.** Large corporations often allocate money to sponsor various community projects, academic research or causes, which can seem like a progressive move for businesses to right the wrongs of social, ecological and economic exploitation from capitalism.

[34] Rubio, Xiang, and Kaplan, 2020.
[35] Bendell, 2023
[36] Fernandes, 2022.
[37] Action on Salt, 2018
[38] IPES-Food, 2022

However, corporate involvement in these spheres often means that businesses have an opportunity to convince citizens that 'green capitalism' is a viable solution to the problems it created.

Additional recommendations

Transition to Agroecology

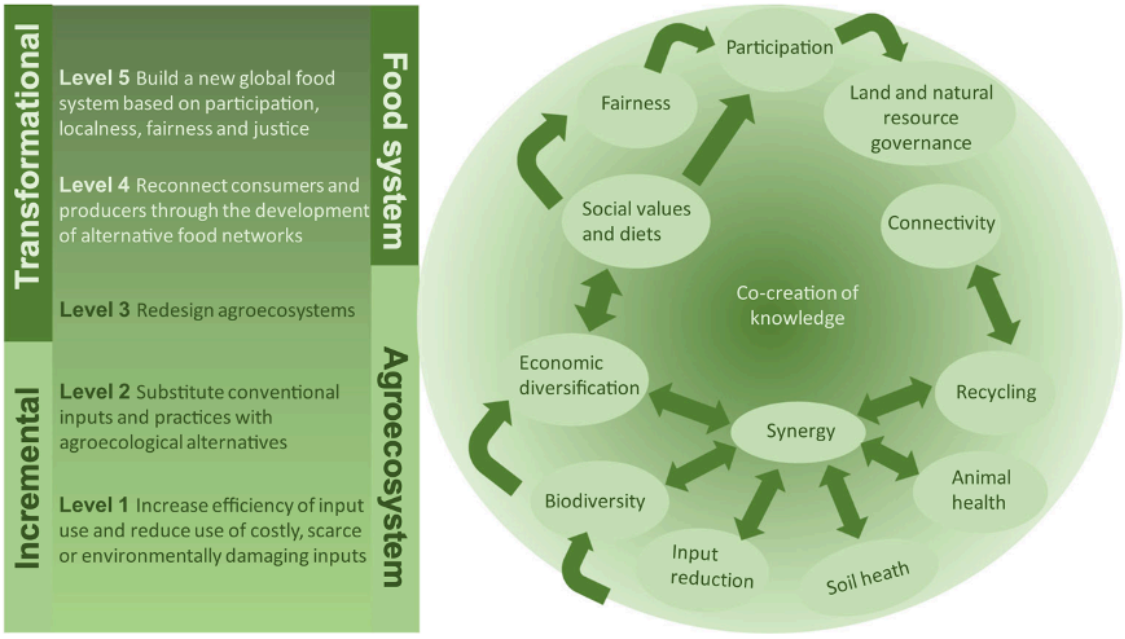
Instead of false solutions peddled by corporates and investors, AFSA calls for agroecology as the *real* solution to ethical and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems, while also addressing social, political and economic inequities in food systems. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)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

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[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

Transition to democratic agricultural and food policymaking

Australia's food and agricultural policymaking institutional arrangements are fundamentally biased towards a narrow number of actors.[48] Just a few groups have a majority of access to policymakers even though they do not authentically represent the groups they claim to speak for. For instance, agricultural interest groups advocating for liberalisation do not authentically represent the majority of farmers whose livelihoods have been adversely affected by these policies.[49] Changes have been so severe, now one farmer suicides every ten days in Australia - a major contributor being financial stress brought on by liberalisation.[50]

Inquiries on the federal level privilege business associations, granting them more access to policymakers compared to citizen groups. In contrast to business associations, when citizen groups submit to a greater number of inquiries they do not receive more invitations to a hearing. Considering the need to more meaningfully engage with citizens in democratic processes, citizen groups need confidence that the effort of providing written submissions will be met with more access to policymakers. It has been shown that more meaningful engagement with citizens in committee inquiries also strengthens the legitimacy of policy solutions.[51]

Within the federal 2022 Inquiry into Food Security, organisations that put forward the least transformative solutions for food security were also granted more invitations to hearings compared to those that put forward more transformative solutions.[52] These included corporations, business associations, and interest groups inside of the National Farmers' Federation family. The committee then went on to recommend solutions that were not transformative, in that they did not focus on addressing power imbalances, implementing rights-based approaches, or aim to increase the influence of civil society in food security policymaking. Due to the importance of providing oral evidence, we ask that the current inquiry includes *at least* an equal representation of civil society in hearings compared to those that make submissions.

To address the undemocratic nature of agriculture and food policymaking, truly democratic policymaking would look like: creating new institutional policymaking arrangements that are made up of civil society, ensuring more diverse representation from civil society in current arrangements (i.e policy groups, committees, forums, etc.), and enabling citizen groups to collectivise so their voices can be heard in government. Without addressing this, government not only runs the risk of creating false policy solutions to address food insecurity, but also more broadly supporting the rise of authoritarianism and populism by disenfranchising citizens.[53]

[48] Botterill, 2005
[49] Trethewey, forthcoming
[50] Hon Emma McBride MP, 2023; Bryant and Garnham, 2013
[51] Rasmussen and Reher, 2023
[52] Halpin, 2003
[53] Schäfer and Zürn, 2024

Case Studies

City of Onkaparinga, SA - Enabling resilient food systems in South Australia[54]

Since 2016, various Adelaide governments, organisations and communities have been working together, guided by a diversity of interstate and local drivers, including the community vision collated in the *Edible Adelaide report*. In 2019, a range of needs were identified at the event: *Urban food systems and the role of government*. This event highlighted the need for:

- Local, state and federal governments to prioritise food systems and develop guidelines, toolkits, budget allocation and staffing.
- Research, to build local case studies, mapping of local food systems and food security data.
- Prioritising collaboration and communication across governments and other sectors.

The network initially met as a working group to develop a Local Government Association Research and Development Grant, which was successful in October 2020.

A local food system is everything it takes to get food from paddock to plate. This includes how food is grown and produced, processed, packaged and distributed, marketed, sold, consumed and then disposed of.

Our Community Food Vision

A healthy, sustainable food system in Onkaparinga:

- SUPPORTS local food growing and builds skills through food education and training.
- PROVIDES all people access to fresh, affordable food – no one left behind.
- ACKNOWLEDGES and understands Kaurna Nation food culture and practices.
- DIVERTS and reduces food waste from landfill.
- ENCOURAGES a strong food economy that values our local producers.
- DEVELOPS better food business models.

These workshops helped design a toolbox to help local governments enable local resilient food systems in the face of climate risks.

Find the toolbox here: https://www.saurbanfood.org/planners-toolbox

The City of Onkaparinga has a range of food system initiatives including:[55]

- Magic Harvest
- Community Gardens
- Grow it Local
- Social Supermarket Pilot
- Onkaparinga Food Security Collaborative
- Cooking program development

[54] City of Onkaparinga, 2023
[55] Ibid.

- Connect
- Verge Landscaping and Planting
- Grow Free
- Foodbank referral locations
- Emergency Food Assistance list
- Free and low cost meals list

Eagle Heights Edible Exchange

Residents of Eagle Heights, a suburb in the Gold Coast's hinterland, are tackling rising costs of living by growing their own fruit and vegetables and exchanging them with neighbours in their community.[56] This community of small backyard farmers and garden growers utilises a recycled old timber roadside stall to exchange their excess produce for another's. For example, fresh fruits are taken from the stand to be dried or turned into jam, with the excess portion returned for other community members. By doing so the residents are able to maintain a steady supply of locally grown produce whilst minimising waste. They are also encouraged to bring seeds and recipes for exchange. Having used social media platforms to attract many Tambourine Mountain residents, the initiative has engaged 1,000 of the mountain's 7,000 residents. Not only has this edible exchange reduced the cost of living for many households, but strengthened community connections over the shared desire for affordable and nutritious food.

Tasmania's urban agroecological gardens

Tasmania has a widespread and well-established culture of agroecological urban gardens. One third of these gardens are located along Community Houses in low socio-economic areas, and bring communities together to protect their right to safe, nutritious, affordable, environmentally sustainable and fairly produced food. Marsh (2020) highlights four urban agroecological gardens of central consideration from a public health and food sovereignty perspective.[57] *Goodwood Community Garden* is maintained by and feeds its surrounding low socio-economic communities. The *Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens Community Food Garden* aims to grow food for low socio-economic communities and improve mental health for returned veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It also donates the majority of the 4 tonnes of local vegetables and fruit they produce to Second Bite. *DIGnity Supported Community Garden* supports individuals with various disabilities to garden within a shared community space. *Edible Precinct* serves as a reconciliation garden to honour the history and knowledge of the Palawa people as traditional custodians of Tasmania.

[56] Sheehan & Forbes, 2022
[57] Marsh, 2020

Cultivating Community, Melbourne

Cultivating Community has been a pioneer in Melbourne's urban agricultural community for over 20 years.[58] The co-op works with low-income and migrant communities to create equitable, secure and resilient local food systems. Through the organisation's Community Garden and Food Systems work they allow residents in Melbourne's public housing to access healthy, affordable and culturally-appropriate food. By supporting community gardens on public housing estates the initiative is able to foster an inclusive gathering space for tenants to come together and share their food cultures and traditions. Other projects such as Community Food Centres, School Food Garden programs and After School Cooking classes create opportunities for adults and children alike to connect over, share and learn how to prepare food in sustainable ways. Through this work Cultivating Community collaborates with local councils and other community groups to increase awareness of food insecurity, whilst facilitating community learning on food waste minimisation and the benefits of composting.

Food Next Door Coop

Food Next Door is an initiative which matches under-utilised farm land with landless farmers, specifically newly arrived migrants and refugee groups.[59] With community gardens based in the Sunraysia region of rural New South Wales and Victoria, the co-op aims to support small-scale regenerative farming and protect the right of migrant communities to produce nutritious and culturally-appropriate foods. For example, the hand harvesting of traditional African maize by the Twitezimbere Burundian Community in north-west Victoria has given refugees, most of whom have a farming background, an opportunity to ease into the local community whilst maintaining their cultural practices. Interviews of other migrant farmers from Vietnam, Tonga and Italy[60] have highlighted how their introduction of safe, low-tech cultivation and pest management techniques from their home countries has made community food production more resilient to pests and disease.

Other key advantages contributed by multicultural farmers include a diversity of crops and hybridisation techniques which strengthen the climate resilience of local farming ecologies. Food Next Door therefore highlights the importance of protecting these diverse farmers' right to grow nutritious culturally-appropriate food. By fostering a diverse culture of horizontal knowledge and practice sharing, these farmers and organisations are able to secure a local food system that is not only self-sufficient, but climate resilient.

3000Acres, Melbourne

3000Acres is a social enterprise which has been supporting a range of sustainable urban agriculture projects since 2014. Their mission is to unite people who want to grow food on empty, under-utilised land around Melbourne. They work with councils, developers, statutory bodies and communities to support skill and

[58] Cultivating Community, 2021
[59] Food Next Door Co-op., 2023
[60] Klocker, Head, Dun, & Spaven, 2018

knowledge building. They also work to transform underutilised land – such as tiny verges on street corners, vacant car parks and large empty lots waiting for development – into community gardening spaces. Their services include providing free advice to individuals and groups looking to start community gardens or community compost initiatives; offering expertise to councils, developers and other organisations on urban agriculture and sustainability projects; facilitating food swaps, workshops and their flagship Olives to Oil Harvest Festival.

Community Grocer, Melbourne

The Community Grocer is a not-for-profit social enterprise aiming to create healthy connected communities and increase physical, economic and social access to fresh food. Based in the Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy, Pakenham and Carlton, Community Grocer hosts markets in priority populations, stocking culturally-appropriate produce (reaching up to 61 types of fruits and vegetables) and creating weekly gatherings to celebrate diversity. They also offer fruit and vegie boxes to be purchased one-off or through subscription. Their combined 200 eaters every week represent 17 different nationalities.[61] 1 in 6 of these eaters are food insecure and 25% are low income.[62] As such, ensuring affordability is key – the Grocer offers food prices which are 24-30% cheaper than supermarkets. They represent an important actor in the food network promoting food justice and protecting the community's right to food in a dignified and culturally-celebratory way.

Chile's integrative food labelling and marketing policies

Chile's introduction of the Law of Food Labelling and Advertising in 2012 was exemplary of a structural government approach to human health, in particular the country's obesity and non-communicable disease epidemics.[63] The policy includes front of package labelling for foods and beverages that exceed set thresholds for sugar, sodium or saturated fat. This has had a strong effect on reducing the consumption of UPFs and has led other countries (such as Israel, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Uruguay) to adopt similar labels.[64] The law also banned the sale, promotion and free distribution of all foods with warning labels in schools. In 2016 Chile restricted child-directed marketing which used popular children's characters on the packaging of products high in energy, saturated fats, sodium and sugars. The country also restricted child-directed television marketing, and subsequently all marketing of warning-labelled foods, from 6pm to 10pm.[65] These laws have been key in improving point of purchase consumer information on the quality of food, and decreasing children's exposure to the marketing, advertising and sales of unhealthy food. Whilst these laws have been contested by the private sector, they have proved an important global example of a government protecting the Peoples' right to food through enforcing healthy and democratic healthy food environments.

[61] The Community Grocer, n.d.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Corvalán et al., 2013; Tallie et al., 2020
[64] Popkin et al., 2021
[65] Reyes et al., 2019

Structural Reforms to End Hunger in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

The Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte's food security framework has redefined national and international standards for governing the right to food. Since founding the Municipal Secretariat of Supply and its 20 interconnected programs in 1993, the city has been a pioneer in promoting food sovereignty. The Social Security Food Service mandates fresh-cooked, low-price meals available for urban workers; meals for workers' children; minimum wages to increase the demand and food security of industrial labourers; and nutrition training courses aimed at increasing the population's food literacy.[66] The national Fome Zero programs sought to systematically support local production and purchasing by requiring school food programs and restaurants to offer significant amounts of local vegetables and fruits each day. This strategy - along with other trade policies to eliminate dumping on their markets - has supported the livelihoods of small-scale agricultural holdings whilst improving the health and food security of rural and urban populations alike.

The result of this institutional prioritisation of food sovereignty, human dignity and wellbeing has led to unprecedented improvements in food security: between 1987-1997 infant mortality has fallen by more than 70%, hospitalisations due to diabetes have fallen by 33%, and the per capita household consumption of fruits and vegetables has increased by 25%.[67]

The cost? Strong political will and 2% of the city's annual budget.[68]

For other examples of sustainable public procurement policy see.[69]

- Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria: A Consensus Statement[70]
- VicHealth and the Food Systems and Food Security Working Group[71]
- Vermont's (USA) Farm to Plate Policy (2021-2030)[72]
- Michigan (USA) Farm to Institute Network[73]
- Denmark's Organic Public Procurement model[74]
- Finland's Food 2030 Policy[75]

[66] Chappell, 2018
[67] ibid. (p.66)
[68] World Future Council, n.d.
[69] Leah A Galvin - Churchill Fellows Association of TAS (churchilltrust.com.au)
[70] Victorian Food Security and Food Systems Working Group, 2022
[71] ibid.
[72] Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, 2021
[73] Michigan Farm to Institution Network, n.d
[74] Holmbeck, 2020
[75] Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland, 2017