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**Submission from the Dietitians Association of Australia
Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related *Industries Inquiry*
*into food production in Australia***

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with branches in each state and territory. DAA represents over 3700 members who work in a variety of settings including hospitals, community health, public health, private practice, tertiary education and industry.

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DAA is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries on the issue of food production in Australia, and the question of how to produce food that is affordable to consumers, viable for production by farmers, and of sustainable impact on the environment.

Affordability, nutrition and food production

DAA advocates for better food, better health and better living for all. To achieve these aims DAA believes that all Australians should be food secure i.e. 'have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life¹'. Thus, food should not only satisfy hunger and provide energy, but it should also be nutrient-rich to promote and sustain good health. Unless this requirement is met, food choices may actually contribute to the burden of chronic disease, particularly for people in lower socio-economic areas².

DAA is supportive of well funded agricultural and economic research which may assist in identifying crops to better meet the nutritional needs of the population while providing an adequate return on investment for farmers, and which produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

Food affordability and accessibility

There is evidence that not all Australians have access to affordable nutritious food³. DAA is supportive of inter-sectoral cooperation between government and non-government agencies in the agricultural, health, retail and transport sectors to redress this disadvantage, particularly in remote areas. Better access to affordable food might be achieved through a number of ways including increased food production in remote areas and better design of transport systems to remote areas.

Information for consumers on food production

DAA acknowledges that the commercial production of food is a complex process from growing and harvesting crops, to processing, and distributing food products. Research suggests that greenhouse gas emissions associated with food are dominated by the production phase with around 83% of life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions, where transportation represents around 11%⁴. Also, the environmental impact of food production is context specific i.e. the life-cycle assessment for food production is dependent on the region in which it occurs and the agricultural practices relevant to that region.

Consumers wishing to support the sustainable production of nutritious food will need appropriate information to assist them in making food choices consistent with this objective, for example on food labels, at point of purchase or on product websites. Such information should take into account the environmental impact at all stages of food production and distribution.

Protection of productive land

Historically, people have settled near water supplies and arable, and settlements have grown to towns and cities. In Australia residential development has consumed land under cultivation for both cropping and market gardens. In addition to reducing productive land, this reduces the opportunity for communities to buy fresh produce locally and disconnects the urban community from the agricultural community. DAA recommends that local government planning gives greater consideration to maintaining productive land area, and to the integration of light agriculture and residential development needs.

Domestic food production

While the commercial sector is the main area of interest in this Inquiry, it is also important to remember that many people are in a situation where they may grow their own food. Not only should this be encouraged, but individuals and families should also know how to prepare and cook food. Consequently DAA recommends that people have access to education programs at all

levels of the education system to learn skills related to domestic food production and preparation.

References

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2. Drewnowski A. *Obesity and the food environment: Dietary energy density and diet costs*. American Journal of Preventive Medicine 2004; 27 (3S): 154-162
3. Harrison MS, Coyne T, Lee AJ, Leonard D, Lawson S, Groos A and Ashton BA. *The increasing cost of the basic foods required to promote health in Queensland*. Medical Journal of Australia 2007; 186 (1): 9-14
4. Weber CL and Matthews HS. *Food-Miles and the relative climate impacts of food choices in the United States*. Environmental Science & Technology 2008; 42 (10): 3508-3513