Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to Developing a New Tasmanian Agriculture Strategy

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
Tasmanian Government

Submitted to:
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We thank the Tasmanian Government for initiating consultation on developing a new Tasmanian agricultural strategy. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission, as well as all further opportunities to participate in development and implementation of the strategy. 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 Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance[1] (AFSA) is a farmer- and First-Peoples-led civil society organisation working for socially just and ecologically sound food and farming systems. We centre the voices of First Peoples, small-scale food producers, and local communities in decision making.

AFSA connects small-scale producers for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, advocates for fair access to local markets and infrastructure, and pushes for scale-appropriate regulation at all levels of government.

We are part of a strong global food sovereignty movement through our membership in La Vía Campesina, Urgenci, and the IPC for Food Sovereignty, and we support the Australasian delegate to the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism at the UN.

Our vision is for agroecology-oriented farms to thrive, producing nutritious food through short, fair supply chains that protect human and planetary health. This includes recognising and promoting First Peoples' knowledges and custodianship of Country, and committing to decolonial futures for food and agriculture.

Executive summary

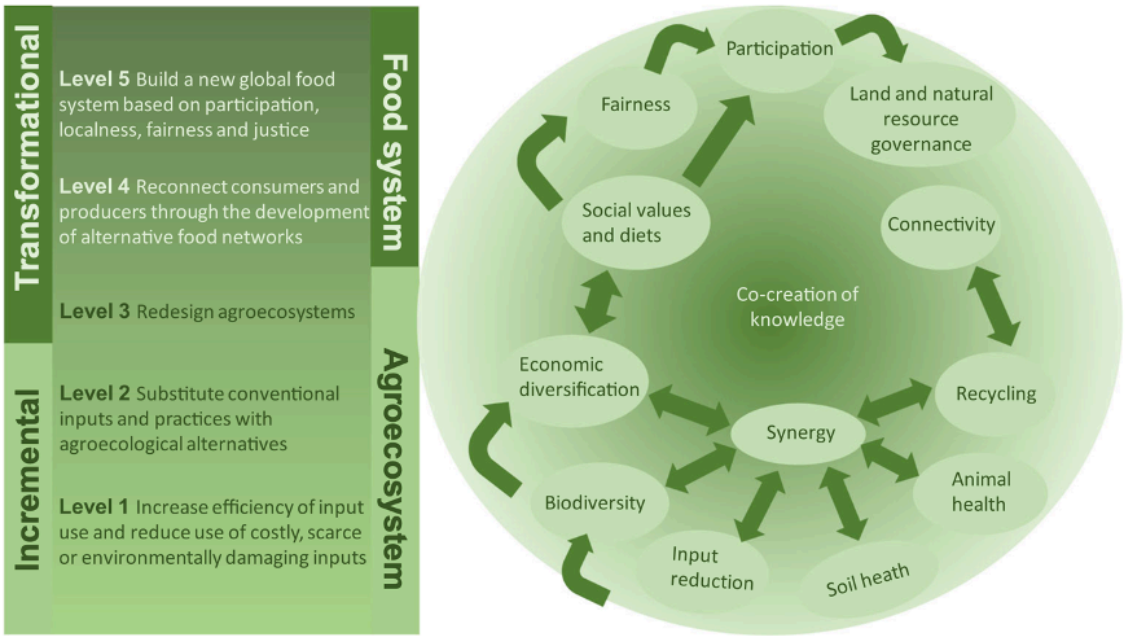
AFSA thanks the Tasmanian Government for the opportunity to provide this submission to Developing a New Tasmanian Agriculture Strategy. As a farmer-led organisation, AFSA represents nearly 400 small-scale food producers and allies who are fighting for social and ecological justice for people, animals and ecosystems.

Instead of false solutions promoted by corporates and investors, AFSA calls for agroecology as the *real* solution to ethical and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems, which address 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.[2]

[1] Formerly Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, name changed in October 2025
[2] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023

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



Against the crises driven by profit-focused, export-oriented agriculture, localisation and curbing corporate power offer real antidotes to feeding people under climate volatility and the threats of intensive monocultures in global markets. The COVID-19 pandemic, biodiversity destruction, and climate change reveal the fragility of a globalised and corporatised food system, and should prompt policymakers to consider how agricultural policy should support localisation to safeguard food security[3] rather than bolster wealth accumulation.

For a major change toward sustainability in food systems, there is a need to promote participation of and collaboration between farmers' organisations, food justice and consumer advocates, public authorities, and non-human actors and infrastructures, to ensure access for civil society to the decision-making process.[4] 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.[5]

In this submission, AFSA has demonstrated this need by ordering its recommendations from most transformational to the incremental changes required right now, to address the most dysfunctional aspects of the food system and broader social security needs. Our position is that both these approaches are

[3] Carey, R., Murphy, M., & Alexandra, L. (2020). COVID-19 highlights the need to plan for healthy, equitable and resilient food systems. Cities & Health, 5(sup1), S123–S126. https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2020.1791442
[4] González de Molina et al. 2019; Marsden, Hebinck, and Mathijs 2018
[5] 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

needed if a Tasmanian agricultural strategy aims to achieve food security, while promoting social, ecological and economic justice. When we discuss resilience in the context of food and agriculture systems, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a marker of instability in demonstrating how vulnerable the food system is to collapse. However, this also asserts that a return to a pre-pandemic system is the solution, when in fact, our food system has been in crisis for decades.

> The dominant approach to resilience tends to focus on restoring supply chains or bouncing back to pre-crisis conditions. This framing assumes the current system is worth preserving. But if the status quo is already unjust and unsustainable, what exactly are we trying to bounce back to[6]?

We urge the Tasmanian Government to reenvision what a socially-just and ecologically-sound food system can look like through the right balance of incremental and transformative changes. We need to act now and look forward, rather than look backwards and maintain the status quo of social inequalities and ecological ruin.

Context

For decades, small-scale farmers have been sidelined in agricultural policy while large agribusinesses have enjoyed priority access and influence. This imbalance has produced opaque decision-making and regulations that burden small producers and favour export-oriented, industrial systems. Public investment overwhelmingly supports large commodity supply chains and multinational interests, rather than decentralised infrastructure, regional markets, or farmer-led solutions that build food security and community resilience.

Australia's productivist agenda—"get big or get out"—has entrenched high-input, export-driven agriculture. Although Australia produces enough food to feed 80 million people, one in six Australians faces food insecurity, and our precious soil and water are increasingly extracted for export markets, often for the benefit of a very small number of operators. Meanwhile, farmers face rising debt, declining soil health, and vulnerability to climate shocks, while agribusiness input and processing companies capture the profits.

This model reflects global corporate influence over food systems, prioritising scale, uniformity, and trade over local sovereignty, farmer livelihoods, and ecological health. Food sovereignty offers a different pathway—centred on local markets, cooperative models, Indigenous custodianship and self determination, agroecology, and democratic control of food and land systems.

[6] https://rooted-magazine.org/2025/09/05/reimagining-resilience-building-just-and-equitable-food-systems/

Developing a New Tasmanian Agriculture Strategy

1. How can government and industry work together to improve the competitiveness of Tasmanian agriculture to reach the AgriVision 2050 target?

AFSA recognises the ambition to strengthen Tasmanian agriculture and ensure a sustainable future for farming in lutruwita/Tasmania. However, the pursuit of the AgriVision 2050 target—to grow farm-gate value to $10 billion—must be grounded in democratic, ecological, and socially-just principles if it is to genuinely benefit Tasmanians, farmers, and Country.

Competitiveness cannot simply mean scaling for exports or chasing global commodity markets. True resilience and competitiveness emerge when food systems prioritise ecological health, local markets, and community food security, ensuring that Tasmanian farmers are not beholden to volatile international prices, input-dependent production systems, or concentrated corporate supply chains. The Tasmania's salmon industry is an example of how export-driven scaling can undermine ecological health and community resilience: mass mortalities and disease outbreaks, chronic benthic and water-quality impacts in places like Macquarie Harbour, and documented threats to endemic species reveal that prioritising global markets risks local food security, coastal ecosystems, and small producers.

Government and industry can work together by shifting focus from extractive growth to **agroecology,** which keeps value in local communities and restores ecosystems. A food-sovereignty-aligned competitiveness strategy would include:

Support Farmer-Led Agroecological Transitions

- Prioritise investment in agroecology, low-input systems, biodiversity, and soil regeneration
- Fund farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange programs and on-farm participatory research
- Incentivise diversified and mixed farming systems that improve ecological and economic resilience

Democratise Decision-Making & Value Chains

- Embed First Peoples' rights and leadership in land, water, and food policy
- Ensure small-scale and direct-market farmers have representation in policy design
- Support cooperative models, local processing facilities, and community-owned infrastructure

Strengthen Local Food Economies

- Prioritise local and regional markets before export-led growth
- Invest in local distribution, cold-chain logistics, and micro-abattoirs
- Expand procurement programs for Tasmanian schools, hospitals, and public institutions

Guarantee Fair Work & Farmer Viability

- Improve access to and secure tenure on land for new and young farmers
- Ensure strong labour rights, pathways for migrant workers, and dignified rural employment

- Shift subsidies and incentives toward enterprises that demonstrate fair work and ecological stewardship

Prioritise Public-Good Research & Innovation

- Support open-source, community-driven agricultural research—not proprietary tech and GM solutions
- Invest in climate-adaptation research rooted in Traditional Ecological Knowledge and farmer practice
- Maintain public ownership of agricultural science and extension capacity

Protect the Foundations of Production

- Guarantee long-term land and water security through protection of agricultural land from development pressures
- Prioritise climate resilience, carbon sequestration in soils, and regenerative grazing and cropping systems

By working together through a **food sovereignty and agroecological lens**, Government and industry can build a Tasmanian agriculture sector that is competitive because it is:

- resilient in the face of climate change
- rooted in community wellbeing and farmer livelihoods
- regenerative and self-reliant rather than input-dependent
- governed for the public good, not private accumulation

Tasmania has a unique opportunity to lead Australia in building a farming future where prosperity is shared, Country is healed, and all people have the right and ability to feed themselves with dignity. Reaching 2050 is not just about reaching $10 billion—it is about safeguarding food, land, culture, and care for generations to come.

2. What success factors are contributing to the profitability of your farm business or industry?

For our farms and the diversified small-scale sector we represent, profitability is not driven by volume growth, scale, or export access — it is built through **control over supply chains**, fair market access, transparent relationships, and the ability to retain value within farming communities rather than surrender it to corporate intermediaries. This can be seen in different Tasmanian produce collectives that connect growers directly to Hobart collection points, keeping value local, or Launceston being designated as Australia's "City of Gastronomy", which champions artisan producers, fair market access and community-embedded food networks.

Key success factors include:

2.1 Direct and Relationship-Based Markets: Selling through direct channels — farm-gate shops, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA), and restaurant partnerships — ensures farmers receive a

fair return for their labour and stewardship, rather than competing in price-suppressive commodity markets. This strengthens trust, food quality, and community connection.

2.2 Localised, Farmer-Controlled Processing & Distribution: Access to decentralised infrastructure — such as micro-abattoirs, on-farm processing facilities, community packing sheds, and cooperative logistics — allows farmers to retain value, meet customer demand, and avoid bottlenecks where large processors and transport companies dictate terms, timelines, and prices.

2.3 Diverse Production and Revenue Streams: Mixed farming systems, value addition (e.g. on-farm butchery, grain milling), agro-tourism that is ancillary to the farming use, and diverse market channels ensure resilience to climate, market fluctuations, and supply chain disruptions — a key lesson from COVID-era shortages.

2.4 Agroecological Practices That Reduce Input Dependence: Regenerative and low-input systems reduce exposure to volatile global input markets for fertiliser, feed, chemicals, and fuel — keeping money on farms rather than flowing to multinational suppliers. Profitability is rooted in soil health, biodiversity, and farmer knowledge, not purchased inputs.

2.5 Farmer-Led Knowledge Sharing & Collaboration: Profitability grows where farmers have access to peer networks, cooperative models, shared equipment, and open knowledge — not top-down technology packages. Participatory learning and farmer-to-farmer exchange strengthen practical capability and avoid dependency on costly proprietary systems.

2.6 Values-Aligned Consumer Demand: Tasmanians increasingly seek ethical, local, ecologically-produced food. Being able to tell our story — stewardship of Country, fair labour, biodiversity, community care — is a competitive strength and a source of stable demand.

Our success comes from **independence from extractive supply chains** and **embeddedness in local, democratic, and resilient food economies**. When farmers can control processing, distribution, marketing, and pricing — rather than being price-takers in concentrated, vertically-integrated systems — we are able to thrive economically while regenerating land, supporting workers, and feeding our communities.

3. What are the barriers to productivity and growth for your industry or business?

For small- to medium-scale, agroecology-oriented and direct-market farmers, the greatest barriers are not on-farm capability or innovation — they are **structural barriers created by policy, infrastructure gaps, market concentration, and regulatory systems built around industrial agriculture**. In Tasmania, small- and medium-scale farmers often operate within systems designed for industrial agriculture rather than regional resilience. Market concentration in the vegetable and dairy sectors limits bargaining power, as a handful of processors and supermarkets set prices and dictate contract terms. Many small producers face prohibitive costs meeting food-safety and export-grade regulations tailored to large operations, while lacking equitable access to cold-chain infrastructure and regional processing facilities. These barriers constrain farmgate profitability and innovation, reinforcing dependence on vertically integrated corporate buyers. As

highlighted by Tasmanian growers' networks and the Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association, fairer infrastructure investment and proportionate regulation are essential for sustaining diversified, community-based farming systems that keep value circulating locally rather than extracted by intermediaries.

3.1 Centralised, corporate-controlled processing & logistics: Limited access to appropriately scaled abattoirs, dairy and grain processing, storage, and distribution forces small producers into systems designed for export-scale throughput. This creates price-taker conditions, and vulnerability to corporate scheduling, cost structures, and gatekeeping.

3.2 Regulatory frameworks designed for industrial scale: Food safety, planning, and biosecurity regulations are often **one-size-fits-all**, imposing compliance costs and administrative burdens disproportionate to small and diversified farms — despite lower inherent risk and strong traceability in local, short supply chains.

3.3 Lack of investment in decentralised infrastructure: Funding overwhelmingly flows to large agribusiness and commodity supply chains, while farmer-led and community-owned infrastructure — micro-processing, cooperative storage, small abattoirs, seed networks — remains under-supported, hindering local value retention and regional food sovereignty.

3.4 Access to land and secure tenure: Rising land prices, speculative investment, and consolidation limit opportunities for new and young farmers and reduce diversity in farming landscapes — entrenching scale rather than fostering resilient regional food systems.

3.5 Market concentration and corporate dominance: Upstream and downstream concentration — inputs, processing, supermarket duopoly power — suppress farm-gate returns, erode farmer autonomy, and direct value away from communities toward multinational balance sheets.

3.6 Policy focus on exports over local food security: A growth narrative centred on volume and global markets overshadows domestic access, regional resilience, and food-system self-reliance — despite rising climate and economic risks.

Our barriers are not a lack of ambition, capability, or innovation. They are **system-level constraints that prioritise scale, export-orientation, and corporate control** over community food security, farmer viability, and ecological stewardship.

Removing these barriers requires:

- Tailored regulation for small-scale, direct-market producers
- Investment in decentralised processing & distribution
- Worker and land access programs designed for small farms
- Public R&D in agroecology and participatory farmer-led research
- Policy settings that value local markets and resilience, not just export growth

Tasmania can unlock substantial food system value by **enabling farmer autonomy, regional infrastructure, and local market development**, fostering a resilient, diverse, and community-enabled agricultural economy.

4. What are the biggest challenges or opportunities for agricultural research and innovation over the next 5-10 years?

From a food sovereignty and agroecology perspective, the coming decade presents both profound risks and extraordinary opportunities for reimagining agricultural research and innovation in Tasmania. The central challenge is to ensure that public research serves **the public good**, not private profit — empowering farmers, regenerating Country, and building resilient, localised food systems.

Key Challenges

Corporate capture of research agendas

Agricultural R&D has become increasingly shaped by corporate partnerships and proprietary technology models that prioritise export competitiveness, chemical inputs, and intellectual property over farmer-led, open-source innovation. This limits the independence of research institutions and restricts knowledge access for small and medium-scale farmers.

Narrow definitions of "innovation"

Innovation is too often equated with technological adoption — precision farming, gene editing, AI, and automation — rather than **social, ecological, and cooperative innovation** that strengthens community resilience, fair livelihoods, and local market systems.

Marginalisation of small-scale and agroecological producers

Research priorities and funding tend to focus on large commodity sectors, leaving smaller, diversified producers without data, extension support, or pathways to apply research outcomes suited to their scale or ethics of production.

Disconnection from Traditional Ecological Knowledge and farmer knowledge

Current research rarely integrates **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)** and the experiential knowledge of farmers who have developed regenerative practices on the ground. This undermines the diversity of knowledges needed for climate adaptation and resilient farming systems.

Climate crisis and biodiversity destruction

The accelerating impacts of climate change and biodiversity destruction demand a fundamental reorientation of agricultural R&D — from yield maximisation to **resilience, mitigation, adaptation, and regeneration** — guided by ecological limits and custodianship of Country.

5. What drives farmers and agribusiness to invest in agricultural research and innovation?

Farmers and agribusiness invest in agricultural research and innovation for fundamentally different reasons, shaped by their scale, market orientation, and relations with land, community and capital. Understanding these differences is critical to developing R&D that supports the public good rather than deepening corporate control.

Small-scale agroecology-oriented farmers are driven by care for Country, community and collective autonomy. Their innovations focus on low input dependence, circularity and nutrient cycling on farms, supply chain control, accessing and sharing knowledge horizontally in farmer-to-farmer exchanges, and building resilience to cope with climate change. Their research investments are time, labour, and community-based, not capital intensive or proprietary.

By contrast, large agribusinesses are driven by profitability, market competitiveness and technological advantages (all of which put downward pressure on workers, decreasing the quality of working conditions and/or eradicating jobs in agriculture). Their innovations focus on yield maximisation and cost reduction, which often increases input dependency while externalising environmental and social impacts.

6. In what ways can government help support farmers and agribusiness with the uptake and adoption of research?

For research to genuinely serve farmers, communities, and Country, Government must move away from a top down 'technology transfer' approach and attitude, and instead support participatory, local knowledge exchange. The most effective support comes when farmers are treated not as 'end users' of research, but as co-creators of knowledge and knowledgeable custodians of the land they steward.

As such, AFSA recommends that the Tasmanian Government:

- Develop and support transdisciplinary research conducted through platforms that foster co-learning between practitioners and researchers, and horizontal dissemination of experience among practitioners (e.g. farmer-to-farmer networks, communities of practice and agroecological lighthouses)
- Increase investment in research and development to support programs in agroecology
- Require agricultural research funded by government grants to serve the public good, such as research to enhance animal welfare, and reduce environmental and public health impacts and risks.

7. Are the RD&E Principles still relevant to guide prioritisation and allocation of Tasmanian Government funding for publicly-funded research and innovation?

AFSA welcomes the Tasmanian Government's commitment to supporting research, development, and extension (RD&E) in agriculture. However, we urge a recalibration of the investment strategy to ensure that public funds truly serve the public good, strengthen democratic control of food systems, and foster agroecological pathways to resilient, just, and sovereign food systems in lutruwita/Tasmania. The status quo of RD&E investment will see the exploitation and extraction of key agricultural resources and knowledge from Tasmania, and not create the long term transformation of the Tasmanian food and agriculture sector that will provide a more equitable, fairer and sustainable benefits into the future.

Productivity cannot be narrowly defined as growth in output or export value. True productivity in a climate- and cost-of-living-challenged world must be measured in terms of ecological regeneration, food security for Tasmanians, fair livelihoods for farmers and food workers, and the protection of Indigenous sovereignty and custodianship of Country. Public RD&E investment must prioritise farmers and communities over corporate interests, and ensure that knowledge remains accessible rather than privatised through patents or proprietary technologies.

We support investment across the four nominated areas—industry development and sustainable production; capability training; innovation; and international linkages—but firmly assert that all four must be grounded in:

- **Agroecology and sustainable food system transitions**, centring soil health, biodiversity, circular nutrient flows, water stewardship, and climate resilience
- **Democratic participation and farmer- and First Peoples-led research**, including small-scale and diversified growers, First Peoples, and culturally appropriate knowledge systems
- **Localised and community-embedded economies**, prioritising regional food security and community-owned infrastructure and processing capacity
- **Fair work and livelihoods**, ensuring that training and capability investment builds pathways for young farmers, farm workers, and migrant labour within just employment conditions
- **Knowledge sovereignty**, ensuring research outputs remain open-source and accessible to farmers, researchers, and the wider public.

To deliver meaningful outcomes, the strategy must rebalance away from export-oriented growth and technological fixes that risk deepening dependence on external inputs, debt, and global commodity volatility. Government investment should strongly back farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, participatory innovation, regenerative grazing and cropping systems, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge led by Traditional Custodians.

We call for transparent, community-centred processes in reviewing investment priorities, and for genuine representation of small-scale producers and First Nations knowledge holders in all advisory and decision-making bodies.

lutriwita/Tasmania has the opportunity to lead Australia in building a food system rooted in care for Country, farmers, workers, and communities. With a clear commitment to food sovereignty and agroecology, public RD&E investment can help create a future where farming livelihoods thrive, ecosystems regenerate, and all Tasmanians have the right and ability to nourish themselves from land and waters governed for the common good.

8. Do any of the RD&E principles need to change? If so, how?

AFSA covers this in the previous and following response.

9. Are there any important RD&E principles missing and, if so, what are they?

We contend that the RD&E Investment Principles need amendment to meet the challenges of today and the future. See the original principles followed by AFSA's proposed shift in focus towards food sovereignty and agroecology.

RD&E Investment Principles
The following principles guide the prioritisation and allocation of Tasmanian Government funding to agricultural RD&E activities:
1. Focus on sustainable productivity growth for Tasmanian farmers and agribusinesses.
2. High quality agricultural RD&E likely to deliver a net social benefit that otherwise would not be undertaken.
3. Alignment with Tasmanian Government policy.
4. Clear impact pathway articulating a plausible and feasible connection from RD&E investment to farm-level impact, including provision for extension and evaluation.
5. Partnership approach for industry engagement along the value-chain, appropriate levels of co-investment and maximisation of adoption and impact.
6. Transparent reporting that enables assessment of outcomes and impacts against the Government's RD&E investment

RD&E Investment Principles with a Food Sovereignty Approach

1. Focus on resilience and equitable prosperity for Tasmanian farmers, communities, and Country.
2. Public good agricultural RD&E for the common benefit.
3. Alignment with Tasmanian Government policy that upholds First Peoples' sovereignty, local food security, climate resilience, and the right of Tasmanians to define their own food and agriculture systems.
4. Participatory pathways from research to real-world impact from the farm level to landscape, regional, and global levels.
5. Partnership approach that prioritises participation of First Peoples, small-scale farmers, and community-controlled processing and distribution infrastructure.
6. Democratic and transparent reporting for public accountability.

10. What further opportunities are there for red tape reduction, streamlining or harmonisation for your industry or agriculture more broadly?

AFSA calls for **scale-appropriate regulation** that supports smallholders and independent producers, acknowledging the environmental, social, and economic risks of large-scale industrial agriculture and long supply chains. Through this agricultural strategy, Tasmania has an opportunity to lead the nation by ensuring its planning and regulatory frameworks genuinely enable **diverse, decentralised, and community-controlled food systems**.

Pastured Livestock

Tasmania's planning system should clearly distinguish **pastured and regenerative livestock farming** from industrial intensive operations. These systems differ profoundly in their ecological impact, animal welfare outcomes, and community benefits, and should not be burdened by one-size-fits-all definitions such as 'intensive animal husbandry.'

AFSA welcomes Tasmania's current approach of minimal regulatory burden for small-scale poultry producers and urges similar **supportive planning provisions for pastured pig farms**, modelled on NSW's 2022 reforms. This would recognise their low risk to environmental and amenity.

Horticulture

Tasmania's vibrant small-scale market gardens are critical to local food security, yet they face rising pressures from urban expansion, water access inequities, and scale-blind regulation. Water policy must account for **vast differences in use and impact between small mixed farms and large monocultures**, and any new food safety or environmental standards must be **proportionate to risk and scale**.

Local Processing and Value Chains

A key barrier to regional food sovereignty is the **loss of local processing infrastructure**, particularly abattoirs. AFSA has been calling for reform of the **Primary Produce Safety (Meat and Poultry) Regulations 2014** to enable **micro-abattoirs** on farms without requiring planning permits, recognising them as low-risk, essential components of resilient rural economies. This was achieved in Victoria in August 2025, with an amendment to the planning scheme that recognises rural industry–including micro-abattoirs–as an ancillary use in farming zones. On-farm and community-owned micro-abattoirs strengthen regional economies, animal welfare, and climate resilience, while keeping value in the hands of farmers and local communities.

Farm Gate Sales

Farm gate shops and direct sales outlets should be encouraged and simplified through planning reforms. These outlets reduce food miles, emissions, and waste, while improving farmer viability and community food access. Regulation should prioritise **enabling local trade** rather than constraining it.

Water

Current policy treats land and water mainly as resources for food and fibre production, with a focus on maintaining yields for export. Instead, agriculture policy should recognise that land and water are living parts of interconnected ecosystems, and that farming practices affect their quality and supply. Governments must also respect the cultural and spiritual significance of water for First Peoples and support **First Peoples' leadership in caring for land and waters.**

Governments are compelled to ensure that water governance addresses issues of access, rights and tenure from the perspective of sustainability, inclusiveness, and efficiency. The FAO notes that:

> *To a significant extent, the over abstraction of ground water reflects the incentives that users face resulting from both market and policy failures. The available enabling frameworks and guiding principles are in insufficient use and there is a paucity of responsible collective action. This is one of the root causes of groundwater depletion and degradation of aquifers, and urgent call to action is needed if trends in the state of this resource are to be reversed.*[7]

In response to these pressing concerns and known causes, the FAO's Shared Global Vision for Groundwater Governance[8] formulated an agreement between governments of the world that by 2030:

- There are appropriate and implemented legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks for groundwater that establish **public guardianship and collective responsibility**, permanent engagement of stakeholders and beneficial integration with other sectors, including other uses of the subsurface space and its resources; and,
- All major aquifer systems are properly assessed, with the resulting information and knowledge shared, making use of up-to-date communication techniques.

11. What professional development and skills training does the agricultural workforce need to remain competitive over the next 5 years?

The agricultural workforce needs professional development that builds **ecological literacy, practical agroecological skills, and community-based business capacity** rather than focusing solely on industrial efficiency or yield. **First Peoples' knowledges should be valued and promoted–led by First Peoples**–ensuring culturally informed and collaborative management of Country.

12. How can government help industry overcome the barriers to attracting the skilled workforce it needs?

In the circular bioeconomies of small-scale agroecology-oriented farming, farmers take on more supply chain roles than in the linear economy of industrial agriculture. In many if not most cases, smallholders are their own workforce, reliant mostly on family labour, or that of emerging young farmers keen to learn skills towards their own future of farming.

Livestock farmers in particular are taking on more supply chain roles, becoming butchers and more recently, slaughter people and meat inspectors, in addition to their diverse roles as delivery drivers and bookkeepers. Yet the technical skills and certificates needed for some of these roles are increasingly captured by the same vertical integration that has cost smallholders access to abattoirs, as training is only undertaken in-house and government subsidies only provided for employees of abattoirs. Government has a role to

[7] FAO, 2016
[8] FAO, 2016

play in providing subsidies for meat safety and meat processing training to address this serious skills shortage in the meat industry, and particularly to support localised, community-controlled processing.

13. What are some examples of how you and your industry are managing risk and building resilience?

AFSA members and allies are managing risk and building resilience through **diversified, localised, and community-controlled approaches** that strengthen both farm and community systems. Examples include:

- **Diversification of production** — integrating diverse and heirloom crops, heritage-breed livestock, and agroforestry to spread risk, improve soil health, and reduce dependence on external inputs and volatile markets.
- **Short, direct supply chains** — selling through farmers' markets, CSAs, co-ops, and farm gate shops to retain value on farm and buffer against disruptions in industrial logistics or fluctuations in export markets.
- **Collective infrastructure and knowledge sharing** — developing community-owned processing facilities, seed networks, and farmer-to-farmer education to keep control within local food economies.
- **Agroecological practices** — building resilience to climate extremes through soil regeneration, water retention, and biodiversity on farms.
- **Localised decision-making** — working with councils and communities to design planning and food policies that support small-scale, regenerative production.

14. How else can the Tasmanian Government support farmers and industry to plan for, manage and respond to risks?

The Tasmanian Government can best support farmers to manage risk by **investing in local, diversified, and community-controlled food systems** rather than export-driven industrial models. AFSA recommends the following actions:

- **Empower First Peoples' leadership in land and water stewardship**, recognising that cultural land management builds long-term ecological resilience.
- **Support decentralised infrastructure** such as micro-abattoirs, community food hubs, and seed banks that strengthen local supply chains and reduce vulnerability to national or global disruptions.
- **Fund on-farm water and soil conservation projects** that enhance resilience to drought, fire, and floods through regenerative land management.
- **Provide accessible grants and insurance schemes** tailored to small-scale and agroecological producers, who are often excluded from conventional risk management programs.
- **Invest in local knowledge networks and peer-to-peer exchanges** so farmers can share practical, context-specific strategies for managing environmental and market risks.

15. What natural resource management issues or opportunities will most influence Tasmanian agriculture over the next 5 years?

Over the next five years, the key natural resource management issues shaping Tasmanian agriculture will centre on **water, soil, biodiversity, and marine ecosystems** — and how they are governed. The greatest opportunities lie in recognising these as **living systems to be cared for**, not merely resources to be extracted for profit.

- **Water** – Policy must shift from maximising extraction for export crops to **protecting catchments and water quality**, ensuring sustainable use and recognising First Peoples' custodianship of waterways.
- **Soil health** – Regenerative and agroecological practices that rebuild organic matter, sequester carbon, and reduce chemical dependence will be critical to maintaining fertility and resilience.
- **Biodiversity** – Protecting and restoring on-farm and landscape biodiversity will help manage pests, stabilise ecosystems, and adapt to climate change.
- **Marine ecosystems** – Tasmania must urgently address the **ecological and social damage caused by intensive salmon farming**, including water pollution, destruction of marine habitats, and loss of community control. AFSA calls for a **transition away from industrial aquaculture** toward small-scale, ecologically managed systems that respect marine and coastal ecosystems and the communities who depend on them.
- **Climate change** – Managing fire, drought, and flooding risk requires integrated planning that prioritises **ecosystem function over yield maximisation**.
- **Land access and planning** – Protecting farmland from urban encroachment and enabling small-scale, mixed-use farming will sustain regional food production and community resilience.

16. How can government continue to support farmers and various industry sectors to be productive, profitable and sustainable?

The Tasmanian Government can best support farmers to be productive, profitable, and sustainable by **reorienting agriculture policy towards food sovereignty and agroecology** — centring people, place, and ecology over export-driven growth. AFSA recommends:

- **Invest in local value chains** — Support community-owned processing and distribution infrastructure so farmers can retain more value on farm and build local economies.
- **Fund agroecological transitions** — Provide grants and incentives for agroecology that restores soil, protects water, and builds long-term viability.
- **Support small-scale and diversified farms** — Develop scale-appropriate regulation, planning pathways, and financial assistance that recognise the low risk and high public value of smallholders.
- **Promote cooperative and collective models** — Back farmer co-ops, land trusts, and mutual aid networks that strengthen local economies and community resilience.

17. How is your industry using the Tasmanian brand?

The following case study of Bruny Island Cheese exemplifies the importance of small-scale production and processing to Tasmania's reputation as a producer of artisanal produce.

Bruny Island Cheese[9]

Founded by Nick Haddow in 2003, Bruny Island Cheese Co. was started after Nick spent 10 years working with specialist cheese makers in many different countries around the world. We are cheesemakers, farmers, bakers and brewers on the traditional Country of Lunawanna-alonnah (Bruny Island), our island home.

Our products are unique and quintessentially Tasmanian. They tell the story of the place they were made, and the people who made them. Our craft is rooted in tradition and our methods are uncompromising. Our production is small and reflects the seasonality of where we live, farm and create.

Nick is a staunch traditionalist, who recognises that great cheese was made for centuries before modern technology played a role. He believes passionately in the old way of making and maturing cheese.

"The subject of raw milk and raw milk cheese has been a hot topic for as long as I have been making cheese". Says Nick, "This debate goes to the core of the discontent much of society feels when our food gets manipulated. We feel like our autonomy is being threatened, our ability to live the life we choose, make our own decisions and be guided by our own common sense."

Because pasteurisation kills bacteria, it is the first and foremost reason countries in the West have mandatory pasteurisation laws for all commercial dairy products. It is a safety net designed to protect the lowest common denominator. However, these laws are becoming less defensible because unsafe cheese can still be made using pasteurised milk. Raw milk cheese can be made safely. It happens every day, in dozens of countries by thousands of cheesemakers.

Raw milk from healthy animals is, fundamentally, a safe food. But it is also the perfect growth medium for pathogenic bacteria. Cheese is a fermented food. Fermentation is a natural and ancient food preservation technique which can render unsafe foods safe. The primary fermentation in cheese is the conversion of lactose (the sugar in milk) into lactic acid. This job is done by bacteria, which occur naturally in milk.

In cheesemaking, post-pasteurisation contamination is a real risk. This is because pasteurisation removes much of the good bacteria as well as all the bad. The good bacteria form a natural defence in the milk, and if this defence mechanism is removed or compromised, then undesirable bacteria can become established and flourish quickly. This is why rapid acidification of pasteurised milk is an essential step in cheesemaking.

[9] From is an edited extract from MILK. MADE. WHAT'S THE STORY WITH RAW MILK CHEESE? By Nick Haddow published by Hardie Grant Books https://www.brunyislandcheese.com.au/

We were making cheese long before we had food scientists, and we are playing catch-up a bit. For the past 50 years or so we have taken a very conservative, risk-averse approach to food production – one that has shunned centuries of traditional food production and relied wholly on the point of view of science.

Fans of raw milk cheese maintain that pasteurisation destroys the natural flora in the milk which deliver so much of the character and flavour of the cheese. This is true but it is not an absolute truth. Raw milk cheese does have more character than the same cheese made on the same day from the same milk, only pasteurised.

The rich flora found in raw milk is determined by several factors: the breed, age and health of the animal, the soil, the climate, the pasture, the supplementary feed such as hay or silage, the quality of the air and water the animal consumes; to list just a few of the big ones.

Combined, these produce a milk which is true and unique to that specific animal and farm. *Terroir*. Pasteurisation removes much of that special character.

In the Australian wine industry, we now place a high value on the terroir of wines. It is what sets two wines of the same variety, vintage and region apart. Yet in Australia, it is a conundrum to me that we do not value terroir in cheese. In fact, we are legally obliged to stamp it out through pasteurisation. Yet, artisan and farmhouse cheesemakers in countries like Australia rely on this point of differentiation from more commercially produced cheeses which are becoming more and more competitive on quality and price but who are not in a position to make raw milk cheese.

These regulations must be changed; not only to recognise that raw milk cheese can be made safely but also to allow for the development of real cheese with true regional character.

18. What actions could be taken to capitalise on Tasmania's agri-food brand over the next 5 years?

Supporting smallholders as per all of the recommendations above would support and strengthen Tasmania's agri-food brand, whereas failure to do so and continuing to focus on increased yields instead of increased quality and ecological care will damage the state's brand. Nothing perhaps damages Tasmania's reputation more than its catastrophic salmon industry.

The Brand Tasmania story hinges on clean oceans, unspoilt landscapes, premium produce and ecological credibility. These recent events undermine that narrative in several ways:

- **Visual and tangible environmental damage**: Dead fish and oily waste washing up on beaches associated with Tasmania's premium tourism and export imagery contradict the notion of pristine waters.

- **Wildlife & environmental stewardship credibility**: The P. salmonis outbreak, high mortalities, and risk to the Maugean skate erode Tasmania's credentials as a leader in environmentally responsible aquaculture.
- **Premium product integrity**: Consumers who pay extra for Tasmanian salmon or associate it with 'sustainable, clean' production feel misled if large-scale aquaculture enters periods of systemic failure, disease or welfare issues.
- **Supply-chain risk & export brand damage**: High mortality and regulatory scrutiny increase reputational risk for Tasmanian seafood exports — buyers overseas may downgrade or avoid Tasmanian-sourced salmon based on perceived risk.
- **Local community trust & social licence**: Tourism, local food economies and regional employment depend on trust that farming and aquaculture are compatible with environment and place. These mortality events and regulatory failures threaten that social licence.

19. What are some other examples of how the sector is reducing emissions and adapting to climate change?

Across Australia, agroecological farmers are demonstrating real emissions reduction and climate adaptation by restoring soil health, increasing on-farm biodiversity, and shortening supply chains. For example, Transition Farm in Victoria (see case study below) operates as a closed-loop biodynamic system that builds humus and soil biota, sequestering carbon while breeding regionally adapted seeds resilient to disease and drought

These place-based practices stand in stark contrast to the industrial system's reliance on carbon credits and techno-fixes, which the People's Food Plan identifies as "false solutions" that commodify nature rather than regenerate it. Agroecology, which is rooted in Indigenous and smallholder knowledge, offers real pathways to emissions reduction through living soils, crop diversity, and decentralised food systems that reduce fossil fuel dependence.

Transition Farm[10]

Transition Farm grows Certified Bio-dynamic vegetable, herb and flower seeds regionally bred to thrive in organic, low input, growing conditions with resilient health and strong genetics. Located in the land of the Boonwurrung People of the Kulin Nation on the Mornington Peninsula, VIC, the farm works to build the life of the soil as a closed loop system, using high quality Bio-Dynamic preparations in combination with diverse green manure crops and conscious tillage practices. The resulting humus supports plants with robust root systems that guide their health based on sunlight and innerconnection - traits that are genetically preserved in the seed. Transition Farm is breeding for flavour, local adaptation, yield, exquisite beauty and disease resilience.

[10] Transition Farm https://www.transitionfarm.com/

Their growing practices are centred strongly around building soil life, using nutrients held within soil humus content, not through water soluble nutrients in the soil water. By incorporating integrated pest management and cover cropping, using intensive planting techniques and innovative market gardening tools, they grow large quantities without chemical use. Their work on soil biota and creating genetically diverse seed for surrounding farms is key to enhancing the agricultural biodiversity of the region.

20. What does climate-ready agriculture look like to you?

Agroecology ***is*** climate-ready agriculture: diverse, decentralised, and democratically governed. It restores the metabolic balance between people and nature by regenerating soil, water, and seed systems. It also enables autonomy for local communities, placing decision-making in the hands of First Peoples and local producers who have an acute, place-based understanding of changing landscapes, rather than corporations pedalling carbon and biodiversity markets as false solutions to the climate crisis.

As AFSA's updated *People's Food Plan*[11] outlines, agroecology sequesters carbon, enhances biodiversity, and rebuilds resilience to extreme weather. It rejects the false promise of lab-grown food, GMOs, and "precision agriculture," which deepen dependence on fossil fuels and data monopolies.

21. What other opportunities are there for the agricultural sector to make Tasmania a place where nothing is wasted?

The supermarket duopoly and the control it has over our food system leads to significant food waste at harvest. While both Coles and Woolworths have aligned with food charities in corporate social responsibility initiatives to redirect unsold or 'surplus' food, research has revealed a number of contradictions in this arrangement.[12] Most notably, a large volume of perfectly edible produce does not even reach the shelves (i.e. has no opportunity to be redirected to charity) due to supermarket aesthetic standards and production volumes. No transparent data on this phenomenon of 'upstream' food waste exist in Australia, but US research estimates that when this waste stream is added to retail and consumer waste, about half of all produce grown is thrown away.[13] The power of large supermarkets to shift risk – and associated wastage – onto producers is a key part of this problem. For example, a Tasmanian lettuce grower contracted to Woolworths had to plant crops to fill the supermarket's largest possible supply order, but would usually bulldoze most of it back into the ground:

> *I have to grow for the maximum size of an order, or else I lose the contract. So I grow on that scale even though the order is usually a lot less. Everything I don't sell, I have to destroy.*[14]

[11] https://afsa.org.au/updatedpeoplesfoodplan/
[12] Richards and Devin, 2017
[13] Goldenberg, 2016
[14] Knox, 2014

The demands of large retailers thereby impose false and unsustainable economies of scale, where farmers are forced to overproduce and huge volumes of perfectly edible, nutritious food is wasted. This is apparently to ensure that supermarket shelves are never empty. However, the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated that distribution models relying on long supply chains are the most vulnerable when crisis hits. Australian food supply chains have lengthened in recent years in response to consolidation policies of the dominant supermarkets, which have reduced the number of distribution centres in order to maximise economic efficiencies. Supply chain interruptions and panic buying showed up the weaknesses in the 'just in time' model, with supermarket shelves empty of many basic products such as eggs, pasta, and meat. Meanwhile, many farmers faced the sudden closure of their usual market channels, as the operations of some farmers' markets and food services businesses ceased.

For large-scale farms, this spelled disaster. For example, a watermelon grower in the Northern Territory whose market was primarily restaurants, caterers, and airlines had very little choice but to watch the melons rot in the fields. With 600 tonnes versus a pallet of produce to sell, selling direct to eaters was not an option. However, small-scale farmers had significantly greater capacity to pivot to a greater diversity of direct sales channels. Entities such as Open Food Network[15] rose to the challenge to bring a thrilling wave of new farmers onto their platform to directly connect with eaters looking for alternatives to the supermarkets. The upsurge in people seeking direct sales from farmers was breathtaking. For example, one beef producer saw an 85 to 100% increase in direct orders during the first month of the pandemic, which allowed them to cover their costs in the absence of restaurant sales and on-farm tourism operations.[16] Another organic producer went from delivering 300 produce boxes per week to 800, while others reported an initial spike in interest which steadied out to around 30% growth over time.[17] Although there were some adaptation challenges involved – for example, developing systems to support the massive increase in demand – small-scale producers were able to succeed in providing food where long supply chains failed. The pandemic demonstrated that globalised food systems are brittle and threatened, while local food systems, solidarity economies, and strongly networked and collectivised communities are strong.

Alternative distribution models, based in localised networks and drawing on close relationships between producers and consumers, present farmers with the option of greater financial security, risk sharing, and connection with the people who eat their produce, while connecting eaters with the places and people who grow their food. Given the grassroots nature of these models, good policy in this area relies less on intervention and more on enabling scale appropriate regulation that supports small-scale farmers. In addition to scale-appropriate regulation, policymakers can strengthen localised food economies by removing obstacles for small-scale food producers throughout the value chain from production and processing, right through to distribution and consumption. For example, a key barrier to resilient local food systems in Australia is a lack of processing infrastructure for small-scale farmers[18].

To achieve this, the Tasmanian State Government can:

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[15] https://openfoodnetwork.org.au/

16 Hartley and Hughes, 2020

17 Baczkowski, 2020

[18] https://afsa.org.au/media-release-afsa-responds-to-730-report-on-co2-stunning-of-pigs-calls-for-small-scale-local-abattoirs/

- **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 completed[19] 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.

22. What issues and opportunities will influence the adoption of digital technologies in Tasmanian agriculture over the next 5 years?

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, solving the problems of industrial food production

[19] See Estrada-Flores & Larsen, 2010 ; Tarkunde, 2021

in the monoculture farming of animals and vegetables. However, 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.[20] 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; 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.

High tech (false) solutions that further entrench centralised production and distribution are often touted by Global North elites, including genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to reduce the need for pesticides in plants, lab meat as a solution to growing demands for meat, hydroponics and other intensification methods growing in response to the need to feed cities. The FAO estimates that 75 percent of the world's crop diversity has been lost, due to agribusiness establishing systems that favour genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties.[21]

However, if we live in a balanced, diverse world, with local food supply chains and resilient systems, many of these technologies are not required. Currently, many technological approaches have the ability to further disrupt our long term ecosystem reliance, and are a dangerous path to progress along.

Firstly, AFSA asserts that techno-fixes violate the precautionary principle, putting profits before planet and people

The *Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Consultation* (ETC Group) monitors the impact of emerging technologies and corporate strategies on biodiversity, agriculture and human rights. The ETC Group puts forward: 'New high-risk technologies, ranging from the very small (synthetic biology, nanotechnology) to the very large (geoengineering), are rapidly developing. Their promoters promise that they hold the keys to solving climate change, world hunger, energy shortages and biodiversity loss and the precautionary principle and social and economic impacts are often ignored in the rush to deploy the latest technofix.' There is no clearer example of this than U.S. billionaire Bill Gates, whose book 'How to Avoid a Climate Disaster' details various lucrative false solutions to global food crises under a changing climate. Not coincidentally, Gates is currently the biggest private owner of farmland in the United States, having acquired 242,00 acres of agricultural land worth almost $700 million.

The precautionary principle is an approach which derived from the *World Commission on Environment and Development* (WCED) report, led by then Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem-Brundtland. The precautionary approach states that if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to either the public, or the environment – then the burden of proof is that 'not harmful' falls on those taking the action. In other words, in the absence of proof that GMOs are not harmful, the use of GMO seeds should not be used until they are proven safe. Governments should utilise policy instruments to limit GMOs, including

[20] https://grain.org/en/article/6790-peasants-still-feed-the-world-even-if-fao-claims-otherwise
[21] FAO, 2004

importing from other countries. Recently, Mexico imposed strong restrictions on GMO corn[22], despite push back from the U.S. as a main import.

Secondly, digital agriculture erodes the rights of smallholders.

The push for the digitalisation of agriculture is simply another way for multinational corporations to maintain and gain further control of food and agriculture systems. The overall trend of digitalisation is towards an integration between the companies that supply products to farmers (pesticides, tractors, drones, etc.) and those that control the flow of data. AFSA is part of a global movement of smallholders, Indigenous Peoples and civil society organisations actively campaigning against the digitalisation of agriculture, on the basis that techno-fixes will not work to solve the complex social and ecological crises from industrial agriculture, and will further erode the rights of smallholders.

On the input side, agribusiness is joining the trend of getting farmers to use their mobile phone apps to supply them with data, on the basis that they can give advice to the farmers. On the output side, big e-platform corporations can be seen buying their way into the sector and taking control of food distribution. Together, they favour the use of chemical inputs and costly machinery, as well as the production of commodities for corporate buyers, not local markets. They encourage centralisation, concentration and uniformity, and are prone to abusing their power and monopolisation. Farmers may find themselves locked into selling their farm products to just one company at a price determined by their algorithm. Farmers are sometimes contractually forbidden from repairing the equipment on their own farms.[23]

Food workers increasingly find their jobs replaced by machines such as robots and drones. They may be expected to work at the same pace as a robot, perhaps by wearing robotic devices, even though this has already been leading to more accidents in highly automated workplaces such as industrial meat processing facilities.[24] Automation is not only causing more risk in some workplaces, it is also a consequence of capitalism's constant attempt to lower costs of production that adds to the rising precariousness of employment and leaves individual workers held responsible for their own 'upskilling'. 'It is ethically dubious to assume that it is people's individual responsibility to assure that they remain competitive in these circumstances.'[25] Increasing automation, accompanied by rising unemployment, are further arguments for instituting a Universal (or Unconditional) Basic Income (UBI), which would bring a level of 'societal upskilling', meaning 'that society as a whole bears responsibility to ensure that every person can lead a dignified life.'[26]

AFSA recommends that the Tasmanian Government:

- **Ensure connectivity and access to the internet**, which is lacking in many rural areas.

[22] https://foodtank.com/news/2023/02/science-precaution-and-mexicos-gmo-corn-restrictions/

[23] GRAIN, 2021

[24] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-26/jbs-meat-company-worker-safety-four-corners/101012734

[25] Wagenaar & Prainsack 2018: 54

[26] ibid.

- **Fund smartphones for farmers** so they can access information such as weather forecasts and open source e-commerce platforms.
- **Enable the development of open source platforms for farmers to connect to local markets** to sell produce by not-for-profits like Open Food Network.
- **Embrace and sustain First Peoples', smallholders, and local communities' knowledges** and ways of being/knowing.
- **Uphold right to information as a framework to ensure communities have access to information and resources** to inform food choices and increased participation in decision-making (e.g. food origin and chemical intervention)
- **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.
- **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;

23. What information or tools do you currently rely on or need more of to anticipate new trends or changes that may impact your business or industry sector?

If the Tasmanian Government's agricultural strategy seeks to utilise technology, it must do so based on principles of technology justice.

The smallholders we represent have very basic digital needs: we need connectivity and access to the internet, which is lacking in many rural areas. Farmers need smartphones so they can access information such as weather forecasts that can help decide when to cure a harvest without risk of spoiling in unanticipated rain. And we need to be able to connect to local markets to sell our produce – not through Alibaba or other profit-driven e-commerce platforms, but through open source platforms developed by not-for-profits like Open Food Network. **Farmers don't need digitalisation, they need technology justice.**

Principles for technology justice assert the need to:

- Enable people, communities, and other-than-human life to have agency;
- Do not seek control / liberate;
- Stimulate reciprocity and greater (protected) sharing;
- Regenerate and repair relations / build and restore social tissue and all life;
- Prioritise access and ownership by people and communities to its infrastructures;
- Challenge power;
- Embrace and sustain peoples' knowledge, artefacts, and ways of being/knowing; and
- Reflect and support world-making organised by equity and justice.

Just technology practices include:

- Sharing data, sharing technology and all products of technology, rather than owning (tech as commons);
- Governing according to socially agreed upon use rights and obligations;
- Decentralising platforms and infrastructures (or finding just balance between central/decentralising);
- Visibilising all labour (human and beyond-human) in the making and use of technology; and
- Adapting technologies to pluriversal ways of knowing/being - not a "one size fits all".

Questions to assess technology parallel those that assess food sovereignty more broadly:

- Who controls? Who has power? How is power challenged?
- What is the relation to labour?
- Who makes the technologies? Who owns them?
- What do the technologies reproduce? and
- What do they transform?

24. What are the big challenges for your farm or industry sector over the next 5 years

The biggest challenges facing small-scale producers over the next five years are **structural, not technical**. They arise from policy environments designed to serve industrial agribusiness and export markets, rather than the small, place-based producers who actually feed local communities.

First and foremost is **regulatory and market capture by corporations**, which entrenches power among a few large players controlling inputs, processing, and retail. Supermarket duopolies, vertically integrated abattoirs, and corporate digital agriculture platforms limit farmers' access to fair markets, infrastructure, and data sovereignty. As AFSA's *People's Food Plan* outlines, smallholders are burdened by "scale-inappropriate" regulation — being held to the same standards as industrial operators despite vastly lower risks and much higher ecological and social benefits. This not only stifles innovation but drives farmers out of business altogether.

A second, interconnected challenge is **land access and tenure insecurity**. Small-scale producers are increasingly priced out of farmland by speculative investment, urban sprawl, and large corporate consolidation. Without access to secure, affordable land, the next generation of farmers cannot enter or remain in agriculture. The *People's Food Plan* proposes community-led solutions such as **agrarian land trusts**, **landsharing initiatives**, and **local planning reforms** that protect farmland from inappropriate development and keep land in community hands — all essential to Tasmania's food resilience.

Climate instability compounds these pressures. Smallholders are already facing erratic rainfall, water scarcity, and the impacts of industrial land use that degrade soil and biodiversity. Yet they are also the solution: agroecological producers are actively sequestering carbon, restoring ecosystems, and building resilience. However, they lack policy recognition and investment compared to industrial "climate-smart" models that commodify carbon and biodiversity.

Finally, **the digitalisation of agriculture** poses both opportunity and threat. Corporate-controlled ag-tech can strip farmers of autonomy through data extraction and dependency, while open-source, community-owned platforms like the **Open Food Network** demonstrate how digital tools can strengthen solidarity economies. Ensuring **technology justice** where farmers, not corporations, control the tools that shape their livelihoods, will be critical in the coming years.

Overcoming these challenges requires **a just transition to agroecology and food sovereignty**, centering First Peoples' and farmer leadership, democratic participation, and local control over land, water, and food systems. Without this systemic shift, Tasmania risks deepening its dependence on extractive, export-oriented models that harm both farmers and Country. With it, we can build truly climate-ready, resilient and self-determining rural communities.

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.

Examples of false solutions include: carbon and biodiversity markets; ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives and lab meat; the digitalisation of agriculture; genetic engineering; Green Economy and Blue Economy.[27]

- **Technology will feed the world.** Small-scale farmers are responsible for feeding around 70 percent of the world's population, and are able to do so without expensive technology pushed by agribusiness. The digitalisation of agriculture aims to further entrench corporate control over food systems, by insisting that farmers must adapt to emerging technologies, or be pushed out of farming. In reality, what we need to address future food security is horizontal knowledge exchanges between farmers, communities and collectives to scale-out agroecological farming and localised food systems.
- **GMOs will solve food insecurity.** Similarly to philanthropy being used as a tactic by billionaires (see: Agroecology), GMOs have been touted by agribusiness and food charities to solve food crises. In addition to the negative consequences of genetically narrowing ranges of seeds and breeds on biodiversity, GMOs impede on smallholders and Indigenous Peoples' right to land, water and seed to grow local, diverse food sources.
- **Corporate control and rights to seed.** The notion that agribusiness should hold rights and entitlements to seed to mitigate biosecurity risks should be addressed as a fallacy by governments. Controlling rights to seed impinges on the rights of Indigenous Peoples to engage with traditional knowledge and practices to grow native foods; disempowers farmers, communities and individuals from having the skills and knowledge to grow their own food; and encourages monocropping, leading to socio-ecological destruction of agricultural land and waters.
- **Sustainable intensification, precision agriculture, climate smart agriculture and other such approaches** are seen as silver bullets to food and nutrition security. However, the focus on higher productivity has not, and will not, solve current and future food requirements, and these approaches attempt to do so at the cost of healthy and biodiverse agro-ecosystems. The focus of government reforms should be on enhancing biodiversity in agricultural production and surrounding ecosystems.
- **Offsetting.** Restoration of ecosystems should not include destruction and offsetting. Restoration in itself is critical, but its benefits are undone when it is a compensation for destruction elsewhere. Species and ecosystems may be treated as commensurable and substitutable (fungible) in the economic value terms of the capitalist economy, but in reality they are incommensurable and irreplaceable. Their individual demise represents real ecological consequences.
- **Nature based solutions.** We reject the notion that nature is capital, promoted through so-called nature-based solutions (NBS) to enhance biodiversity. A more realistic term for these approaches

[27] https://focusweb.org/false-solutions-instead-of-just-solutions/

would be nature-based dispossessions, where the rights of smallholders and First Peoples are eroded through land grabs or lock ups for the purpose of capitalist conservation.
- **Payments for environmental services** lead to the commodification and financialisation of biodiversity and carbon, undermine cultural value systems that support biodiversity conservation and reinforce the disadvantageous economic position of politically and economically marginalised groups like women, Indigenous Peoples and small farmers who often have insecure or otherwise non-recognized land governance rights. Behind this monetisation of the environmental crisis is a logic and language that transforms the global environment – Nature – into a provider of services for (some) humans.

Conclusion

A truly ethical, fair, and resilient food system for Tasmania would **embrace diversity at every level**—including diversity of production types, crop varieties, farming practices, wildlife, actors, and their interactions. This diversity enhances system robustness by increasing the likelihood that certain elements resist and adapt better to multiple and unpredictable disruptions.

- The system would promote territorial autonomy, enabling farms to locally access their production inputs, market and process their products within the region, and allow communities to meet their basic needs through localised food supply, a concept known as "reterritorialisation" or subsidiarity.
- It would be modular and connected, operating as relatively autonomous units (such as farms, gardens, regions) capable of mutual support to contain disruptions and enable rapid assistance to affected areas.
- Functional redundancy would ensure that multiple independent components fulfill key roles, boosting resilience.
- Crucially, strong cohesion among actors would foster solidarity, collective decision-making, flexible interactions and the system's evolution over time.

This integrated approach is vital to build social equity, ecological sustainability, and adaptability in Tasmania's food system against climate and socio-economic challenges. Only by embracing such diversity and solidarity can Tasmania cultivate a food system that truly nourishes people, Country, and climate now and for generations to come.

A vision for lutruwita/Tasmania's food sovereign future

Tasmania has the opportunity to lead Australia in building a food system rooted in care for Country, fairness for farmers and workers, and nourishment for all communities. A sovereign food future in lutruwita/Tasmania places power back in the hands of those who grow, harvest, prepare, and eat food — not multinational corporations or distant commodity markets.

In this vision, agricultural prosperity is measured not only in dollars, but in the health of soils and rivers, the strength of rural communities, the dignity and autonomy of farmers, and the right of all Tasmanians to good food.

A sovereign food system respects Palawa custodianship, embeds Indigenous knowledge in agricultural decision-making, and supports land return, co-governance, and cultural food economies. Country is cared for, not extracted from.

Small-scale and family farmers, youth, and migrant and seasonal workers shape agricultural policy and research priorities. Decisions are transparent, participatory, and farmer-led, not dictated by agribusiness interests.

Tasmania grows food first to feed Tasmanians. Local and regional food economies thrive, supported by community-owned processing, distribution, and storage infrastructure. Local abattoirs, regional packing and processing hubs, farmer cooperatives, and local seed networks reduce reliance on fragile export chains and imported inputs. Wealth and value stay in communities.

Farming systems regenerate soil carbon, biodiversity, water cycles, and on-farm ecosystems. Research and extension services champion farmer-led innovation, traditional ecological knowledge, and low-input, diversified practices that build resilience to fire, drought, and floods.

Every Tasmanian — from remote island communities to cities — has reliable access to fresh, culturally-appropriate, locally-grown food. Public procurement champions local, ethical produce in schools, hospitals, and aged care facilities.

Public research stays public. Seeds are saved, shared, and protected. Innovation is driven by farmers and communities, not patents and proprietary technologies.

What This Future Delivers

- Strong rural communities
- Healthy landscapes and climate resilience
- Economic diversity and local employment
- Democratic control of food and land systems
- A thriving, dignified farming culture for new and established farmers
- Nourishment, not just commodity output

Tasmania is already known for its clean waters, fertile soils, and thriving food and farming culture. In a world facing ecological and economic instability, lutruwita can become a beacon of sovereign, regenerative, community-rooted agriculture — proving that real prosperity grows from land that is cared for, people who are empowered, and food that is treated as a right, not a commodity.