

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Food Security in Australia

May 2009

Overview

The senate committee inquiring into food security in Australia has been asked to consider the country's food production capacity considering three factors.

How can Australia produce food that is?

- A) Affordable
- B) Viable for production by farmers
- C) Of sustainable impact on the environment

Submission

My farm is a mixed farming enterprise growing summer and winter crops e.g. Maize wheat, barley, chick peas, sorghum, sunflowers, soy and faba beans. I also run beef cattle and a free range egg enterprise operates on the property.

Currently I'm in the process of moving from conventional agriculture to biological /organic practices. My aim is to produce nutrient dense/rich food for my fellow man. The relationship between human health and soil health is critical if we are to survive into the future. If the soil in which our food is grown is nutrient deficient, then the food we produce will be also, having a long term negative impact on human health.

To maintain microbial life in the soil, oxygen, food and water is required. It is the microorganisms that produce a living soil and maintains the delicate balance of humus, trace elements and nutrients. To stay viable soils need to be built by increasing the humus content. Humus, which is active carbon, holds four times its weight in water and improves plant and produce quality along with nutrient holding capacity. Without humus the immune system of a crop is diminished and there is an increase in disease and insect attack. With the infringement of mining companies on the Liverpool Plains, contamination of the soil, air and water becomes an issue. Pollution of the water and soil with salts and heavy metals, such as lead, arsenic and cadmium, would destroy the beneficial microbes in the soil and allow the non beneficial organisms to flourish. This would undermine the system of biological/organics that I have been setting in place for the last nine years. Not only would the quality of the crops produced be diminished so to

would be long term food security while contributing to the degradation of our rich farming land and our long term viability to produce quality food.

“Around 1.2 billion ha or 10% of the worlds arable area is affected by serious degradation, of which 300m ha is now unusable for farming. There is a continuous loss of about 5-10 million ha a year. Eighty per cent of the remaining arable area is degraded to some degree.” Cribb J. For this reason prime agricultural land must be preserved to ensure a secure food supply for our growing population.

To help drought proof my farm I recently purchased an irrigation block which allows for food production to continue during dry times. The water is drawn from alluvial aquifers and is off high quality. The damage of any mining activities on ground water has the potential to contaminate or destroy these aquifers and their recharge areas. For this reason a water study must be done to determine the potential damage that mining will have on this most valuable resource which once lost can not be replaced. Any contamination will be detrimental not only to the quality of food produced, but also to obtaining organic status.

We have the privilege along with the responsibility to ensure that this land, of which we are custodians, is delivered to our children in a better condition than we found it

Cribb, J “Food the Forgotten Issue’ Acres Australia. Vol 15, p1, 3. Dec. 2007