



# Response to Our Cities Discussion Paper Feedback Survey

1 March 2011

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## ***Introduction***

The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance (SFFA) is an incorporated association that works to promote food security and sustainable food systems across Sydney. Its members include health professionals, community workers, social justice advocates, community gardeners, academics and development practitioners. Members of the SFFA undertake advocacy, education and networking to promote access to affordable, healthy food that has been produced in a sustainable manner.

The SFFA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Our Cities Discussion Paper Feedback Survey. The production and consumption of food is integral to the health of people, the environment and economy and must be front and centre in planning for sustainable and liveable cities. With this in mind, we submit the following responses for your consideration.

### ***1. What is your vision for Australian cities? What should our cities look like in 2030 or even 2050?***

The SFFA vision is for cities that facilitate access to enough, affordable, healthy food for all residents; food that has been produced in a sustainable manner.

### ***2. What do you think may be the differing challenges and opportunities faced by regional cities or cities of different sizes and stages of development?***

#### **Climate change**

The impact of climate change on food production is one of the key challenges facing Australian cities. Climate change will mean more unpredictable weather events that will destroy crops. It will also mean less – and less reliable – rainfall in some of our traditional agricultural basins. 75 per cent of irrigated crops in Australia are grown in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Garnaut Report submitted that unchecked climate change will lead to a 92 percent decline in irrigated agricultural production including fruit, vegetables, dairy and grains, in this basin. A decline in agricultural production, together with increased demand for food from growing populations, here and abroad, will see upward pressure on the price of food.

#### **Peak oil and peak phosphorous**

At the same time, two key resources in the agricultural sector will become more scarce over time. We currently rely on oil to power agricultural machinery that harvests and processes our food and to transport it to our cities. We use phosphorous to fertilise our crops. Evidence points to the existence of both peak oil and peak phosphorous. As the supply of oil and phosphorous tighten and the price of each of these commodities increases, our food will also increase in price.

## **Food insecurity**

Already in Australia, 5 to 6 per cent of the population experience a degree of food insecurity in that they run out of food and cannot afford to purchase more at some stage over the course of a year. In areas of high socio-economic disadvantage this figure is much higher. Other households are able to secure access to *enough* food but lack the means to buy enough *healthy* food. Low-income earners, Aboriginal communities, the unemployed and sole parents are considered particularly vulnerable to these financial difficulties.

Food insecurity is, here and now, a challenge that confronts our cities. In the future, as climate change, peak oil and peak phosphorous increase the price of food, more residents of Australian cities will experience food insecurity and those households who are already food insecure will experience it more often.

## **Unhealthy food system**

At the same time as some people struggle to be able to afford to access enough healthy food, our food system produces, promotes, positions and retails an array of unhealthy, energy dense, nutrient poor foods.

Research informs us that low-income neighbourhoods have fewer healthier food options and more fast food outlets than high-income neighbourhoods. The food industry spends significantly more money promoting fast and junk food, including to children, than public health advocates and governments spend promoting healthy food. One of our largest retailers labels itself as the fresh food people but over 70 per cent of the floor space is dedicated to non-fresh food. Moreover, increasingly, supermarket shelves are home to generic branded goods. An Australian National Health Foundation analysis comparing generic products with branded goods shows the cheaper in-house brands generally contain significantly more salt, saturated and trans fats and more calories than branded products. These are the brands that people on low incomes tend to buy.

Such policies and practices promote unhealthy eating habits at great cost to individuals, society and the economy. Currently, 68 per cent of Australian men and 55 per cent of Australian women are overweight or obese at a total direct financial cost of \$8.3 billion per year. One Australian in seven is forecast to have type 2 diabetes, at a cost to the economy of \$14 billion. Those expected to have diabetes will have complications, requiring 270,000 coronary bypass operations. More than 250,000 will have strokes and more than 750,000 will have kidney complaints. As food system related disease and ill-health continues to take an increasing personal and economic toll, it represents a significant challenge for Australian cities.

## **Loss of agriculture within the Sydney Basin**

Another food related challenge confronting Sydney is the pressure on agriculture within the Sydney Basin. High quality agricultural land and vegetable farms on the urban fringes are under threat from urban expansion. Sydney's

market gardens and farms currently produce an astonishing 12 per cent of NSW agricultural production on just 1 per cent of the state's agricultural land. This includes more than 40 per cent of poultry production and 40 per cent of greenhouse production. Australian Bureau of Statistics data informs that the Sydney Basin is the third most important area for vegetable production in NSW, in terms of tonnage, after the Murray Basin and the Murrumbidgee. As well as being comparatively more productive than land elsewhere in NSW – returning \$5,500 per ha compared to \$136 in NSW as a whole – the Sydney Basin also has ready access to labour markets, water and transport infrastructure.

***6. What do you consider to be the most significant transport issues affecting our cities, and what approaches would you encourage governments to pursue?***

### **Public transport to support access to healthy food**

Whilst, as noted, a proportion of the population experiences food insecurity because they cannot afford to purchase enough healthy food, other consumers experience physical difficulty getting to sources of affordable healthy food. This includes frail older people, people with disability, people living in suburbs not serviced by a supermarket or grocer or without adequate competition between food retailers, people without a vehicle, and those who live in areas not serviced by public transport.

The SFFA advocates for city-wide assessments of the availability of adequate public and community transport to facilitate access to healthy and affordable food stores for disadvantaged communities. Where consumers are found to reside in food deserts – that is, in areas without ready access to affordable, healthy food – governments must invest in public and community transport networks to facilitate access to healthy food.

***8. What is the role for pricing reform (such as water, roads or carbon pricing) in meeting the challenges of Australian cities?***

### **No price reform without compensation for low-income households**

The SFFA considers setting prices to amend consumer behaviour to be a very blunt policy instrument that has the very real capacity to adversely affect the lives of people living on low and fixed incomes.

Where pricing reform – such as a carbon price – is employed, the SFFA contends that low-income households must be compensated to ensure they are no worse off under the new pricing regime. This may mean amendments to pensions, benefits and taxation levels – as the Australian Government promised under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme – or changes to service specific concessions and rebates.

***10. What opportunities do you see for governments to achieve better outcomes for urban communities, by leveraging their investments in other activities such as health and education?***

## Independent food policy council needed

Given the array of food issues facing Australia now and in the future, the SFFA advocates that its time government convened an independent food policy council to develop an integrated food policy. To ensure such a policy best meets the needs of the Australian people and environment, its primary objective must be to foster access to affordable, healthy food for all people; food that has been produced in a sustainable manner.

More specifically, a food policy council and food policy would seek to:

- Protect, in perpetuity, prime agricultural land and the agricultural water supply;
- Ensure compliance of agricultural production and distribution with the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- Adopt a cautionary approach to approving new food production and processing technologies to ensure food safety;
- Provide adequate funding for agricultural research and development that complies with principles of ecologically sustainable development and, especially, the growing organic industry;
- Ensuring fair economic returns to farmers;
- Support the development of community-based and regional food systems that support regional economies and improve food access;
- Ensure access to affordable and adequate fresh food irrespective of income;
- Investigate innovative measures such as tax reforms and subsidies to promote access to healthy foods and reduce the burden of chronic disease;
- Mandate front of pack traffic light labeling to assist consumers to better understand the health impacts of their food choices and to incentivise industry to reduce the salt, sugar and fat content of processed foods;
- Ensure people have access to information about GM ingredients, and place of origin, so they can make informed food choices;
- Provide incentives for councils, universities, schools, social housing providers, developers and businesses to allocate land for community gardens. This is particularly important if cities move towards more high-density living in place homes with backyards;
- Oblige developers to include provision for food stores in new estates and other large developments;
- Fund food security programs within area health services to promote access to healthy food for disadvantaged communities;
- Ban junk food advertising during children's television shows; and
- Introduce an online grocery price comparison service.

***13. How can we best protect and enhance land and habitats in and around our cities where they are ecologically sensitive, of heritage value, or highly productive agriculturally?***

## **Diverse and complementary strategies needed to preserve Sydney basin agricultural productivity**

Consistent with work by Industry & Investment NSW, the SFFA contends it is essential to scope the potential and identify the land requirements for the Sydney Basin to supply 50 per cent of the vegetables required in the Sydney region.

Thereafter, the diverse agricultural activity within the Sydney Basin should be retained through the introduction of agricultural protection zones. This will ensure the provision of sustainable fresh food for Sydney and will improve the city's resilience in the face of predicted impacts of climate change, peak oil and declining rainfall locally, and of possible disruptions to global food markets.

The SFFA also recommends that Government investigates the role that transferable development rights could play in maintaining the viability of Sydney farms.

Of note, many urban communities in Australia and worldwide are exploring ways to stimulate local economies through food enterprises. Tourist trails, farmers markets, and social enterprises can support farmers, reduce food miles and generate employment in low-income areas.

### ***14. How do you think we can best support more efficient use of resources (such as water, energy and food) in our cities?***

#### **Reducing waste in the food system**

The SFFA acknowledges that more than \$5 billion of food is wasted every year in Australia. This waste occurs from paddock to plate. At one end, requirements on farmers to provide large retailers with produce that is uniformly shaped, sized and coloured means that much produce that is fit for consumption is discarded.

To assist in reducing waste at this end of the food chain, the SFFA urges government to work with large food retailers to introduce a 'seconds' range of imperfect looking fruits and vegetables at a lower price than premium products. This would serve to both reduce waste along the food value chain and promote the affordability of fresh, healthy food.

### ***15. How can we best plan and build our cities and infrastructure to achieve a lower ecological footprint?***

#### **Protecting peri-urban agriculture**

As noted, the SFFA urges governments to protect peri-urban agricultural land. The loss of this land to housing and other urban developments in Sydney would push agricultural production to the other side of the Great Dividing Range. In so doing, food would have to travel further to get to market, increasing its ecological footprint.

***17. How can we ensure that climate change risk is taken into consideration in the design, construction and operation of cities, infrastructure and buildings?***

**Growing food in our cities**

Beyond protecting agricultural production on urban fringes, the SFFA submits that government should consider integrating additional food production into the development of cities, including urban farms, community gardens, and vertical gardens. Public land and people should also be employed to plant and tend fruit trees eg street orchards and other edible plants. Ensuring our cities are able to produce some of their own food will provide a measure of protection against adverse impacts of climate change.

Within Australia and around the world there are many examples of urban agriculture that will serve to mitigate risks to food production from climate change. In NSW, community gardens like Randwick Community Garden, Randwick; Glovers Community Garden, Rozelle; Kooragang City Farm, Newcastle; and Woolloomooloo Community Garden, Woolloomooloo may serve this purpose. Interstate, the Northey Street City Farm, Brisbane; and CERES, East Brunswick are examples of community based city farms that produce food, and educate the community about food production, within the city.

Internationally, there are many examples of productive agricultural systems in high density urban areas. In Greater Vancouver and Victoria, Canada, there are numerous community gardens. In Copenhagen, Denmark, local authorities have an obligation to ensure the existence of allotment gardens. In Havana, Cuba, state and community run urban vegetable gardens employ over 100,000 people and account for about half the vegetables grown in Cuba.

***Conclusion***

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Our Cities Discussion Paper Feedback Survey.

Consistent with our vision for Sydney, the SFFA urges you to ensure that plans for our cities seek to protect and promote food production within urban areas and promote access to healthy, affordable food for all households.