

Outcomes of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance

Blue Mountains FORUM 17 July 2009

Food Police Ideas and Recommendations applicable at a State or National level

1. Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to communicate the outcomes of the Blue Mountains Food Forum held on July 18 2009 at the Mid Mountains Community Centre in Lawson. On that day, over 60 people came together to articulate their desire for a food system which was equitable and sustainable. The Forum itself was one of 5 regional forums being held around the Sydney Region in the Lead up to the Food Summit on October 22/23 2009. The purpose of this summit is to table policy ideas at the state level for a fair and sustainable food system for NSW.

More information about the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance and the Food Summit 2009 can be found at www.sydneyfoodfairness.org.

Many ideas came out of the Blue Mountains Forum that are of immediate relevance to State and Federal policymakers. This document summarises these ideas. A companion document contains information relevant to community activities and local government..

The full list of outcomes are on our website (<http://sites.google.com/site/sffabmforum/>) but the following summary distills the discussions of the various subgroups on the day.

2 General Statements

The BM Forum requests that the Food Summit in October 2009 adopt the following Bill of Rights (Ethics of Food)

We have the following rights

- To produce our own food
- To know the source and contents of our food (comprehensive labelling)
- To have access to a wide variety of nutritious foods
- To save and sow our seed without genetic or other interference
- To a fair and equitable share of water resources (including collection of rainwater)
- And our responsibility is not to take more than our fair share

- National/State programmes to be developed which promote and gives financial incentives for local food production and supply. Adopt a 20% target of population buying/eating local by 2020 -> kick-start local food economy
- Emphasise that the approach to achieving sustainable food policy goals is by emphasising the benefits, rewards, enjoyment, passion.

- Commit to minimal negative impact on natural systems as a result of either broadacre or peri-urban/urban food production
- GE Free policy at all levels of govt, and in the meantime, Genetically Modified labelling needs to be improved to be accurate and comprehensive.
- Planning laws to show more flexibility
- Expand Human Rights Act to encompass food

3 Innovation

There is much that needs to be restored, developed, extended and created, in the infrastructure of a local food economy. National and State governments can assist in this by

- Fund and resource a centres of excellence (decentralized!) on alternative technology for small-scale and community organic/sustainable including education, demonstration, promotion and practical implementation.
- Crop protection (greenhouses, canopies, netting, shading, season extension, lighting)
- Land contouring (layout, ponds)
- Water reticulation /irrigation (subsurface, microspray, drip, trickle, efficient methods)
- Water availability/ security/droughts
- Reuse public system – grey water/storm water
- Organic methods – biodynamic, natural bacteria promotion, rotation planting, soil-food-web, plant & weed teas for growth stimulation and insecticides, mulches, composting, pest control – natural methods, companion planting, non-hybrid resistant varieties
- Greenhouse technology – passive solar and low technology greenhouses
- ALL of above requires funded trials for community involvement.
- Agriculture Dept to devote educational resources to alternative technology for organic gardening at community level
- Determine a ratio land allocated to sustainable agriculture and residential in Town Planning regulation, and require space to be devoted to allotments, small market gardens etc in new developments in the same way that green space or urban bushland already is.
- Support use/subsidies for greenhouses ie solar powered prototype

4 Protecting Agriculture

Concern was expressed amongst attendees that while there was so much agreement on the need for a more healthy and equitable food system, many government policies actually made things worse. Repeated reference was made to the loss of prime agricultural land to urban sprawl, and planning regulations which prohibited sensible small scale agriculture.

- Planning regulations should be modified to promote new models of peri-urban subdivision which respond to and address the known risks of climate change and peak oil (cf BMCC Climate Change Risk Identification project)
- Adopt strategies which effect a 'buffering' or risk minimisation approach of diversity, flexibility and decentralisation, rather than traditional monolithic approaches. This will allow peri-urban agriculture to develop as diverse/mixed/organic/intensive/small. Example of this is Rivers Road

Organic Farms in Canowindra which has community title for approx 12 farms, and thus many costs and efforts can be shared.

- Require Organic standards for peri-urban agriculture as this permits safe co-existence between production and residential (not the case for chemical farming)
- Determine a ratio for land allocated to sustainable agriculture and residential in Town Planning regulation, and require space to be devoted to allotments, small market gardens etc in new developments in the same way that green space or urban bushland already is.
- Strategies to support small producers e.g. market gardens, mixed farms, bottom up, community driven. Example of how China's food supply doubled when communist government permitted small private producers. To what extent do we have a 'planned economy' in food here?
- Protect productive agriculture land from development which contributes to greenhouse effect. Specific legal protection for rural zones in Land and Environment Court.
- Nutrition through soil, Dept of Agriculture, mineral deficiency, re-mineralising
- Lobby Govt to purchase farm land in Sydney Basin – green belt for market gardens
- Comprehensive integration of peak oil and greenhouse concerns into planning cycle
- Food and transport desert
- Link between food and environment for schools
- Expand Heritage Act to recognise agricultural heritage and to include food growing land and practices

5 Factor In Environment

Much discussion covered the issues of 'cost' and 'price' of food, and the move towards factory farming, carbon intensive food, and oligopoly control of the food system

- Increase sophistication of accounting for environmental impact statements
- Research and education about so called externalities in food economy. In particular social cost = private cost plus externality (eg chemical factory emitting polluted waste – creates a higher cost which is not on the balance sheet)
- Respond transparently, in the communities' interest, to the known risks to our food system of chemical contamination, malnutrition and undernourishment, climate change, peak oil and influence by monopolistic forces. Insurance companies are already factoring in the effects of climate change – why not State Government mitigating the risk to our food supply?
- Determine a ratio land allocated to sustainable agriculture and residential in Town Planning regulation, and require space to be devoted to allotments, small market gardens etc in new developments in the same way that green space or urban bushland already is.
- Example of how China's food supply doubled when communist government permitted small private producers. To what extent do we have a 'planned economy' in food here?
- Remove implicit subsidy for GM food by factoring in the cost of genetic pollution in and non GM food systems (eg Honey, weeds, species crossing etc)

6 Health and Safety & Welfare

Many participants articulated a strong desire to get past narrow and restrictive definitions in discussions around 'efficiency' in the food economy. This usually ignored the broader impacts and costs on the community of health, welfare, equity, social cohesion and social capital.

- The Food Policy to be developed needs to emphasise the critical importance of healthy food and embrace the concept of 'food as medicine'. Nutritious food needs to be identified as a basic human right. The call to action statement in the document "Food for Thought" could be incorporated in the Food Policy.
- We need to promote the enjoyment of food, its taste and flavour.
- A national (international) interactive website to be developed that people can contribute to, which provides recipes that are linked to food composition tables, shopping lists, and national and UN dietary guidelines.
- Advertising could be used to promote healthy eating eg. Junk Food ads to be taxed – revenues used to sponsor advertisements which convey quick and easy food recipes for the community.
- At all levels of government, legislation needs to be revisited to redress the imbalance between food safety and over packaging of foods. This is particularly the case in relation to food provision for vulnerable communities, where legislation has meant the over-packaging of food, & outsourcing of food provision in places like hospitals, aged care facilities etc.
- State Food policy should support and develop the concept of share and bulk shopping by communities.
- People on pensions/low income who have special dietary requirements (where additional food costs are involved) should be able to access discounts – similar to how the Pharmaceutical Benefits scheme operates.
- Government system of Food Assistance for vulnerable families needs to include vouchers from healthy food outlets, like Food Co-ops, Fruit and Vegetable outlets etc.
- Local food inspectors to incorporate GE monitoring

7 Education

While much progress was acknowledged in the development of healthy food curricula, there was agreement that much more is required to counteract established unhelpful ideas and patterns of food and eating in our culture.

- All educational strategies need to be broad, inclusive and culturally sensitive.
- Given that all families with children have contact with the state education system; this provides an ideal opportunity to increase general knowledge of healthy food. We can 'educate' families through their children.
- The school curriculum (particularly primary schools) needs to be examined to ensure that it recognises the importance of and includes the development of cooking skills, healthy eating, planning and budgeting.
- Clarification and better communication of what the differences and implications are for "Best Before" and "Use By" labelling - to promote health & safety while reducing food waste.
- The skills of Occupational Therapists could be better utilized especially in relation to their living skill development tools. This needs to be explored at a state level.
- Schools could be better utilized as a resource for growing seeds, cooking, and storage while fulfilling an educational role (as identified above).

- **Department of Health to model programmes which teach low income/atrisk families how to establish food-buying groups and cooperatives**