



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 be 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 or 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 coordinated approach to food supply, nutrition, public health and sustainable agriculture in the Sydney region.

The Sydney Basin — economy, employment, sustainability

The Sydney Basin provides...

90 per cent of Sydney's perishable vegetables

Almost 100 per cent of the state's Asian vegetables

80 per cent of the fresh mushroom supply

Most of Sydney's cherry tomatoes, snow peas, snake beans, Lebanese cucumbers, fresh tomatoes, spring onions, shallots

33 per cent of NSW's poultry production

The Sydney Basin contributes to...

The security of Sydney and NSW's food supply

A sustainable and healthy city

A viable local economy

The economic and social livelihoods of farming communities and workers in agricultural processing and marketing

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...

Farm ownership: mostly family owned and operated (Parker 2004)

Average size: 40ha, compared to 1454ha for the state (Sinclair 2004)

Average return per hectare to Sydney Basin farmers: \$5433

Average return for NSW: \$136 per hectare (1997 ABS Agriculture, NSW Agriculture 2003, p1)

Sydney agricultural livelihoods...

Sydney Basin agriculture is the largest industry in Western Sydney, employing around 12,000 people

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)

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)

References

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