Sydney Food Fairness Alliance

working towards food security and sustainable food systems

Re: The Senate Inquiry Food Production in Australia

Food production in Australia and the question of how to produce food that is:

a. affordable to consumers;
b. viable for production by farmers; and
c. of sustainable impact on the environment.

The government is to be commended for undertaking the Senate Inquiry into food production in Australia. There are serious concerns regarding the impacts from the increasing urbanisation of peri urban agrcultural land at the fringe of our cities, the on-going drought, and predicted climate change which will influence food production.

Food security is fundamental for human health & should be incorporated in comprehensive long term planning to ensure that Australia is sustainable, and that it caters for diversity of cultures.

The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance (SFFA) is an organisation working towards food security for all, and sustainable food systems. We are a network of over 200 people linking health, welfare, charitable and community organisations with community gardeners, organic suppliers, permaculturists, primary producers, academics and farmers networks**.**

SFFA believes that the key concepts of *food security* and *food supply* should be incorporated into all government planning, at the local, state and national levels of government. The health of any rural community and /or urban environment relies on its ability to produce locally grown and nutritious food.

In general terms, to ensure food security, there needs to be:

- Clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of each sphere of government regarding sustainable food production and environmental management in Australia.
- Legislative, policy and regulatory guidance
- Information and data provisions
- Trial initiatives and demonstration projects
- New funding and investment strategies and
- Monitoring and evaluation projects

With regards to Sydney, it is important that biodiversity & sustainable agriculture is protected in the Sydney Basin, with its fertile soil, access to water, transport, & in close proximity to Sydney, to ensure that Sydney can become a sustainable city nourished by a healthy fresh local food supply. We believe that Sydney can make a leading contribution to the wider Sydney region by promoting sustainability within its own boundaries.

Prices of food staples have skyrocketed globally: there is panic buying in many countries and food riots in others. Australians have been insulated from the worst impacts, but Sydney is experiencing increasing food prices, which are not just the result of drought. This is a serious concern in Australia, where only 10 per cent of the world's driest continent is suitable for growing food.

We would like to offer the following submission to the Senate Inquiry.

1 Promotion of Food security in Sydney

2 Promotion of food production within the Sydney region

3 Contribution to planning in the wider Sydney Region to promote a Sustainable Sydney

1 Promotion of Food Security in the Sydney

Food security is defined as access at all times to sufficient food for an active and healthy life. (Kendall A, Kennedy E. Position of the American Dietetic Association, 1998, 98:337-342).

Food Security is essential to provide the fresh food supply for a Sustainable Sydney.

While cities are the centres of power in our society, it must be recognised that the city is dependent on, and a collaborator with rural communities. Cities are dependent on food supplies from external sources. We need to re-establish our social and cultural connections with the food supply on which we depend, and we need to consider how we can better support our local food suppliers.

These issues are increasingly important with rising fuel and food prices. The time for complacency has gone, and there is, we believe an increasing uncertainty in the wider "community"

In addition, lack of access to affordable and nutritious food is a real issue for many low-income people in Sydney, with severe long-term health implications. Research in 2004 in three low-income areas of Sydney found a prevalence of food insecurity of over 20%; this rose to 50% for particular groups such as single parents. (Nolan et al. HPJA.2006)

Since that time, food prices have risen sharply, along with petrol prices, rental costs and interest rates. Many working in social services are aware of an increasing demand for food assistance. Those who have most to gain from healthy food can least afford it.

These pressures mean that strategies to improve access by all to healthy foods must be supported. Examples include community and school food gardens, farmers markets, local co-ops, provision of emergency relief & social enterprise.

FARMERS MARKETS facilitate producer-consumer alliances, raise awareness of the ways in which food is grown, and of the importance of agriculture in cities where people have become less engaged with the importance of a clean local food supply. They provide opportunities for the sale of heirloom & organic produce, and markets such as the Farmers Market at Warwick Farm & Flemington Markets provide access to cheap fresh nutritious produce, of particular importance for those on lower income.

Recommendations:

- **Sydney takes a lead role in supporting 'food security' with other local government areas in the Sydney region**
- **Ensure that food security remains a basic objective, along with water, energy, housing and transport, for a Sustainable Sydney.**
- **Contribute to development of a Food Policy for Sydney (as in Toronto, Knoxville) and other cities & regions in Australia**
- **That Government Tender Policies include commitment to purchase foods for all services**

and use that are:

- **fresh locally produced foods from the Sydney Basin**
- **ethically produced foods**
- **non GMO foods and/or**
- **Fair Trade foods from developing countries**

- **Identification of suitable buildings, such as warehouses, to accommodate food distribution centres for emergency food aid, at nominal rent**
- **That loc al & state governments develop planning instruments such as SEPPS & LEPs to make provision that food outlets selling essential food items, fresh fruit and vegetables, and/or food co-ops targeting those on low income, have priority in shopping centres and precincts.**
- **Planning instruments and policies be used to encourage Farmers Markets in town & city centres.**
- **That new developments and revitalisation of existing villages makes provision for the supply of accessible (i.e. walkable distance), affordable and nutritious foods for all residents, to prevent the creation of new 'food deserts' and pockets of disadvantage (SWAHS, 2005).**

2 Promotion of food production within Sydney

Community Food gardens and urban farming
Although Sydney might not appear to have a role in food production, there are many opportunities for urban farming and growing food in cities & towns, and many examples of this both locally and internationally, with the opportunity to contribute significantly to local fresh food supply.

The provision of 'urban agriculture' as a permissible use under the LEP would allow the establishment of community gardens and city farms on land that is vacant and unproductive. This could include schools, hospitals, parkland, gaols, church grounds etc. This would provide urban agriculture with legislative recognition. It would also facilitate the establishment of community gardens and city farms which may be currently hindered by local planning laws.

- Within Australia there are many examples of urban agriculture (as community gardens and city farms) that are well established and already providing the many social, economic and environmental benefits that such land uses permit
- ***NSW examples***
  1. Fairfield City Farm, Abbotsbury
  2. Glovers Community Garden, Rozelle
  3. Kooragang City Farm, Wallsend/Newcastle
  4. Woolloomooloo Community Garden, Woolloomooloo
- ***Australian Examples***
  1. Northey Street City Farm Brisbane
  2. CERES, East Brunswick
  3. Collingwood Children's Farm, Collingwood
  4. Collingwood Community Garden, Collingwood
  5. West Brunswick Community Gardens, West Brunswick
  6. East Perth City Farm, East Perth

There are many examples from around the world where such zonings exist in high density urban areas and operate successfully within the urban context

- ***International Examples***

1. Greater Vancouver and Victoria, Canada – numerous community gardens established in these regions. Includes the provision for the establishment of gardens on 'Parkland' guided by a Park Board Community Gardens Policy. (ref: **http://city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/info/policy/comgardn.htm**)

2. Copenhagen, Denmark - A debate in the Danish Parliament at the end of the 70's and a principle decision about protecting and extending the allotment garden areas have since meant that local authorities have an obligation to ensure the existence of allotment gardens. The attempted solution is to place the allocation of allotment garden areas into the jurisdiction of regional planning so that the Ministry of Agriculture buys up land, which is later let out to the allotment garden people on a long term basis. (ref: **http://cityfarmer.org/DenmarkHistory.html#historyCopen**)

3. Agricultural Zoning in Havana, Cuba.

   State-run urban vegetable gardens developed in vacant lots here in the capital and in other cities and towns across Cuba. Recent planning laws have made the use of land for food production a priority.

Overall, the government estimates that 117,000 people work in urban agriculture and that the *gardens account for about half the vegetables grown in Cuba.* Officials said urban gardens are expected to increase production by more than a third next year, reflecting a policy of linking wages to productivity.

> Many state enterprises, schools and hospitals grow some of their own food and raise livestock, while the government has helped thousands of families and individuals to set up home gardens, plant fruit trees and raise chickens and rabbits.
> (ref: http://www.cityfarmer.org/CubaGreen.html)
> For the first time, in the "General urban and land-use plan for the city of Havana" (December 2000), urban agriculture is explicitly mentioned and zoned as an "agricultural corridor" around the urbanised area of Havana. The goal is to "Create the urban and land-use conditions that contribute to reach the goals set for agricultural production and commercialisation." **(Reference :** http://www.ruaf.org/no4/30_31.html**)**

Recommendations:

- **Identification and mapping of potential food-growing areas within Sydney**
- **Listing 'urban agriculture' as a permissible use under LEPs to allow establishment of community gardens and city farms on vacant and unproductive land. This could include schools, hospitals, parklands, gaols, church grounds etc.**
- **Promote opportunities for community food gardens, urban agriculture, food distribution centre, food co-operatives , farmers markets and social enterprise**
- **Planning instruments such as SEPPS, SEPP 5s, LEPs, DCPs and protection zones could be used to protect areas designated as 'common land' for community food gardens & urban agriculture.**
- **Develop guidelines for Green roofs for food growing**
- **Identification and mapping of food producing trees in cities,**
- **New street tree and parkland planting to incorporate fruit growing trees as occurs in Athens. Council could maintain the trees through Parks & Gardens program**
- **SEPP5s and multi unit dwellings to incorporate food growing areas**
- **Consider rate rebates for food producers within the urban area**

3 Contribute to planning in wider Sydney Region to promote a Sustainable Sydney

Current situation and food supply

The SFFA believes it is useful to raise the concept of "Greater Sydney" and to highlight the interaction between the centre of Sydney and its hinterland; indeed this is increasingly being recognised by the Western Sydney and Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC and MACROC) and other Sydney based organisations.

Since European settlement the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment has contributed as one of the most productive agricultural areas of Australia.. Covering an area 2.5% of NSW, it currently supplies up to 25% of the state's agricultural produce including fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, over 80% of Sydney's leafy green & perishable vegetables, 100% of Asian vegetables, poultry, eggs, nearly a third of the state's oysters and some dairy produce.

Sydney Basin contributes to the security of Sydney and NSW food supply, a sustainable Sydney, a viable local economy and the the economic and social livelihoods of farming communities & workers in related industries.

It is estimated that agriculture in the Sydney Basin is worth $1B per annum at the farmgate with a multiplier effect on related industries to over $4.5B annually (Gillespie, Mason 2003). Sydney Basin agriculture is the largest industry in Western Sydney employing around 12,000 people. At least 30% of the workforce come from culturally and linguistically divers backgrounds, with about 90% of those in the vegetable industry.

Increasing pressure for housing development and urban sprawl threaten the sustainability of agriculture and food security for the Sydney region. There is increasing recognition of the value of agriculture, the tenuous nature of its sustainability and the need to retain diverse agricultural activity within the Sydney basin to ensure the city's local food supply. (The Sydney Metropolitan Strategy advises that 640,000 residential building sites will be required in the next 30 years, 30% of these in greenfield developments in the Hawkesbury Nepean catchment).

Proposals to develop a land area the size of Canberra, will result in loss of biodiversity & some of the most productive agricultural land in Australia.

Food security includes social, health, economic, environmental, equity and cultural issues; the need to encourage and facilitate diversity, and to re-establish peoples' connection with their food source. Food is integral to our lives at every level, including nutritional, health, with increasing recognition of its social and cultural importance; the importance of the contributions, skills, knowledge, culture and livelihoods of food producers, the people who grow our food.

Food Security and Climate Change

There is increasing evidence of climate change and recognition of the need to reduce food miles.
Sydney Basin has one of the highest rainfalls in NSW, and as climate change progresses, it is predicted that the drought will continue west of Sydney.

In terms of food production our ecological footprint is huge, with external costs resulting from cleared land, transportation, water supply & soil health.

Climate change, if left unchecked, stands to reduce Australia's agricultural productivity by up to 27pc over the next 75 years. US economist William Cline of the Peterson Institute of Institutional Economics in Washington, estimates that global warming will cut agricultural productivity worldwide by between

3pc and 19pc by 2080 (The Age, Sept 2007).

Stabilising the atmosphere would require cuts in greenhouse gas emissions of about 80% on current levels, to avoid dangerous climate change, as supported by Professor Garnaut in the Interim Climate Change Review.
Presentations at a recent Planning Institute of Australia Congress indicated that 18 per cent of New South Wales food production comes from the Sydney fringe where development is encroaching through growth corridors.

Peri and Urban Agriculture
Securing a clean fresh food supply within close proximity to the city of Sydney is essential to reduce fuel consumption, transportation costs & to reduce food miles travelled.

The importance of **peri urban agriculture**, defined as agriculture on the fringes of cities (WHO), is being increasingly recognised worldwide. It is important in the maintenance of food security and the supply of fresh, perishable food, but also in terms of its social and cultural value, its aesthetic value, promoting open space, and for the urban population, providing a closer "connection' with the food supply, and knowledge and understanding of a different lifestyle and diverse landscape, and agritourism (Parker 2004).

Peri urban agriculture influences public health from many perspectives:

1. The positive benefits to the general community through the maintenance of a sustainable healthy city from the landscape, food production, and the potential to use rural lands for waste disposal
2. Through the livelihoods of farmers (Parker 2004) and the local community.

Extracts from "Farm the City" by Jac Smit (1996)
Urban agriculture produces three to 15 times as much per hectare as common rural methods. It is more organic and sustainable because urban waste - which is 70 per cent organic - is more abundant than rural waste, while the urban farmer's labour-intensive methods use less land and water per unit of production than industrial agriculture. Using waste reduces pollution and enriches the soil while regenerating its biodiversity, while urban agriculture reduces the city's 'ecological footprint' and so conserves the rural environment. Its intensity and proximity to habitation, however, will require new methods of regulation and monitoring. (ref: http://www.ourplanet.com/txtversn/84/smit.html)

Extracts from 'Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture and Urban Planning'
Discussion paper for FAO-ETC/RUAF electronic conference "Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture on the Policy Agenda" August 21 - September 30, 2000
Prepared by Axel W. Drescher, University of Freiburg, Germany

Urban planning should incorporate urban and peri-urban agriculture in order to:
- improve urban sustainability;
- enhance the urban food system, especially food security; and
- avoid or minimise conflicts between agriculture and other resource-use activities.

Transport and food supply
A safe efficient, integrated mass public transport system across Sydney is urgently required for social, economic and environmental reasons. Planning policies towards land use and transport, and in particular policies directed at equitable access to a secure local food supply are integral to these aims.

The 'food miles' travelled by the food consumed in Sydney, along with green house gas emissions, fuel

consumption and transportation costs need to be decreased not increased if Sydney is to become a more sustainable city. If Sydney's food supply has to travel a greater distance then not only will it lose freshness but also it will increase Sydney's 'food miles', external costs and contribution to green house gas emissions.

Recommendations:

- **Support planning and legislation to protect biodiversity & sustainable agriculture in the Sydney Basin, to ensure that Sydney can become a sustainable city nourished by a healthy fresh local food supply.**
- **Identification and protection of open space and/or arable land, and rural protection zones as essential land uses**
- **Maintenance a sustainable healthy city from the landscape, food production, and the potential to use rural lands for waste disposal.**
- **Support best practice environmental management in food growing areas.**
- **Work to secure a clean fresh food supply within close proximity to the city of Sydney, essential to reduce fuel consumption, transportation costs & to reduce food miles**
- **Develop holistic land use and transport policies directed at equitable access to secure local food supplies.**
- **Support comprehensive assessment of all private & public land in the region & clear directions how this may be allocated for the future water and food supply needs of the Sydney community.**
- **Taht the federal government works with State and local government to quantify the future food production and supply needs for the population of Sydney.**
- **Contribute to development of a legal framework for urban and peri-urban agriculture activities.**
- **Support long-term strategies to preserve and enhance the food production resource base of the Sydney Basin**
- **Regulate access to land and water as well as urban organic wastes and wastewater.**

(Ref: http://www.fao.org/urbanag/Paper3-e.htm)

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO foods)

SFFA members advocate non GMO foods. We believe that current food shortages must address social inequity and food distribution problems rather that quick fix unproven technology. GMO have no proven health or public benefits

A small acreage of GM canola is being grown on a few NSW and Victorian farms this year but the rest of Australia will remain GM-free for at least another four years. NSW and Victoria should reimpose their GM bans before 2009. If GM contaminates our environment and food supply our right to choose GM-free may be lost.

Most Australians want Monsanto's Genetically Manipulated (GM) Roundup tolerant canola banned. They include: farmers; rural industries eg. beekeepers & grain harvesters; food processors eg. Goodman Fielder that uses 40% of Australia's canola crop; supermarkets (eg. Coles, that says over 90% of its customers want GM-free).

Local governments can work effectively for GM-free, both directly and symbolically. The why and how of GM-free Zones are explained: "Staying GM-Free: A resource kit for local action" at: http://www.geneethics.org/resource

The GM-free states say GM foods and crops - canola and cotton (grown in Australia), corn and soybean - pose unacceptable environmental, health, social and economic hazards and costs. GM-free offers new food production and marketing opportunities. As GM-free states grow over sixty percent of Australia's canola they will reap the rewards of priority access to all canola markets, here and overseas.

GM-free offers a more secure food supply in the coming oil-depleted and climate-altered world, to our great grandchildren and ourselves.

Recommendations:
To minimise the risks and win the benefits, local councils (both urban and rural) should also adopt and implement GM-free policies to:

- **protect their own constituents through local initiatives; and**
- **influence state and federal government GM-free policies.**
- **advocate GM-free food and farming systems, independent of patented high-tech GM seeds.**

FOOD LABELLING LAWS

Food products can be labelled as 'Made in Australia' even though they contain ingredients from countries with lower food standards or have been partly manufactured overseas. Without regulations that force full disclosure, manufacturers will inevitably source their ingredients from the countries with lax food laws in order to cut costs.

Recently, Food Standards Australia said it was taking seriously reports that fruit and vegetables grown in China and exported to Australia could be contaminated with melamine.

http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/greens-decry-food-label-laws/2008/10/11/1223145699144.html

Recommendations:

- **Review Food labelling laws to ensure full disclosure regarding country of origing labelling on all fresh and processed foods.**

SUMMARY:

Effective planning for and protection of natural resources, food & water security for a Sustainable Sydney is essential, in close proximity to habitation, markets, transport, & access to workers.

We need a national conversation to develop a food policy that looks at all aspects of the food chain, to promote health and equitable access to healthy food options for all segments of the population, encouraging the population to be interested in food, while contributing to a strong and environmentally sustainable food industry.

Governments should support and educate farmers to be custodians of the land, soil and water, and actively support efficient smallholders. The Department of Primary Industries should be reformed to provide leadership towards sustainable farming, and not leave this vital industry to market forces. The Sydney food basin must be protected to ensure that Sydney residents have access to fresh foods sustainably grown close to the city.

This needs control of urban growth in our food basin, complemented by planning controls and

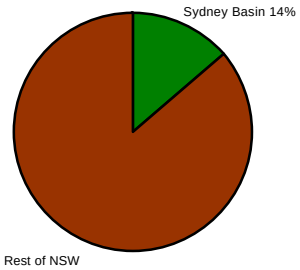
incentives to retain small farms on the city fringe. Governments can support small sustainable farmers with fresh food programs that give priority to locally grown fresh foods using fewer chemicals over processed foods that have been grown with high levels of mechanical and chemical inputs and transported long distances, with high greenhouse costs in food miles. The New South Wales Government must collaborate with the Commonwealth, local councils and the community to ensure long-term fresh food supplies for the Sydney Basin.

Yours sincerely,

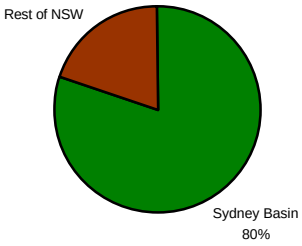
Lynne Saville
President, Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
On behalf of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
8th November 2008

0410 145 473
0438341436

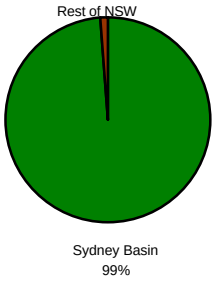
Economic Value of NSW Agricultural Production



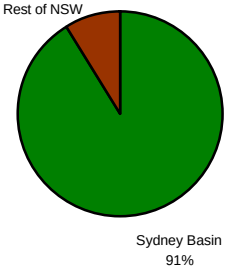
NSW Fresh Mushroom Production



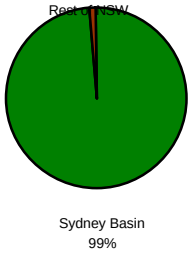
NSW Asian Vegetable Production



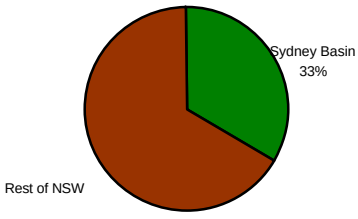
NSW Spring Onion and Shallots Production



NSW Tomatoes, Snow Peas, Snake Beans and Lebanese Cucumbers Production



NSW Poultry Production



Subject: Scotland Begins Public Discussion on Food Policy

www.foodforethought.net

Editor's note: Scotland is setting out on a novel task - to develop a coherent food policy. It has just released a discussion paper to begin a national conversation on how to go about such an ambitious pursuit. The paper highlights its vision for a food policy that looks at all aspects of the food chain. It seeks to promote health and access to healthy food options for all segments of the population, encouraging the population to be interested in food and ask questions about where it comes from while also contributing to a strong and environmentally sustainable food industry. The discussion paper invites public commentary through a variety of fora which will help determine the content of the policy.

Please visit www.foodforethought.net to link to the discussion paper.

http://politics.guardian.co.uk/scotland/story/0,,2240084,00.html

MEDIA RELEASE from the Faith Ecology Network (FEN)

"Safe Food! "

Do we really know what we are eating?

Why the push for genetically modified food?

How safe is our food?

*Does the industrialised production of food respect its sacredness***?**

These questions were discussed by people from ten different faith traditions at

a Multifaith Forum on Safe Food at Strathfield on Sunday 18th June.

Key scientific expert on Public Health, Dr Judy Carman, demonstrated the poor quality of the safety assessments made on genetically engineered (GM) foods by the regulator of food standards for Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ). This body does no independent evaluation. It relies entirely on inadequate testing and reporting by the GM companies themselves. Because proper testing has not been done, we the public don't know what the long term effects will be on our children.

The Forum was the initiative of the Faith and Ecology Network (FEN), formed in 2003 to enable people of different faith communities to work together on major issues of common concern to all Australians.

People came from city and country areas and from a variety of religious traditions: Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian (Catholic, Anglican and Uniting churches), Hindu, Jewish and Muslim.

Mehmet Ozalp (Muslim) and Sandra Menteith (Catholic) spoke of moral, theological and spiritual dimensions of food production and eating. Jill Finnane, a specialist in sustainable food systems, stressed the necessity of encouraging small-scale local food production. Frances Bodkin, a D'harawal woman, described some Aboriginal uses of plants for food and medicinal purposes. The sacred character of food was recognized in its sharing as a communal act.

Shown at the Forum was a new DVD, 'Unjust Genes', produced by the Columban Missionary Society, on GM food crops and the serious effects of promoting this technology for farmers in Australia and the Philippines. This DVD is intended for widespread community education on Safe Food.

A Statement on Safe Food by a Coalition of Religions was produced (see next page)

For access to Forum material, including suggested further activities,

Email annelanyon.cmi@columban.org.au**, ph 02 9352 8021**

or join the FEN Group faith_ecology_network-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au

Contact Details:

Rev Dr Charles Rue 0408 466 820, or Anne Lanyon 02 9352 8021

STATEMENT ON SAFE FOOD BY A COALITION OF RELIGIONS

As a coalition of believers from ten faith traditions within the Faith and Ecology Network (FEN), we are grateful for and support the work of scientists, health professionals and campaigners who have alerted us to problems associated with access to nutritious food and the increasing presence of genetically modified foods in the market.

we believe that:

- access to nutritious, culturally acceptable and safe food is a sacred gift and a universal human right

- reliable food supplies are best assured by protecting ecological systems and traditional growing methods

- food sovereignty helps national stability and security, and

- human solidarity means ensuring that all people have access to food, locally and globally.

we support:

- research to increase the quality and yields of conventional farming

- informative and accurate labelling of all food stuffs

- overseas development aid which fosters local agricultural systems

- international agreements and local laws promoting food self sufficiency

- programs to give people access to quality food and education about it.

we are concerned about:

- the increasing control of the food industry by agricultural-chemical companies and supermarkets locally and globally

- the move towards the commercialisation of genetically modified crops and animals (GMOs), and subsequent negative impacts on species diversity and the little

researched long term effects on human health

we call for:

- independent research by government agencies to better regulate food labelling and the commercialisation of food production

- easier access to, and education about, healthy food

- more publicly funded, peer reviewed, research into the relationship between human health and ecologically sustainable agriculture in Australia and overseas

- an Australian position at Trade Related Intellectual Properties (TRIPs) meetings that helps protect peoples' traditional knowledge and rights to their natural heritage.

We invite the members of all religions to support this call for safe food as a moral and spiritual issue believing that food is a gift to be shared. To raise awareness about safe food and work to make it available fosters human solidarity and promotes the value of life, physical and spiritual. END.

Issued 18 June 2006 at a Forum on Safe Food, Strathfield, Sydney. Participants came from Aboriginal, Anglican, Baha'i, Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Uniting Church and Anglican religious traditions. Contact: Anne Lanyon 61 2 9352 8021 pej.cmi@columban.org.au

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Discussion sheet

Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
working towards food security and sustainable food systems

Sydney Basin agriculture...
LOCAL FOOD, LOCAL ECONOMY

Most productive of lands

Some of the most fertile and productive agricultural land in Australia is found in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment on Sydney's western edge — the Sydney Basin.

Sydney's urban fringe agricultural lands occupy only 2.5 per cent of NSW, yet they provide Sydney with much of its fresh food and are important to the viability of regional and national food markets and to the prosperity of the family farmers who operate the city fringe market gardens.

It is estimated that agriculture in the Sydney region is worth $1 billion a year at the to farmers, with a multiplier effect on related industries. Its economic value to the industry as a whole is over $4.5 billion annually (Gillespie, Mason 2003).

Most threatened of lands

The NSW government's Metropolitan Strategy proposes to develop an area the size of Canberra to the west of Sydney.

With some of the greatest biodiversity in Australia, it is only common sense that the development should not exceed the region's capacity to handle increases in infrastructure due to valid concerns over soil salinity, food production capacity and water management constraints (SFFA 2005).

Sydney's urban fringe farms sustains a healthy city from the surrounding land

Sydney's urban fringe agriculture is:

- important to the nutritional health of the city's inhabitants
- supports the livelihoods of farmers (Parker 2004)
- maintains the viability of local communities
- can reuse as fertiliser the green, compostable wastes of the city.

The loss of Sydney Basin agricultural land will affect us all:

- food prices will increase as the city-fringe fresh food supply diminishes
- the availability of locally grown, fresh, nutritious and high quality food will decline
- food transport costs will rise due to the greater distance food produced further from the city has to bee moved
- employment on farms and in the food industry will be lost
- the agricultural knowledge and entrepreneurial nature of local food and farming practices of Sydney's urban fringe farmers will be lost
- farmers will bear the high cost of relocating further from the city
- threats to biosecurity will increase as more foods and plant materials are imported, increasing the risk of bringing in new plant pests and diseases
- foods transported long distance to market in Sydney may be preserved with chemicals and irradiation; treated foods are considered to be inferior to fresh foods by many commentators
- biodiversity will be lost in the fifth most biologically abundant region in Australia.

Take action for a viable local food industry

- buy local food and support the Sydney region's small farmers and reduce the long distance transportation of food
- shop at farmers' markets, visit the Hawkesbury Farmgate Trail; start of join a food cooperative, join a Community Supported Agriculture scheme
- ask your local fruit and vegetable retailer to purchase local produce and label it as local
- propose strategies to protect our food supply through improved rural land zoning adjacent to the cities
- write to the media, your local MP and the state government to urge a coordinate approach to food supply, nutrition, public health and sustainable agriculture in the Sydney region.

The Sydney Basin — economy, employment, sustainability

The Sydney Basin provides...	The Sydney Basin contributes to...
90 per cent of Sydney's perishable vegetables	The security of Sydney and NSW's food supply
Almost 100 per cent of the state's Asian vegetables	A sustainable and healthy city
80 per cent of the fresh mushroom supply	A viable local economy
Most of Sydney's cherry tomatoes, snow peas, snake beans, Lebanese cucumbers, fresh tomatoes, spring onions, shallots	The economic and social livelihoods of farming communities and workers in agricultural processing and marketing
33 per cent of NSW's poultry production	The survival of small, often family-owned farms which are often more productive than large corporate farms (Food First)
	The maintenance of productive, natural resources
Productive small farms...	**Sydney agricultural livelihoods...**
Farm ownership: mostly family owned and operated (Parker 2004)	Sydney Basin agriculture is the largest industry in Western Sydney, employing around 12,000 people
Average size: 40ha, compared to 1454ha for the state (Sinclair 2004)	At least 30 per cent of the workforce come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with around 90 per cent of those in the vegetable industry (Sinclair et al 2004)
Average return per hectare to Sydney Basin farmers: $5433 Average return for NSW: $136 per hectare (1997 ABS Agriculture, NSW Agriculture 2003, p1)	For every million dollars of agricultural output, 22 agricultural jobs and 65 additional jobs linked to the sector are created (Australian Farm Institute report, March 2005)

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Understanding FOOD MILES

The long journey of our well-travelled food

The greater the distance food has travelled from paddock to plate, the greater the transport pollution and the greater the impact on the health of people, the land and the global climate.

Kiwifruit from Italy, oranges from Brazil...

THE 'FOOD MILE' is a measure of the distance food travels from where it is grown or raised to where it is purchased by the consumer. Increasingly in Australia, supermarket shelves are stocked with imported food and food products that have been hauled thousands of kilometres: kiwifruit from Italy, oranges from Brazil. In the last four years Australia has had a 26 per cent increase in imports of fresh produce. Imports now total $300 million per year. [1]

Swedish systems ecologist Folke Gunther goes even further, suggesting that we need to be concerned about all the 'miles' travelled in production as well as distribution — the distance travelled by fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides, fodder, veterinary supplies, containers, farm machinery etc — in which case we take into account the entire industrial agriculture system, not simply the distribution of food products.

High costs, hidden costs

The food purchased in this globalised system is not 'cheap' — there are high costs for farmers, for our environment and for our health. In general, the greater the distance food has travelled from paddock to plate, the greater the transport pollution and the greater the impact on the health of people, the land and the global climate.

The impacts of long distance food may include:

- ENVIRONMENTAL — freight, especially by air and road, consumes large quantities of fuel and energy and releases greenhouse gases which contribute to global climate change. Add to this the environmental impacts of packaging and processing and the real costs of the weekly shopping basket can be much greater than people think.
- HEALTH — long distance transport increases the time from farm to fork and can reduce nutritional value as the food contains fewer of the vitamins and minerals that our bodies need for good health.[2] Buying local food ensures fresher, more nutritious food, often picked closer to ripening time, and usually with fewer pesticides applied.
- SOCIAL — Australians have little say in the farming practices of other countries — the levels of pesticide used and the wages and conditions of workers. Imported food can come from countries with inadequate environment and health standard and few regulations to protect workers from contamination.

Agribusiness, trade agreements, government subsidies

The current system of production and distribution in the industrial agriculture of globalised food pits small farmers all over the world against each other.

This has depressed the farmer's share of the food dollar with the profit being taken by

Even imported organic food can have a tremendous impact. A single Briton's shopping basket of 26 imported organic products could have travelled 241,000km and released as much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as an average four bedroom household does through cooking meals for eight months.

transport, marketing and processing by global corporations.

Trade liberalisation is forcing small farmers off the land as they attempt to compete with subsidised food imports and big corporations in the farming sector.

In Australia between 1986 and 1996, the number of farms fell by 20 per cent — almost all of them less than 500 hectares in size.[4]

Globe-trotting food

To date, little research has been done on the food miles associated with products on sale in Australia.

Measuring the full impacts of food can be a complex task, however the Australian Conservation Foundation lists the following figures from overseas studies that reveal the true costs of the unsustainable practice of globe-trotting food (www.acfonline.org.au):

- In the USA, food for a typical meal has travelled nearly 2100 miles but the figure is much greater if the meal contains off-season fruits or vegetables. Australia may not be far behind this figure.
- The energy consumed in food freight often outweighs the nutritional energy in the food itself. It takes around 1000 kJ of energy to ship 170kJ worth of strawberries from Chile to the USA.
- Processed or multiple-ingredient food products may accumulate more food miles. A recent German study found that a 240ml cup of yoghurt on a supermarket shelf in Berlin has covered over 9000km in transport. (Germans eat 3 billion cups a year.)

Even imported organic food can have a tremendous impact. A single Briton's shopping basket of 26 imported organic products could have travelled 241,000km and released as much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as an average four bedroom household does through cooking meals for eight months.

Many consumers don't want local growers and industries undermined by cheaper imported produce. In New Zealand, the importation of Chinese garlic has decimated the local industry. For every one kilogram of garlic imported from China there is an additional 5500 kJ of energy from fossil fuels consumed (www.greens.nz/food-revolution).

Locally produced the best choice

So, you want food that is less well travelled from farm to shop, that has contributed less to global warming and that supports local growers, processors and retailers as well as local economies? Go local.

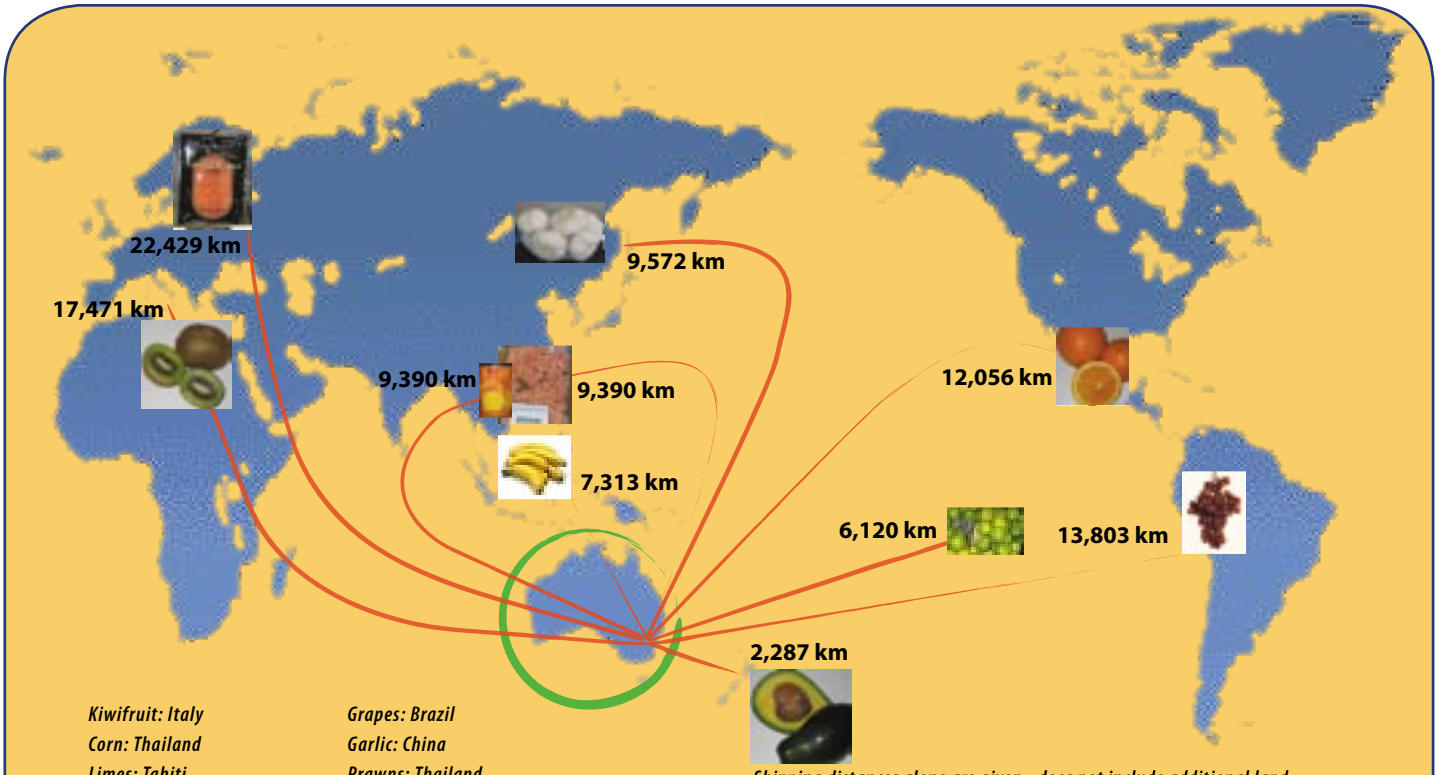
Locally grown and raised has made a shorter journey to market and abattoir. According to a 2005 British study, if all food was consumed within 20km of where it was produced, costs associated with congestion and transport would be cut by 9 per cent (www.acfonline.org.au).

How to reduce your food miles

How, in practice, do we support, purchase, and eat local food?

- **Read the labels** and ask questions. Buy potatoes, sprouts, carrots, cabbage, strawberries, apples, pears and the vegetables and fruit that thrive in our own region, the Sydney Basin.
- **Find local greengrocers, butchers, delicatessens and fish shops** — these are likely to be locally-owned businesses selling products produced within the region. Again — read the labels or ask where produce has come from.
- **Avoid air freight**, especially. Tell your shopkeepers and the government that you want food with 'country of origin' clearly identified on the label.
- **Eat whatever is in season** — that is when it is at its freshest and tastiest — and also at the best price. Seasonal food guide pamphlets are available from some fruit markets or www.sydneymarkets.com.au
- **Source your food from community food options**: local farmers' markets, community gardens, food co-operatives, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and box schemes (see related FFA fact sheet *Community Food Systems*).
- **Grow some of your own food**. Most people can get access to a 1m x 3m sunny, raised bed in which you can deposit compost and intensively grow a surprising amount of supplementary fruit and vegetables. Even on a balcony, tomatoes and herbs do well. Growing fruit and vegetables teaches children — and their parents and teachers — attitudes of care and respect that are needed to sustain life.
- **Look at what you can do to support local food** in your personal and professional life:
  - Does your council/workplace/school support urban agriculture?
  - Does your council/workplace/school purchase regional produce?
  - Celebrate the produce of your region by hosting a local food dinner party.

While you are enjoying your local food shared meal, also share the stories about how easy (or difficult) it was for you to source the food that you brought along. What were some of the challenges? How did you overcome these challenges?



Kiwifruit: Italy
Corn: Thailand
Limes: Tahiti
Smoked salmon: Norway
Bananas: The Philippines

Grapes: Brazil
Garlic: China
Prawns: Thailand
Oranges: California
Avocados: New Zealand

Shipping distances alone are given - does not include additional land transport. Multiple ingredient, processed and packaged foods accumulate much larger total distances.

How far has your food travelled?

Compiled for the Food Fairness Alliance by Sandra Menteith.
Map courtesy of www.theodora.com/maps, used with permission.

A few questions for discussion

1. What kinds of regional produce do you have access to?
2. How might you be able to access more of what is grown and produced locally?
3. How much would our eating habits need to change if we were to reduce the distance our food travels?
4. How are economic, social and environmental problems linked to each other and to the global food system?
5. Compare the hidden costs that are part of our food supply.

   For Sydney region residents, compare the inputs (seedstock and its raising, agricultural chemicals, fuel, transportation emissions and road requirements, marketing costs, packaging and its disposal and retailing) of:

   - a popper container of apple juice imported from Italy and an apple grown at Bilpin in the Blue Mountains near Sydney
   - bananas imported from North Queensland and bananas grown in the home or nearby community garden.

Footnotes

1. AUSVeg CEO quoted in *The Land*, August 2005
2. *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 7 January 2006: *Fresh Food Farce*, by Darren Behar who reports that vital nutrients and minerals may decline in produce held for prolonged times after harvesting.

   See also *Long Distance Food* www.greens.org.nz and *Bringing the Food Economy Home*, Helena Norberg-Hodge and Steven Gorelick www.isec.org.uk
3. Leigh Andrew, *Imported fruit and vegies worry consumers and anger farmers, The Land* August 2005
4. *The World Trade Organisation: An Australian Guide* 2006 edition (quoting the National Land and Water Resource Audit), *Global Trade Watch*, p10.

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- F3 Local Food Consultants (UK): www.localfood.org.uk
- Local Food Works (UK): www.localfoodworks.org

SYDNEY FOOD FAIRNESS ALLIANCE

OUR CONTACT PEOPLE:

Communications - **Rowena Yamazaki 02 9515 9736 rowena.duns@email.cs.nsw.gov.au**

Advocacy - **Lynne Saville 02 4560 5725 lsaville@chcs.com.au**

Education - **Jill Finnane 0427 279 199 jillf@erc.org.au**

Planning - **Monique Desmarchelier 02 4732 7523 mdesmarch@penrithcity.nsw.gov.au**

If you would like to join the *FFA listserv discussion* email either:

fiona.campbell@randwick.nsw.gov.au or rowena.duns@email.cs.nsw.gov.au