



Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance Peoples' Food Plan

Technology

Executive summary

Technology is seen as a solution to many things, not the least of which includes feeding the world, increasing food production, producing food in the cities, and solving the problems of industrial food production in the monoculture farming of animals and vegetables. However, globally there is already enough food produced to feed an estimated 11 billion people, and 70 percent of this is produced by smallholders with just 30 percent of agricultural land. By contrast, industrial agriculture produces just 30 percent of the world's food with a staggering 70 percent of land.¹ Rather than promoting technocratic false solutions to problems in the food system, we should instead: reduce waste by producing food closer to where it is consumed and distributing it in alternative routes to the industrial supply chain; promote diversity in food production, processing and distribution; decentralise and move away from chemical-intensive farming; and address governance barriers to equitable distribution of food.

Global North governments and corporations promote high tech (false) solutions that further entrench inequality and the centralisation of production and distribution. These include: lab meat as a solution to growing demands for meat, hydroponics and other intensification methods growing in response to the need to feed cities, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to reduce the need for pesticides in plants, and the digitalisation of agriculture. They serve a means to increase the efficiency and productivity of already wealthy farmers/corporate farms. They are not scale neutral, producing greater benefit for those who have greater means to invest.

In addition to applying a social lens to the development or implementation of new technologies, we must also adhere to the precautionary principle in refusing to put profit before the planet and people. This requires new forms of governance of which we support technology justice, putting control and decision making power with First Peoples, smallholders and local communities, and respecting privacy and autonomy.

¹ AFSA et al., 2022

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs), including foods labelled as plant-based meat alternatives, are another arm of the technocratic fixes pedalled by corporations. Governments must regulate the sale and promotion of UPFs as they continue to erode: our health, UPFs are a major cause of numerous non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which lead Australia's cause of mortality,² approximately 40 per cent of an Australian adults dietary intake now consists of UPFs³; our environment, with unnecessary packaging waste and commodity inputs that pollute the agroecosystems they were grown in; and our cultural and social connections to food.

Key peoples' policy recommendations*:

Local and State Governments:

- Promote transparent agricultural data governance that ensures equal rights for First Peoples, small-scale farmers and fishers through the following considerations:
 - Agroecology provides the framework for innovations that should be promoted, enabled and supported by public policies, financing and responsible investments to ensure sustained development and evolution of agroecological innovations and practices by small-scale farmers.
 - Recognise, support and promote farmer's innovations and agroecological practices, particularly involving indigenous and traditional knowledge systems, harnessing endogenous capacities and responding to local needs and situations, as already enshrined in UNDROP and UNDRIP.
 - Small-scale farmers should have access to, control and ownership over digital technologies and data in agriculture.
- Fund smartphones for farmers so they can access information such as weather forecasts and open source e-commerce platforms.
- Regulate to address threats and the adverse consequences of application of digital technologies in agriculture which:
 - Take away farmer's control over data and information on their fields and practices
 - Violation of privacy and community rights over data and information pertaining to farmers' practices and innovations
 - Further consolidation of control and power of corporations over food and agriculture through IPR and control over Big Data on impacts of digitalisation on the environment, biodiversity, genetic resources and the climate
 - Undermine farmer's access, control and rights over seeds and breeds resulting from digitalisation of agricultural genetic resources.
- Provide funding to farmers' organisations to survey members' aspirations and needs to farm agroecologically and connect to local value chains and markets, which may include digital connectivity and technologies;

² GBD 2019 Australia Collaborators, 2023

³ Marchese et al., 2022

Federal Government:

- Enact legislation to ensure First Peoples' knowledge and seed is protected under Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP);
- Prohibit monopoly control over digital tech platforms, and promote public-private-farmers partnerships.
- Regulate to address threats and the adverse consequences of application of digital technologies in food and agriculture systems which:
 - Take away farmer's and local communities' control over data and information on their fields and practices
 - Violation of privacy and community rights over data and information pertaining to First Peoples' and farmers' practices and innovations
 - Further consolidation of control and power of corporations over food and agriculture through IPR and control over Big Data on impacts of digitalisation on the environment, biodiversity, genetic resources and the climate
 - Undermine First Peoples' and farmer's access, control and rights over seeds and breeds resulting from digitalisation of agricultural genetic resources.
- Introduce a Universal Basic Income (UBI).
- Amend food labelling standards to include Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) ingredients;
- Establish a Fund to allow simple and efficient compensation for losses suffered by non-GM landholders whose land is contaminated by GM crops, seed, or other GM material;
- Make GM seed and plant merchants responsible to compensate landholders when GM contamination occurs, by requiring GM merchants to pay a levy on seed sales into the Fund;
- Increase regulation to limit GMOs until rigorous, peer-reviewed research is undertaken to determine the health and ecological impacts of GMOs
- Invest in significant upgrades to the NBN to ensure farmers, agricultural workers and other rural workers have reliable, consistent and fast access to the internet; and
- Enact legislation that protects farmers and other agricultural workers from being exploited by agribusiness technologies, including: data mining and privacy breaches; tracking workers' productivity and efficiency; access to financial, legal and other personal records, and loss of right to repair.

**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

Open Food Network

The Open Food Network is a not-for-profit organisation building a new food system that is fair, local and transparent. It does this through its online database which allows eaters to search for diverse,

independent shops for seasonal, local food across Australia. Its open source platform enables an ethical supply chain which efficiently connects 1,594 wholesalers, food hubs and shops to eaters across Australia. The Open Food Network platform is also used all over the world. To name a few, you can find local instances in France, connecting 2270 Shops and Food hubs to eaters, The United States and Canada connecting 935 and 633 shops respectively and the United Kingdom connecting 2305 shops to eaters.

It serves as a direct response to the centralised production and distribution systems which large corporations promote as their 'technology fix' to get food from farms to people. Open Food addresses the vulnerability of such globalised neoliberal systems with its own, one which prioritises the access and ownership of the local communities running the food infrastructure. Rather than seek to control local producers with food quality and regulatory burdens, they provide resources and run events and projects which help community enterprises thrive. Such projects include piloting a brokering service to help farmers sell their seasonal gluts and reduce crop wastage,⁴ building capacity across Victorian food hubs,⁵ and co-designing rural land management and food economy strategies with the Nillumbik, Victoria.⁶

Mexico restricts GMO corn to safeguard local food sovereignty

In Mexico, government support against GMOs has been strengthened in recent times, as it moves to ban genetically modified corn and glyphosate herbicide. Mexico's proposed GM corn restrictions cite increased commitment to better protect public health and the environment. This includes the phase out of glyphosate (a herbicide found in commonly produced and sold AgChems) over three years, which is being banned as part of a public health law now making its way through the legislature. The glyphosate phaseout is reiterated in a new decree with a deadline of March 2024, enabling effective response from farmers where usage has declined steadily in the last two years. The government has also taken actions to address Mexico's rise in obesity and non-communicable diet-related diseases, enacting a strong labelling requirement for foods high in salt, fats, and sugars.⁷

⁴ <https://about.openfoodnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Whole-Crop-Purchasing-Project-Report-2022.pdf>

⁵ <https://about.openfoodnetwork.org.au/project/building-capacity-across-victorian-food-hubs/>

⁶ <https://about.openfoodnetwork.org.au/project/nillumbik-sustaining-land-sustaining-people-project/>

⁷ <https://foodtank.com/news/2023/02/science-precaution-and-mexicos-gmo-corn-restrictions/>