



Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance Peoples' Food Plan

Land and water use

Executive summary

AFSA's members recognise the impact of colonisation on First Peoples, and the colonial histories that dispossessed them, which continue to this day. We know that the role of farmers in the settler-colonial invasion has a direct and ongoing impact on that dispossession, as settler-colonialism is a 'structure' and 'not an event'.¹ In our considerations of relations with the state around land and water use, settler farmers acknowledge we are also in relations with the Land and all on it, including the Traditional Custodians of the unceded Lands on which we farm. As we fight for autonomy and self-determination to enact agroecology on and with the lands we farm, so we commit to the struggle for First Peoples' self-determination and right to Country.

Agroecology is a science, practice and movement that incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems with ecological principles to enable ecologically-sound and equitable food systems. This concept underpins the Peoples' Food Plan recommendations for land and water policy in response to the consequences of the ongoing loss of small-scale farmers and need to support them for their critical work in combating climate change, protecting and promoting biodiversity and social justice, and respecting First Peoples' sovereignty. Key issues identified in regards to planning provisions for land and water use include:

- Land access and secure tenure
- Protecting agricultural land
- Urban and peri-urban food production
- Scale-appropriate planning controls

Although the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) assure the rights of First Peoples and smallholders to secure tenure and access to land managed by communities as commons, these rights are not upheld in the colonial state of Australia in 2023. Where the UN has long recognised the significant role played by First Peoples and peasants in maintaining biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, Australian land and water use policy does not reflect this, and in fact supports increasing consolidation of ownership and management by the most

¹ Wolf, 1999

damaging industrial actors. At the same time that legislation allows the wealthiest industries to tighten control over agricultural land, it sells even more off to wealthy individuals as governments allow peri-urban encroachment of lifestyle blocks and outdated fortress conservation approaches to re-zoning farmland and excluding even agroecological stewards from healing Country while farming in harmony with Nature. Finally, the cognitive dissonance that leads governments to 'protect' land via the planning provisions from those it privileges in ownership leads to perverse outcomes for smallholders, who face significant barriers to farming and rural industry on smallholdings due to scale-inappropriate planning controls on everything from raising pastured pigs and poultry and growing lettuce for the local farmers' market to building micro-abattoirs and opening farm gate shops.

The Peoples' Food Plan advocates for devolving decision making to First Peoples, smallholders and local communities to increase autonomy and self determination - rights assured in UNDRIP and UNDROP. It also advocates a scaled approach to planning controls that takes into account the low risk to environment, amenity and public health of human-scale systems exchanging or selling through direct supply chains to local communities. The case studies offer a range of community and policy approaches to protecting agricultural land, from the introduction of local taxes to enable shires to purchase and maintain valuable agricultural land and protect it from inappropriate development, to the establishment of agrarian trusts by communities committed to keeping land in commons. There is also an example of a community working positively with their local council to ensure the right to grow and exchange nutritious food is upheld by growing on neighbourhood verges (or nature strips), with consideration for pedestrian and vehicle safety through shared decision making. Looking overseas, the example of SAFER in France offers a more progressive and proactive level of government intervention that enables communities to make decisions on whether, how and who can buy and farm on agricultural land.

Key peoples' policy recommendations*:

Local and State Governments:

- Ensure that consultation on land-use and water policy is conducted on the terms set by Traditional Custodians' communities, and with appropriate community representatives.
- Integrate food system thinking into planning frameworks, policies and implementation (look to examples in Canada², Brazil³, and Ecuador⁴)

Federal Government:

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

² Food Secure Canada, 2015

³ Raffay, 2012

⁴ Giunta, 2013

- 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.
- Fund state and local governments to create public land banks for agroecological production.

**Please refer to the Right to Food section of AFSA's Peoples' Food Plan for a full list of policy recommendations for local, state and federal government.*

Case studies

Food Resilient Neighbourhood Project (Brisbane)

In Brisbane, the Food Resilient Neighbourhood Project⁵ aims to empower the community to grow healthy locally-grown food in public spaces that is not reliant on big corporations. Led by local government, the Project started in response to food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with one of the first projects being a collective of 3 seedling hubs in the inner city suburbs of West End and Highgate Hill. The seedling hubs are a space where local communities can swap locally-germinated seedlings and seeds without having to go through large-scale commercial plant suppliers. Further to this, Brisbane City Council allows local residents to plant verge gardens to grow food, on the condition that they do not block pedestrian paths or parked cars, and do not interfere with underground pipelines. The purpose of verge gardening is to enable communities to grow their own food to increase equitable access to fresh produce, as well as reclaim or repurpose public space.

Open Spaces Sales Tax (Boulder, Colorado, USA)

An Open Spaces Sales Tax⁶ was introduced in Boulder County (Colorado, USA) through which residents have approved various sales taxes to support the preservation of open space purchases, the management and conservation of native habitats, and support of recreational opportunities. The Open Space Sales Tax is a sales tax of 0.25% (25¢ on a \$100 purchase).

To date, approved tax measures by residents include:

- 1993: 0.25% sales tax through 2009

⁵ Sri, 2020

⁶ Boulder County, n.d.

- 1999: Extension of 0.25% sales tax through 2019
- 2004: 0.1% sales tax, of which 0.05% is perpetual and 0.05% is through 2024
- 2008: extension of existing 0.1% tax through 2029
- 2010: 0.15% sales tax through 2030
- 2016: extension of 0.125% sales tax (half of 0.25%) through 2034

Money raised by these sales taxes supports acquisition of open space by allowing the county to purchase new properties as well as pay off bonds that enabled earlier open space purchases. The funds also pay for land used for sustainable agriculture, and programs that help preserve habitat, provide educational and recreational programs and create and maintain trails.