



PO Box 224 Gloucester NSW 2422
thegloucesterproject@ipstarmail.com.au
www.thegloucesterproject.org.au
ABN 29 158 807 470

Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries
Inquiry into Food Production in Australia

Terms of reference :

1. affordable to consumers;
2. viable for production by farmers; and
3. of sustainable impact on the environment.

This submission presents its material in a format which reflects the integrated system which is being developed by The Gloucester Project. The components which relate to the Terms of Reference will be noted with a reference code (e.g, TR 1. will refers to Term of Reference 1.) Footnoting numerals direct the reader to notes at the end of the submission.

The Gloucester Region.

Gloucester NSW has been a food producing area since before European settlement. It has a variety of soil, water and climate conditions which have produced and continue to produce a wide range of meat, dairy, vegetable, fruit and value added food products. (TR 2)

Located in the eastern flanks of the ranges in the hinterland of the lower north coast of NSW, it is only one to three hours from the Sydney-Newcastle area, the nation's largest population concentration, with road and rail connections. (TR 1 -- Food Miles)

A NSW Government report recently estimated that more than half of the vegetable farms in the Sydney region will disappear in the next two decades. It is especially in the category of vegetable and fruit products that the Gloucester region can provide much of the anticipated shortfall.

Climate Change model analysis¹ predicts that the area will receive less snow on the nearby highlands but will get increased precipitation from storm and on-shore weather. Thus the area will continue to be relatively favoured compared with other food-producing areas which are already suffering from water shortages. (TR 2-3)

The need to sustain the high profile of the Gloucester region as a place for environmentally sensitive recreation, and a beautiful rural environment, imposes additional requirements on planning for future land usage. (TR 3)

The Gloucester Project

The Gloucester Project is an incorporated, not for profit organisation². TGP's Food Bowl Initiative is dedicated to promoting adjustment to climate changes, fuel costs and availability, energy usage and food production issues, and economic sustainability for the present and the future in the interests of the local community and the nation. TGP proposes that these adjustments, supported by research and development will also provide models for other communities.

Chairperson
Ken Johnson
BA,OAM

Treasurer
Gerald McCalden
MA, MSc, PhD

Secretary
Marianne Johnson
BA, Dip PE, NDT

Scientific and economic analyses show that existing food production, marketing and consumer patterns are already being impacted by changes. TGP takes a whole-of-community approach. This creates a major and different perspective because most research, development, major government and commercial adjustment is in areas of specialist interest and it has been customary for the results of this level of activity to trickle down to the community via market forces or by specific intervention programs. The community however is an integrated entity with each aspect is intimately interrelated with others. This requires different research and development models³.

TGP represents an integrating agency between the specialist sources of knowledge and resources on one hand and the integrated community on the other.

We cannot wait for the slow and inconsistent adoption of change by the market force/trickle down process. The dichotomous relationship between specialising, top level sources of knowledge and resources and the integrated system governing the community must be recognised.

Recommendation:

That the Senate Select Committee report makes clear reference to the need to develop more effective processes to encourage the community level integration and absorption of the many sources of specialist information and resourcing . Emphasis needs to be given to the fact that ultimately everything which is done to adjust our society to the substantial changes which are already impacting, must be implemented at the community level.

The following comments and recommendations largely follow the aims and practices of The Gloucester Project as we pursue adjustment in a real life community. TGP's Food Bowl Initiative gives special attention to the potential for the area to expand its production of vegetable and fruit products. This community has very special and relevant characteristics in the context of food production, marketing and consumption and this presentation is consistent with the role that TGP has adopted to provide a working model for adjustment, not only of production, but also of distribution and marketing of product.

The Current Scene

Worldwide there has been growing evidence that food production and distribution is being impacted by climatic, socio-economic and other interrelated issues. Prediction based on current evidence and trends expects intra- and international strife to increase as food and water sources are less able to serve the needs of populations.

In Australia climatic impacts have affected the security of water for irrigated cropping and rainfall reliability for broadacre production. Marketing changes as well as climatic effects in many areas have hit the dairy industry.

Land use competition, particularly urban spread and mining have created conflict for which we have not made legislative preparation which gives due emphasis to the high priority needed for feeding our populations.

Recommendation:

That the Senate enquiry communicate as a matter of urgency with State and Federal Governments with a view to governments establishing legislation which gives land use priority to food production where there is competition with other commercial or national interests.

Adaptation of Current Practices (TR 1, 2, & 3)

Current production, distribution and consumption practices have their origins in conditions which are rapidly changing. Any analysis designed to produce positive and sustainable changes must consider which current procedures need to be modified in order to adjust to emerging conditions. An area's suitability as a food provider needs to be assessed not only on its current status but also on its potential based on predictable criteria.

The Gloucester region has a variety of localities, each suitable for particular types of food production. The larger grazing properties raise and fatten beef varieties. The valley river flats support dairy herds. Marketing

conditions rather than land and water suitability caused a reduction in dairy production in the recent decade. A resurrection of dairying will be possible if supported by an adapted marketing system. Dairy farm properties generally are also very suitable for mixed farming, with orcharding and horticultural components.

There are numerous alluvial river flats on these grazing properties which can support a new form of horticultural business. The valleys of the Gloucester, Barrington and Avon Rivers have broader alluvial flats similar to the land west of Sydney which is currently being converted from food production to residential and industrial occupation⁴.

There is a trend in land occupation in the Gloucester region, with smaller acreage subdivisions being taken up by people who wish to leave the urban areas.

This is a scenario readily adapted to forms of horticulture and mixed food farming which begins with self sufficiency and expands into production of surpluses of fruit, vegetables, poultry, small meat animals, honey, wine, herbs, etc. These forms of production are already occurring in this area and are demonstrating the potential of the area for productivity, variety and enhancing of the nutritional value of the products.

What is required is a support system to assist with expertise, knowledge about climate management, water management, micro-climate location selection and organisation, quality control and environmental sensitivity. TGP is providing this support with its demonstration plots and educational programs.

In relation to TR 3, the locating of mixed food producing farms in closer proximity to areas of natural bushland and water sources also provides a food source for native birds and animals who rightly regard the growing plots as a new food source. TGP has developed horticultural management techniques which protect beds from local predators without harming them.

Current marketing systems cannot absorb and distribute product from this mixed and dispersed form of production. TGP has promoted and Gloucester Shire Council has assisted in establishing a local marketing system which can accommodate commercial quantities as well as small surpluses of product from individual producers. As production increases the on-selling of surpluses will direct produce into the nearby urban markets. The local consumers will support commencing and smaller enterprises whilst gaining the cost and nutritional benefits of local foods. (TR 1&2)

In order to bring more suitable land into production, TGP is preparing business plans for horticulturists who will lease parcels of suitable land from graziers and small landowners. Thus it will be possible for displaced experienced horticulturalists from declining irrigation and outer urban areas to migrate to the area, bringing skills and capital. One example noted in the recent NSW report refers to the Cambodian horticulturists who farm rented land in western Sydney and who may have to disperse or cease production⁴.

Land Use Competition

The current problem caused by the competing mining and food production industries can be resolved in the Gloucester region. In this area coal underlies the fertile valleys of the Gloucester and Avon rivers. Rubies, sapphires and gold exploration licences cover most of the fertile river flats because these minerals are first located in alluvial deposits. Climate changes, and associated problems have changed the relative values of food and "precious" metals. The 21st century has created new priorities and we can no longer justify the alienation and overturning of fertile land in order to gather pretty stones.

In the Gloucester region we have an example which can resolve the coal mining dilemma. Open cut mining destroys the fertile layer and displaces the skilled farmers from the excavated land and the mine-purchased buffer zone. Open cut and underground mining results in subsidence which causes long term damage to surface streams and aquifers and to the quality and availability of water. In Gloucester, gas extractor AGL is extracting energy from the coal in the form of gas. Extraction and transport of gas, properly done, accesses the energy source and leaves most of the fertile surface untouched. In fact, TGP negotiations with AGL propose the purification of coal-bed water to the level where it will support horticulture. Thus, there is even a potential for enhanced food production accompanying gas extraction.

Conclusion

This submission briefly addresses the problems of food production distribution and consumption by locating the issue at the community level, and by describing an existing program which links the known problems of climate change, fuel crisis and economic stresses to the anticipated crises of food and water security. We locate the adjustment program in a real community where the first steps are already being taken. We touch on the relocation of displaced skilled personnel from areas no longer able to contribute to the nation's food supply, thus preserving the skills and capital as land and water resources are lost. Our plans accommodate the food miles issue, and the vexed issue of competition of land uses.

Recommendation:

The Senate enquiry is urged to recommend to State and Federal authorities, and to appropriate non-government sources of technical and financial support that exemplary programs such as The Gloucester Project be given such support as is necessary to demonstrate successful adjustments to food production and distribution systems at the community level. Clearly, such programs cannot develop to their optimum level without investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to give this brief outline of a project which addresses the issues raised by the Senate enquiry. We remain ready to expand on any of the matters raised in this submission.

Yours faithfully,

K.E.Johnson. BA, OAM,
President,
The Gloucester Project
30.10.09

NOTES

1. Reference Martin Babakhan, Meteorologist. University of Newcastle.
Periodic drought reports, NSW Department of Primary Industry
2. For further information on The Gloucester Project:
< www.thegloucesterproject.org.au >

< www.tuckergardenpatch.com >
3. TGP powerpoint presentation, available on request.
4. Report funded by NSW Department of Agriculture and Horticulture Australia, Ltd. Reported Sydney Morning Herald, Oct. 12. 2009.