



## Victorian Local Governance Association

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17 September 2008

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Radcliffe

re: Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries

Inquiry into food production

The VLGA is a unique peak body for councillors, community leaders and Local Governments working to build and strengthen their capacity to work together for progressive social change.

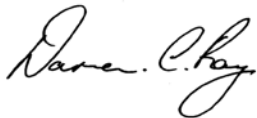
We respectfully request extension of this timely inquiry to a focus on the Australian food chain system from paddock to plate (farm-transport-processing-storage-distribution). We also request an invitation to make an in person presentation to the Committee.

The important features which support food security (or lack of it) exist in a complex web at a number of levels (global, national, state, regional, local, household, and individual). The VLGA is advocating for improved food security at a whole of population level, particularly in the regional and Local Government settings.

This VLGA submission is attached and makes a number of recommendations which we consider require urgent attention in the next five years, if the current levels of mental and physical health and well-being of the Australian population are to be maintained in the future.

We are witnessing a new stage in human evolution and health - in response to the profound changes that human beings have made to our environment in the last 100 years. We need to realise our collective responsibility for future generations, and the Victorian Local Governance Association is willing to assist the Committee in their important work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darren C. Ray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping tail.

**Councillor Darren Ray**  
**Caretaker Chief Executive Officer**

**Victorian Local Governance Association**



**Submission  
To The Senate Select Committee On  
Agricultural and Related Issues**

**- Inquiry Into Food Production -**

**Food Security Relies on Whole of  
Government Commitment to  
Connecting All Sectors**

**16<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

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## Executive Summary

### The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)

The VLGA is a unique peak body for councillors, community leaders and local governments working to build and strengthen their capacity to work together for progressive social change.

### What We Mean By Food Security

The VLGA has adopted one of the most common definitions for food security, namely:

*'Food security can be defined as the state in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable diet at all times through local non-emergency sources.'*

*Food security broadens the traditional conception of hunger, embracing a **systemic view** of the causes of hunger and poor nutrition within a community while identifying the changes necessary to prevent their occurrence.*

*Food security programs confront hunger and poverty'* (Community Food Security Coalition, 1995).

Importantly, the term food security takes a systemic view and **we respectfully request an extension of this timely inquiry to a focus on the Australian food chain system from paddock to plate** (farm-transport-processing-storage-distribution).

We also request an invitation to make an in person presentation to the Committee.

### Recommendations

Flowing from the systemic view of food security, we make the following recommendations.

We consider that they require urgent attention in the next five years if the current levels of mental and physical health and well-being of the Australian population are to be maintained in the future.

#### Recommendation 1

Re-orientation of the focus of the food supply to the whole Australian population.

A sustainable and secure food system (VEIL, 2008ab) is mandatory. This is of greater importance than having a focus on food for commercial export, or a focus on cheap food imports controlled by wholesalers and retailers - both of which distort Australia's food chain systems.

Cultivated biodiversity in the growing of food must be supported and maintained in Australia.

### **Recommendation 2**

Recognition of the need for water and food as basic human rights, and that these essential commodities for human well-being cannot be left entirely to the whim of commercial interests and the marketplace.

### **Recommendation 3**

Re-examination of Australia's ability to feed itself as the foundation to mental and physical well-being of the population now and in the future.

This will require bi-partisan support and a new approach to the integration of agricultural policies and strategies with those of public health (community health and well-being).

### **Recommendation 4**

As the last national food and nutrition policy (1992) should be renewed and updated to allow for integrated policy and action required across all levels of government.

### **Recommendation 5**

Assignment of equal or greater importance to policy, priority, capacity and resources assigned to the food chain system (paddock to plate), as is currently assigned to the development of national food standards and food safety.

### **Recommendation 6**

Identification and removal of systemic barriers to geographical area food security, including the following:

- ✓ Barriers in land use planning which reduce the growing of local foods by supporting building construction on dwindling arable land
- ✓ Barriers to setting aside land for food production in new housing estates and activity centres such as adequate lot sizes and minimum requirements for permeable areas to accommodate home gardens; creation of community gardens; and lack of clarity regarding soil contamination
- ✓ Inadequate infrastructure and local public transport linking households to local food supplies, especially in new housing estates and developing activity centres
- ✓ Financial incentives provided to commercial interests (such as rent reduction). These may support centralisation of local food supplies and work against competitive food distribution systems, equitable retail food markets and low food prices in many areas
- ✓ Barriers to sharing of food at the local level (such as some aspects of food safety legislation)
- ✓ Prevention of planting food producing trees and gardens by local and other restrictions
- ✓ General lack of sufficient financial support for initiation and maintenance of widespread urban gardening

**Recommendation 7**

Leadership for the restoration of respect and support for the value and role of the farming community in Australia. This must include farming's essential role in support of the health and well-being of the entire population.

**Recommendation 8**

Recognition of the need for available water resources to support rural and urban agriculture and households growing food locally

Revision of management structures (for example, local Water Boards) for the management of local water resources, so that they are more transparently accountable to local communities

**Recommendation 9**

A national inquiry into the impact of local water restrictions and whether these are limiting the ability of households to grow their own fruit and vegetables and develop some independence from the commercial food marketplace.

**Recommendation 10**

The protection and preservation (and perhaps restoration) of food bowls adjacent to large Australian Cities.

**Recommendation 11**

Consideration of improvement in the food chain system (paddock to plate) and whole of population food and water security as the essential basic feature on which a local, regional, and national approach can be made to emergency and disaster planning.

This will require investigation of the food nutrition and health needs of populations over defined time periods and how they are resourced by regular food chain systems. Emergency and disaster paradigms can then be examined against such models, and used as the basis for improved planning.

**Recommendation 12**

A whole of government approach is required to support local, regional, state, and national preparedness around food security issues

This will support widespread mainstream community planning, preparedness and resilience at the local level, support farmers growing food, support local economies, and support population mental and physical health and well-being.

**Recommendation 13**

That a single measure of food security be agreed across all levels of Government and resources committed to measuring local community food security across Australia.

## Living With Complexity

The food chain system makes a very high contribution to Victoria's ecofootprint (37%)

(<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/ecologicalfootprint/ausFootprint/default.asp>).

High food miles and the need for prolonged food preservation (such as refrigeration) increase food costs to the environment and to consumers.

There are some other imperatives affecting Australia's food chain system which are current and topical, or which have potential:

- ✓ drought
- ✓ water shortage
- ✓ food and land resource shrinkage
- ✓ oil-petrol shortage – affecting food growing, production and distribution
- ✓ increase in extreme weather events – affecting monocultural crops (global warming)
- ✓ natural gas – potential depletion affects availability of nitrogen based fertilisers
- ✓ increased relative poverty and health inequalities
- ✓ mental, physical, & microbiological aspects of natural and man-made emergencies and disasters, and
- ✓ pandemics such as avian flu, mad cow disease, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)

The quest for food throughout our history continues – this quest affects our health and world events such as wars. The search for food is related to population growth, health, prosperity, politics, religion, and relations between peoples.

As with air and water, food and its constituents are essential for life throughout the lifespan, but we have now reached the stage where food is more like a commodity to be bought and sold.

As a result, most Australians are totally dependent on the commercial food chain system. Such dependency increases the chance of households not having enough entitlements to match what they need to purchase for their health and wellbeing.

To produce food (and water) we have to have a functioning ecosystem in a sustainable environment. Current food chain systems are not sustainable and are already failing many people in the population.

The fact that we are reacting by developing reactive and parallel ways of living and food chain systems points to a discomfort with complexity which must be addressed. In future the choice will not be between the mainstream and alternatives, but about how we interact with the ecosystem and in developing human ways for equitable living in a sustainable environment. We need to realise our collective responsibility as custodians for future generations and VLGA is willing to assist the Committee in their important work.



## Measuring Food Security

The important features which support food security (or lack of it) exist in a complex web at a number of levels (global, national, state, regional, local, household, and individual).

As such, in this submission we are advocating for improved food security at a whole of population level, particularly in the regional and local government settings.

Access to good affordable food makes more difference to what people eat than health education.

**We define the adequate access to the food supply as access to quality food in local communities which is safe, affordable at competitive prices, culturally and environmentally acceptable and nutritious, with opportunity for healthy food choices, within walking distance (400-500 metres in urban areas) (Melbourne 2030) or by readily available, frequent and affordable public transport.**

There are three currently available measures of food security in Australia as discussed below.

### Dietary energy supply per capita

The dietary energy supply per capita (DES) in Australia was 3000-3200 Calories per day in 2001-2003 (FAO, 2006). DES is an estimate of the national total food supply expressed as the average daily energy available per person for human consumption.

The Australian DES indicates that Australian people are less likely to have enough to eat than people in industrialised countries (DES = 3200 Calories per day and above) with higher rainfall and more arable land (such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, most of Europe, and New Zealand).

Australians are more likely to have enough to eat than people in India] (DES = 2400-2599 Calories per day), Asia (DES = 2299-2600 Calories per day), and Cambodia (2000-2200 Calories per day).

### National Health Survey

The annual National Health Survey estimates only one narrow economic aspect of food security through the question: 'In the last 12 months, were there any times that you ran out of food and you couldn't afford to buy more?'

The answer YES to this question is given by about 5% of adults 16+ years of age (1 million adults). Conservatively add one dependent child for each adult, and the figure approximates 10% of the population (2 million individuals). This survey data is relatively homogeneous across Australia, but shows

higher frequencies in vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups (up to 50% or more).

### **Community Indicators Victoria**

The annual Community Indicators Victoria Survey by local government area asked the same food security question (see above). The results are of similar order to those of the National Health Survey - 6.1% Victorian adults plus dependent children (1:1), say 12% Victorians (550 000 individuals). The range of frequency for food insecurity across all Local Government jurisdictions in Victoria was 1.5-23.2%.

While the current data available is out of date, it is all we have to go by. What it does show is consistent with and supported by small scale surveys in vulnerable groups and anecdotal data.

Whatever the figures actually are for food security in local communities, the above data suggests that there are no grounds for complacency in Australia or to imagine that food security is only a concern for poor countries.

### **Responses – reactive or proactive?**

In the past 20 years, there have been consistent attempts to address local food security issues in urban, rural and remote areas across Australia. Reactive small scale strategies have been delivered through public health programs and/or primary health care and other organisations and agencies.

These strategies have been increasing in frequency and variety in response to increasing community need, and include emergency food programs, farmers markets, organic food systems, meals-on-wheels, day centre meals, food co-ops, community gardens, school gardens, food co-ops, community kitchens, food and nutrition education, household management programs, community enterprise programs, community buses, and so on (VicHealth, 2008).

In reaction to inadequacies in the commercial food chain system, such strategies constitute the beginning of a parallel community food chain system and have provided some community relief, particularly for the people who are engaged in them.

However, these strategies have often been project driven and are not financially sustainable. Importantly, they do not address the underlying systemic issues affecting whole of population food security and are therefore reactive in nature.

## **VLGA Activities**

In the last three years, the VLGA has begun to address some of these whole of population food security issues at the local area level through the following initiatives.

### **Food Security Network**

Development of the Food Security Network website with library and discussion forum - to support increased information sharing and capacity building (<http://www.foodsecurity.vlga.org.au>). Although directed towards local government and community development organisations and workers, all citizens can join the discussion forum.

### **Neighbourhood Renewal Rapid Assessment Audit Trials**

Development of a rapid audit for assessment of municipal food security based on the environments for health (natural, built, economic, social-cultural) in Wyndham and Geelong.

### **Local Government Leadership and Learning Centre (LGLLC)**

Provision of food security advisory and training services through the LGLLC.

### **Climate Change Working Group (CCWG)**

Bringing together Local Governments and community leaders, our CCWG focuses on building community resilience and the social equity implications of climate change.

Two key projects of the CCWG include:

- ✓ Land-use and Community Food Security in Victoria: implications and responses for the future, and
- ✓ Liveable and Just – understanding the social equity implications of climate change for local government.

While a good start, the above activities are obviously not going to address all of the issues without the support of local, regional, state and national government policies, strategies and activities.

## Conclusion

The VLGA believes that time is now running out to take the necessary systemic view of food security.

For local communities to be resilient and to respond to the aforementioned challenges, all levels of government will need to resources the building of local capacity to address these together.

While Local Governments have been used to planning in an integrated way for many years, it also has to be acknowledged that we are the poorest cousin in Australia's federation. While we can bring our skills of connecting communities and strengthening democracy at the local level, there needs to be a re-imagining of our roles and responsibilities.

The VLGA also believes there will need to be a significant and urgent expansion of local, regional, state and national government policies, strategies and activities to address food security. We look forward to playing an active and continuing role in this regard.

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