FOOD SYSTEMS AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This document aims to assist local governments in Victoria to develop a coordinated and equitable approach to optimising food systems. This has become critical at a time when international commitments to local food systems are growing, and yet in Australia corresponding commitments from higher tiers of government are lagging. Advocating for state and federal action to improve health and wellbeing is a core responsibility of local governments. To support them in this task, the paper offers clear and easily citeable position statements on three fundamental challenges: Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, and Planning.

MAY 2017

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Executive Summary

Several emerging challenges have made it necessary to enhance Victoria's food systems. Drawing on consultations with local government, community groups, academic researchers, and industry, this document identifies three overarching challenges and proposes steps toward overcoming them. The challenges, outlined in three position statements, are (1) Health and Wellbeing, (2) Economic Development, and (3) Planning. While each of these spheres of activity carries unique implications for the optimisation of Victorian food systems, as a group the three reflect several drivers of change and potentials for improvement:

- *Diet and food retail environment*. As Melbourne's population grows toward an estimated 7 million people by 2050, residents' proximity to fresh food impinges directly on health outcomes. The commercial availability—and viability—of nutritious food represents an emerging opportunity for economic growth, but realising this potential will require more responsive planning regulations to ensure consumer choice and fair prices.

- *Food security*. By the FAO's definition, citizens are food secure when they experience "physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food." To ensure food security, citizens must be aware of the health implications of their food choices, live in contexts where economic development is achieved through a blend of rural and urban farming, and have access to land through locally engaged council planning.

- *Social and cultural inclusion*. Twenty percent of Victorians are from non-English speaking backgrounds (more than any other Australian state). Long recognised as a social determinant of health, inclusion of linguistically and culturally diverse groups encourages economic entrepreneurship and civic participation in local governance and planning.

- *The changing dynamics of food production.* According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of farmers under the age of 35 was 28 percent in 1981 but is only 13 percent today. Agriculture is not economically viable for more than 70 percent of Australian farmers, generating social and mental health pressures in rural towns and demonstrating the need for more comprehensive whole-of-government approaches to food systems planning.

The paper's three position statements examine these drivers of change and offer suggestions for advocating policies to address them. It is the authors' collective hope that policy advisors, Councils and the broader public will find these suggestions accessible and easy to accommodate within their own research and advocacy projects. As safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate nutrition becomes internationally recognised as a "right to food" (see Appendix 2), Victorian local governments are positioned to lead the way to more diversified and fair food systems. Above all this paper argues that greater awareness of food and nutrition as drivers of Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, and Planning is a critical step toward this goal.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Australia's food system is based on an agricultural and economic paradigm whose pursuit of enhanced productivity, economies of scale, improved efficiencies and consumer convenience has generated fragilities. Rationalisation, consolidation and capital intensive production means fewer farmers on the land, higher levels of farm debt, and resulting stress, depression and suicide among food producers. Other consequences include the hollowing out of rural and regional communities, reduced employment opportunities and corrosion of social capital, as well as greater environmental impacts and contributions to greenhouse gas emissions. Cheap and convenient food for consumers, delivered by a retail environment that in many communities privileges fast food over healthy food retail outlets by a factor of four, five or six to one, has produced a pandemic of obesity in which diet is the major cause of disease and early death. When direct and indirect costs are counted, some experts put the total expense impact as high as $56 - $130 bn per year, which equates to as much as 3.5 to 8 percent of the country's GDP.[1]

This is a shocking and unsustainable figure, all the more so when one considers that merely 1.5% of the $161 billion spent by Australian governments on health in 2014-15 was spent on prevention, far less than New Zealand (6.4%), Finland (6.1%) and Canada (5.9%).[2] These outcomes are enabled by policy settings and planning frameworks that often prevent local governments from taking into account health and wellbeing and environmental considerations when making decisions on development applications for the opening of new fast food franchise outlets. The lack of spending on prevention and food literacy is compounded by the absence of any controls on the ability of fast food companies to advertise their products to children and youth. Moreover, the continued expansion of our major cities means that we are losing much of our best soils and farmland to residential and commercial development, putting the resilience of our food system and our future food security at risk.

About this paper

This paper is the synthesis report of a Food Governance Taskforce (FGT), formed at the initiative of Sustain and the Victorian Local Governance Association in 2016, following the Democratising Food Systems workshop held at William Angliss Institute on 19 October 2015.[3] The FGT is a multi-institutional action-oriented taskforce, with a volunteer local government membership, formed with the intention of supporting local government in Victoria to be an enabler of food system change that supports health and wellbeing, environmental and economic development outcomes. The Taskforce met four times from April - August 2016 with the participation of 13 Councils, and continued its work in October-December 2016 via three working groups focused on the priority themes of Health and Wellbeing, Planning and Economic Development. The Taskforce's purpose was defined as follows:

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[1] See Colaguiri et al 2010; also **Obesity as big a risk as smoking** and The true cost of fat: Obesity a $130 billion drag on our wellbeing.

[2] See Moodie et al 2016 and http://www.aihw.gov.au/expenditure-publications/.

[3] See http://www.circlesoffood.org/2016/01/08/democratising-food-systems-workshop-report/. The workshop was attended by producers, social entrepreneurs, community food networkers, farmers' market coordinators, not-for-profit managers, local government managers, local government agribusiness extension and rural business officers, dieticians and health professionals, representatives of philanthropic foundations, trade union organisers, writers, researchers, academics, students, and chefs.

1. To capture and disseminate existing best practice in Victoria and elsewhere as regards food system policies, strategies, research, programs and projects
2. To support Councils and communities to embed food system principles and actions in key Council plans and strategies
3. To support Councils and communities to identify key barriers and obstacles to food system change, and engage in collective advocacy to address those obstacles at the State level

In February 2017 members of the Taskforce convened with a broader representation of 30 council, community, educational and not-for-profit representatives, and resolved to synthesise the position papers produced by the three working groups into a single document, complemented by an additional paper focusing on local government and urban agriculture. The purpose of this paper is to articulate clearly the role of local government regarding the food system, as:

- removing barriers to change
- enabling food system change
- advocating for food system change

This paper is intended to support local government staff and elected officials in the revision, drafting and finalisation of Council plans and key strategic documents, in particular the Health and Wellbeing Plans, Economic Development Plans and (where applicable) Green Wedge Management Plans. It is also intended to have a broader audience amongst community organisations, producers and businesses that engage with local government on a range of food system issues, as well as researchers, teachers, students and members of the general public concerned about the food system.

Applying a food systems lens: the Circles of Food approach

From the brief synopsis above, it can be seen that our local, regional and national food systems are influenced by a multiplicity of interconnecting factors that span the spheres – or domains – of economics, politics, ecology and culture. To make sense of this complexity, applying a systemic framework of analysis and understanding is very important, based on a common understanding of the food system *as a system* comprised of:

> "*The web of actors, processes and interactions involved in growing, processing, distributing, consuming and disposing of foods, from the provision of inputs and farmer training, to product packaging and manufacturing, to waste recycling. A holistic food systems lens is concerned with how these processes interact with one another, and with the environmental, social, political and economic context. The food systems lens also brings to light reinforcing and balancing feedback loops, tensions between the different components and flows of food systems, and interactions that are cyclical, multilayered and multi-scale. It is a way of thinking about the world that seeks to identify the linear and non-linear relationships between the different components of the system.*"
> International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems 2015 (IPES), p3

In developing and applying a holistic and integrated food system lens, *Sustain* works with **the *Circles of Social Life*** framework which offers a practical methodology to collaboratively investigate and address the totality of complex issues across a system and the interactions and tensions between them. This Circles framework builds upon practical work done by the UN Global Compact Cities

Programme, Metropolis, World Vision and a number of cities around the world including Porto Alegre, Melbourne, San Francisco, Berlin and Milwaukee.[4]

This approach offers an integrated method for practically responding to complex issues of sustainability, resilience, adaptation, liveability and vibrancy. It takes an urban or regional area, city, community or organization through the difficult process of responding to complex or seemingly intractable problems and challenges at the systemic level. This approach acknowledges that it is imperative to understand factors beyond the individual and take into account the broader ecological, economic, political and cultural factors, including policies at global, regional national and local levels. As represented in the collaboratively developed *Urban and Regional Food Declaration* (see Appendix 1), which to date has been signed by seven local councils, the focus of this approach is to explore, in an assets-based manner, the key enabling and constraining factors that can contribute to a local food system that aspires to being:

Economically productive: with multiple economic and employment benefits accruing to local residents and, in particular, with enhanced access to healthy and affordable food;

Ecologically sustainable: laying the foundations for a transition to a low-carbon economy, and enhancing health and well-being;

Politically integrated: at a policy and program level, with high levels of active engagement from food-system stakeholders and local residents; and

Culturally vibrant: supporting and expanding a culture that appreciates diverse food traditions and the benefits of local, seasonal and healthy food more generally.

The Circles of Food methodology

The *Circles* approach provides a way of responding to a series of questions that are of fundamental importance to policy makers and professionals across all levels of government and society.

First, how are we best to understand and map the sustainability of the food systems within our cities, communities and organisations in all their complexity — economic, ecological, political and cultural?

Second, what are the central critical food system issues that relate to making the city or community more sustainable?

Third, what should be measured and how? Instead of designating a pre-given set of food system indicators, the approach provides a process for deciding upon indicators and analysing the relationship between them. Thus it supports progressive monitoring and evaluation and a reporting process.

Fourth, how can a positive response be planned? The approach provides a series of pathways for achieving complex main objectives. It offers a deliberative process for negotiation over contested or contradictory critical objectives and multiple driving issues in relation to those main objectives.

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[4] *See* http://www.circlesofsustainability.org

HEALTH AND WELLBEING POSITION STATEMENT

Public health is a mandated area of responsibility for local government under the 2008 Public Health and Wellbeing Act. Public health is the 'science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals' (Winslow 1920). Health and wellbeing is influenced by the social determinants of health. These are the 'conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life' (World Health Organization 2016). These forces and systems can be social norms, economic policies and systems, political systems and social policies. It is not sufficient to focus on the health care system; as the old saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure".

Local governments have both a responsibility to their own staff, as well as external obligations to promote the health and wellbeing of their communities. Universal access to healthy, safe and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times is a basic human right, which all local governments (as well as state and federal governments) are bound to uphold (Right to Food Coalition 2016). This requires consideration of the whole food system, including 'everything from farming, food processing, transportation and the selling of food, through to how we buy, enjoy and dispose food' (North East Food Policy Working Group 2016).

This position statement aims to provide an overview of the issues facing Victorian local governments, examples of best practice and case studies to demonstrate that there are many actions that local governments can undertake to create sustainable and equitable food systems.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

"The conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life" require preventive health practitioners to act broadly for systemic change. Food policy covers "immense and diverse terrain" (Lang et al 2012), requiring an acknowledgement of the need to engage broadly across intersecting portfolios, agencies and tiers of government.

The current food system is based on an agricultural paradigm in which improved efficiencies and cheaper food for consumers can exacerbate the drivers of climate change, reduce employment opportunities and lead to dislocation and corrosion of social capital in rural areas. The agricultural paradigm promoted by federal and state governments undermines rural resilience and capacity and ensures that rural areas, particularly those highly dependent on farming, bear a disproportionate burden of this production system. The gradient of socioeconomic and health inequity is exacerbated by the current food system, creating an inherent rural / metropolitan divide. Evidence of this chronic rural burden is apparent across a range of health indicators (National Rural Health Alliance 2016), yet the systemic roots of rural disadvantage remain largely unaddressed by governments.

Diet and food retail environment

Diet is now the single greatest cause of preventable disease and mortality in Australia. The economic cost associated with obesity has recently been estimated as high as $130 bn / year.[5] The proximity of residents to healthy and/or unhealthy food outlets is directly related to health outcomes, and some Councils (e.g. Cardinia) exhibit a ratio as high as 6:1 (unhealthy vs healthy food outlets – see Healthy Together Cardinia 2015). Limited access to affordable, fresh and healthy food is a major driver of poor health outcomes, as is a lack of skills and capacity about meal planning and cooking (Pollard et al 2016). Conversely, location and higher levels of food literacy and education have been shown to improve healthy choices (Cannuscio et al 2014; Gallegos 2016; Reitzel et al 2016). That said, it must be borne in mind that information on its own does not equate to large scale behaviour change in conditions of structurally entrenched poverty and inequality (Story et al 2008; Caraher 2016).

Food security

Food security 'exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Food and Agriculture Organisation 2002). According to the Foodprint project, at least 60 percent more food will be needed to feed Melbourne by 2050 and yet less water and land will be available.[6] Easy access to land for growing is critical for improving access to healthy and appropriate food. Many Victorian local government food policies already exist, particularly in urban and peri-urban locations. Melbourne should build on the achievements of the City of Melbourne Food Policy to emphasize the importance of *resilience*.[7] This priority resonates with Melbourne's existing commitments under the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, which frames food security in terms of low-carbon production, efficient water use, and reduction of the "food miles" required to transport agricultural produce to customers.

Social Inclusion

Food production opens innovative pathways to acknowledge and celebrate Australia's diverse and growing multicultural heritage and immigrant identities, and to engage ageing sectors of society in healthy activities. Twenty percent of Victorians are from non-English speaking backgrounds (more than any other Australian state). Food growing, preparation and sharing are all means to engage diverse groups who might experience social exclusion, which in itself is a social determinant of health. Community food practices offer a way to build social cohesion and community resilience, consistent with the priorities determined by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.[8] Similarly, urban agriculture provides opportunities for older Australians to engage in social interaction, stay connected with their communities, feel valued and experience better health and wellbeing. This reduces pressure on public health services, and most importantly, enables individuals and groups to continue contributing to their communities as they age. Outcomes include increased physical activity, enhanced mental health resilience, greater social inclusion and prevention of dementia.[9]

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[5] See http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/the-true-cost-of-fat-obesity-a-130-billion-drag-on-our-wellbeing-20151204-glfh6a.html

[6] See http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/project_content/foodprint-melbourne/.

[7] See http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/health-services/Pages/food-policy.aspx.

[8] See http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/about/community-resilience-unit.

[9] See https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/gardens-and-health

Policy context

Health and wellbeing outcomes in Victoria are inevitably influenced by the dynamics of the global food system. National governments are exposed to the power of global markets and the dominance of multinational food system players and policies. Food ideologies are deeply entrenched. Global market and governance frameworks inform the policy directions and actions of Australian governments. There is no defined responsibility for any tier of Australian government to address issues of the food system holistically. Australian attitudes toward broad food systems governance are highly partisan, particularly at the federal level.

Given the lack of coherent policy to address food system issues at federal and state levels, local governments lack the support necessary to deliver systemic improvements to public health and wellbeing, including through food. Meaningful actions are nevertheless possible, particularly when they align with initiatives already articulated by higher tiers of government.

- *Federal government:* There is no national, whole-of-government approach to address issues of the food system. A National Food Plan was introduced in 2013 by the Labor government but was abolished by the incoming coalition government as one of its first actions in 2013 (Carey et al 2014). A scoping study for a National Nutrition Policy has since been in development however there has been no further progress in terms of developing the Policy itself.[10]

- *State government:* The Victorian Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) 2015-2019 includes "Healthier eating and active living" as a priority under the strategic direction of "Promoting health and wellbeing" (Department of Health and Human Services 2015). The outcomes framework and actions plan was published in November 2016.[11]

- *Local government:* In a number of local government areas (LGAs) in Victoria, work was supported through the flagship Healthy Together Victoria initiative. The funding for Healthy Together originally derived from programs brought about by the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA), delivered under a federal Labor government in 2010. This funding was subsequently picked up by the Victorian government when the ANPHA was abolished by the federal coalition government in 2014. This state funding ceased in June 2016.

- Some local governments have continued to advocate for food systems reform without higher-level government support, but a coherent national and state government framework for coordinating food systems improvement is now absent. From 2005-2010 VicHealth, whose funding is not tied to political cycles, auspiced a number of local governments to address food security through the Food for All initiative (Burns et al 2007). Some agencies that receive Integrated Health Promotion funding through the Victorian Department of Human Services support work around healthy eating and food systems using the Health Food Connect model and the Achievement Programs (frameworks / models that came out of HTV). Self-funding favours larger and better-resourced – generally metropolitan, peri-urban and

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[10] See https://croakey.org/released-scoping-study-for-an-australian-national-nutrition-policy/.
[11] See https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-outcomes-framework.

regional – local governments. Less well-resourced rural local governments have little capacity to act.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Subsidiarity issues

- Expectations of local government must be proportionate to their capacity
- Local government must not be expected to shoulder the burden of public health and wellbeing without proportionate responsibilities being borne by state and federal tiers of government
- Local government is increasingly expected to take on areas of responsibility that should be undertaken by higher tiers, and therefore advocacy is imperative at every opportunity. The growing pressure on local governments demonstrates the responsibility- and cost-shifting that characterises the Australian federal political system

Capacity and funding issues

- Local government must be appropriately resourced to undertake food system policies
- Although health promotion work has been defunded, the Healthy Together Victoria model works – there is no need to reinvent the wheel
- Preventive health outcomes and systemic change are measured in decades and generations, outside the ambit of electoral cycles. Resourcing must acknowledge this timeframe and be quarantined from political cycles and day-to-day administrative imperatives (viz. VicHealth)

Rural issues

- Metropolitan actors must acknowledge rural inequity inherent in the current food system
- Regional food systems could add economic and social diversity and resilience
- There is a widespread social disconnection from farming and food production
- Better education of urban residents through school programs and community outreach would help to address the rural-urban disconnect

Policy issues

- National and state food policy should be focused on comprehensive health and wellbeing, including the social determinants of health. This approach should recognise both urban and rural needs around health, employment, equity, etc.)
- Food policy should be harmonised across different industries and sectors. Food supply issues are currently siloed across portfolios such as agriculture, health, trade, environment, etc., leading to tensions and inconsistencies
- Systemic problems with the global food system require advocacy, leadership and action by state and federal tiers. There must be recognition that local government cannot be expected to carry the burden of improving the food system

Food Production issues

- Australia's food system is highly centralised and centred on metropolitan areas. This has entrenched problems ranging from a lack of transparency around purchasing to inadequate attention to food health and equity

- Australia exhibits a lack of diversity in food retail. Resulting from the centralisation problem noted above, this problem is evident in the lack of scale aggregation, distribution and retail options for growers and manufacturers
- Land use frameworks must be updated. The practical nature of this problem should facilitate solutions , such as improved public access to land (e.g. nature strip planting, community gardens, and the associated planning issues. Case studies of progressive approaches can be drawn from Devonport, TAS; Ballarat, VIC; and Fremantle, WA. Bendigo, VIC, is also currently exploring land use improvement.

Food consumption issues

- The concentration of fast food outlets, for instance in low income districts of Melbourne, has contributed to the rising incidence of type II diabetes and associated health costs for government (Swinburn et al 2011). Alternative, locally owned outlets would encourage improved health and wellbeing while promoting economic development
- Food literacy amongst the broad population is lacking and could be improved through engagement and outreach activities, such as town hall expositions and school interventions

Systemic issues

- The current paradigm for the food system can be improved, but it is entrenched by significant externalities. Health and wellbeing improvement, for instance, requires an ecological approach to public health that accounts for climate change drivers, water use, and long-term environmental pressures
- Entrenched poverty and inequality, caused by rising cost of living pressures (rents, transport) combining with downwards pressure on wages and benefit levels ,as well as the rise of casualised and insecure work. A comprehensive reform of the tax and welfare system is required, informed by international experiments with a basic income[12]
- Built environments are structured around private motor vehicle transport

ADVOCACY

- Close the loophole in the planning provisions that allows for expansion of fast food outlets independently of health and wellbeing considerations
- Introduce a sugar tax / related hypothecated health levy on unhealthy foods to further promote alternate, healthier food systems
- Set and fund food literacy targets and programs
- Better define the urban boundary to protect arable land necessary to feed a growing population. Small-scale farming should be optimised into a profitable enterprise that attracts young farmers. This will require improved terms of trade.
- Lobby the Public Health Association of Australia to take a more outspoken stance on public health, especially in relation to food systems
- Lobby the Dietitians' Association of Australia to take a more comprehensive approach to food/nutrition (it is currently overly focused on the clinical/medical aspects of dietetics), along the lines of the Canadian Dietitians Association Position Statement.[13] Much more could

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[12] See http://basicincome.org/basic-income/.
[13] See http://www.dietitians.ca/Downloads/Public/HFI-Position-Statement-and-Recommendations-DC-FINA.aspx.

be done around advocacy for better food literacy, an area in which the Association is currently almost completely absent

- Work with the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) single local government representative (currently Mayor of Joondalup in WA, Troy Pickard) to argue for aligned, whole-of-government approaches to food system engagement. Information must be presented to Mr. Pickard in a clear and compelling way that enables him to easily present these issues to COAG
- Local government can support the Right to Food Coalition's invitation to the UN Rapporteur on Food Security to visit Australia (Right to Food Coalition 2016)

GUIDELINES/BEST PRACTICES

- Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Gardens
- Vermont's Farm to Plate program (by Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund) – 20 years old: comprehensive (whole of state alignment)
- Ontario Local Food Act 2013 (http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/localfood.htm) : $130 million investment in provincial (state) food economy
- Kerbside garden and food organics recovery – Moira Shire (Wendy Buck)
- Healthy Food Connect Model (DHHS) provides a process to follow when establishing a local food policy coalition / network and developing a local food plan.

CASE STUDIES

- City of Melbourne/ Darebin Council – case studies
- Nhil Luv-a-Duck demonstrates value of small manufacturing to a small rural community. The inflow of migrant workers has revitalised the town and regional community
- Vermont's Farm to Plate program (FY2014 Annual Report) (whole of state alignment)
- Ontario Local Food Act 2013 (whole of province alignment)
- Northeast Food Policy Strategy & Discussion Paper – includes local data for 7 LGAs with suggestions
- Dandenong Council is engaged with its ethnically diverse local community to plant edible food crops in Dandenong Park (a project facilitated by Dr. Chris Williams of Melbourne University)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POSITION STATEMENT

Councils understand the economic value of a range of industries, but many do not fully appreciate the value of agriculture and allied food production, processing and distribution activities.

Food permeates all aspects of Local Government and to effectively support a thriving food system is fundamental to supporting a thriving community. As such, the development of the food economy transcends the traditional 'silo'isation of local government and requires an open and coordinated approach. Food and fibre industries have been identified by both State and Federal government as a key pillar industry in economic development.

Under the Local Government Act, all Councils are obliged to act to support the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their communities. The Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy are core Council documents, and there is an important opportunity to embed food system initiatives and principles within them. Stimulating and responding to an enhanced demand for local and regional produce generates economic benefits through increased tourism, greater activity in the hospitality sector, encouragement for young people wanting to enter farming, and collaboration with public and private actors in Australia and overseas.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Australia is losing farmers at the rate of 7-10 every day. The percentage of farmers under 35 years of age is now 13 percent, compared to 28 percent in 1981 (ABS 2012). While the growing focus of Australian agriculture on basic commodity crops has achieved greater economic rationalisation, this process has diminished employment opportunities and made farming not viable for more than 70 percent of Australian farmers. Several specific factors are driving the need for change:

- Young and entry level farmers have inadequate access to land, training, and economic opportunity. This predicament stems largely from under-concentration of market opportunities for small producers and over-concentration for the supermarket sector, which drives down the terms of trade for most producers, processors and retailers. Farm land availability is diminished by the expansion of large-scale monocropping and the outward growth of cities, but can be protected through land banking in peri-urban spaces.
- Corporate farming currently has disproportionate influence over policy and regulatory approaches. Monsanto, Bayer, and other multinational enterprises respond to the interests of (largely foreign) shareholders who have little understanding of local issues.
- Consumer preference for healthy, sustainable, ethical and local food is growing. The expansion of organic food markets illustrates the potential to reinvigorate peri-urban food production for Melbourne and other Victorian cities.
- Climate change, extreme weather events, and the transition to a low carbon economy require more resilient and locally integrated food systems. At a time of growing international attention to these issues, Victoria is well placed to show leadership. The choice of Melbourne to host the 2017 Ecocity International Summit has raised international awareness of Australia's (and especially Victoria's) capacity for environmentally responsible economic planning.

- Peak phosphorous, diminishing crop diversity, and associated sustainability issues are generating the need for ecologically sound food production alternatives. It is becoming clear that soil conservation is critical not only for long-term food security, but also to economic prosperity.
- Diversification of farm income streams will ensure the sector's viability. Promotion of innovative market models such as Community Supported Agriculture, Food hubs, direct marketing, and online sales can enrich and strengthen the profile of the food industry. These practices also support social cohesion while harnessing emerging digital capacities.

CRITICAL ISSUES
- Export focus of governments, tertiary institutions and funding bodies associated with agricultural development,
- Concentration of supermarkets and other corporate influences on the food system, such as chemical/fertiliser companies and industrial scale producers,
- Control of supply chain – closure of community abattoirs, insufficient market access for small producers,
- Adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts including extreme weather events and prolonged drought,
- Biosecurity threats and their potential to damage commercial and urban agriculture
- Secure and long-term affordable access to water, as well as licensing frameworks and the development of recycled and stormwater resources,
- Economic development and job creation potential of local food economies,
- Role of Councils and Planning Schemes as enablers and / or blockers of innovative economic activity in food systems,
- Community resilience and food security / access,
- Support for small farmers / entry level farmers,
- Red Tape and regulatory frameworks – raw milk, primesafe, food safety regulation,
- Right to farm,
- Lack of coordination between community organisations, universities, and funding agencies
- The need for greater comparative knowledge of case studies, successes, and failures from around Australia and overseas

ADVOCACY
- Protection of farm land from land banking and development,
- Access to farm land for young / entry level farmers
- Water access and the development of novel water resources,
- Development of practical agricultural skills education at both secondary and tertiary levels,
- Streamlining red tape for sustainable / regenerative farming / food system models,
- Rural and regional reinvigoration, and activation of peri urban spaces for local food systems and secure employment.
- Income generation and environmental health in underserved urban communities

Focus: Agribusiness roles in Local Government

- Dedicated agribusiness officers in Mornington Peninsula Shire and City of Whittlesea have uncovered and exploited significant assets to deliver community-wide benefits. This includes a >$1b local food economy in Mornington Peninsula.
- There is substantial economic opportunity yet to be realised through sustainable agricultural production on peri-urban land. The economic value of peri-urban agribusiness has been significantly under-estimated (cf Foodprint Melbourne research), a problem that can be addressed by dedicated agribusiness officers.
- Agribusiness support delivered through local councils fills a capability gap that otherwise constrains the economic viability and sustainability of small to medium scale local farming.
- Agribusiness roles foster community connections and contribute to multiple council objectives (particularly economic development, municipal health and wellbeing, and sustainable green wedge management).
- Agribusiness officers are particularly well suited to local government. These roles are potentially better placed here than in the previous state-based extension officer model, as this tier of government connects more directly with the community and is the level at which farmers hold many compliance requirements

What do agribusiness officers do?

Agribusiness officers are facilitators and connectors who work closely with established and first-generation farmers, colleagues across council and diverse community groups. Their work falls into three categories:

- **Direct farmer engagement** to support innovation, compliance and business viability
- **Region-wide education & extension** to share R&D, connect farmers in the region, build capability
- **Strategic development** to attract business, identify best use of the landscape, secure additional resources, and support integrated policy and council decision-making.

Why do councils – particularly interface councils - need them?

- **Economic development** – grow the local food economy and earning capacity of constituents
- **Land use tensions** – especially in peri-urban and growth areas the asset of productive agricultural land can be undervalued and permanently lost; the interface is a unique planning area
- **Community-wide health and social outcomes** – including access to local food, social connectedness
- **Engage the farming community** – in council process, to improve council reputation, for farmer welfare.

Recommendations:

1. All councils conduct a comprehensive audit to assess the potential of their agricultural landscape assets.
2. Agribusiness officers can best enable farmers and facilitate community-wide outcomes when located within the Economic Development unit, working closely with others and with actions integrated into key strategic documents (i.e. the Economic Development Plan or Green Wedge Management Plan).
3. State and/or Federal level funding to support agribusiness officers in local government would achieve valuable outcomes for the state since these roles are crucial in interface councils.
4. City of Whittlesea and Mornington Peninsula Shire quantify the return on investment achieved by their agribusiness officer roles to quantify with greater specificity the economic case for these roles.

Sustain conducted the above research from March – May 2016. See here for a summary -
http://www.circlesoffood.org/2016/03/17/agribusiness-extension-officers-food-hubs-review/

GUIDELINES / BEST PRACTICE

- Canada and British Columbia – Right to Farm Act
- Ontario Local Food Act 2013 and Local Food Strategy[14]
- Illinois Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act 2009[15]

CASE STUDIES

- Anthony Flaccavento – Community Food Hubs national tour and literature review[16]
- Open Food Network
- Baw Baw Food Hub
- Yarra Valley Small Farms Project
- Kilter Rural
- Bristol Food Policy Council
- Community Food Supported Agriculture – See the global Urgenci Network website for multiple case studies
- Rio de Janeiro City Council project in Manguinhos

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[14] See http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/localfood.htm.
[15] See http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=3137&ChapterID=7
[16] See http://www.circlesoffood.org/2016/10/28/review-inaugural-community-food-hubs-conference-speaking-tour/ for the keynote presentations at the Bendigo conference.

PLANNING POSITION STATEMENT

Planning is a key area of responsibility for local government under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. Effective planning to manage competing land uses (e.g. farming vs residential / commercial development) is a classic 'wicked problem' of the food system. This is evident in the contemporary complex development environment where Melbourne and Victoria's other major urban centres continue to experience rapid growth. Finding the balance between 'productive' and 'consumptive' land is and will continue to be a major challenge for local government planners and state government policy makers. A related wicked problem of the food system concerns the proliferation of fast and unhealthy food outlets in residential areas, to the point where they substantially outnumber (by a ratio of 5 or even 6 to 1) places where residents can access healthy and fresh food.

Historically, a centrepiece of Melbourne's planning framework as it related to agriculture (and therefore the food system) was the creation of the nine 'Green Wedges' during 1968-1971, with a series of non-urban uses designated for these zones including farming and conservation. By the 1990s and early 2000s, increasing growth pressures on Melbourne, combined with high rates pressures on Green Wedge farmers and other landowners, saw significant erosion of Melbourne's green wedges. The main drivers of this erosion were major expansions of the Urban Growth Boundary, acquisition of land by developers, and subdivision and conversion to urban uses (Buxton 2011). In response to these pressures, the Green Wedges Coalition and others called for the permanent protection of the Green Wedges through legislation (as happened with the Toronto Greenbelt, protected by legislation in 2005).[17] The Green Wedges were formally incorporated into *Plan Melbourne* (2002), and again in the revised *Plan Melbourne (*2014)*. As part of the *Plan Melbourne Refresh* (2016), several local councils, community groups and others agreed that Melbourne should have a fixed urban growth boundary with stronger protection for the Green Wedges and the explicit identification of important farmland, amongst other priorities identified in the submissions (see www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au).

This Position Statement builds on the foundations laid by the work of far-sighted planners and others working over many decades to lay a framework for strategic land use in Melbourne and the protection of valuable farmland through the 'Green Wedge' mechanism. It also draws on the work carried out by the Heart Foundation and the Victorian Eco Innovation Lab with the Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design (FSPUD) publication and tools (2011). As Trevor Budge wrote in the foreword to FSPUD, citing Karen Frank (2005), 'it is time for the architectural and urban design planning professions to support and enhance the city's multiple functions as dining room, market and farm'. Equally, it is time for local and state governments to create the appropriate enabling frameworks to allow that multi-functionality in land-use planning to thrive and support healthy and sustainable food systems.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Multiple factors converge to place pressures on the food system and planning decisions about land use in the design of towns and cities.[18]

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[17] See http://www.greenbelt.ca/ for research documenting the history and benefits of the Toronto Greenbelt.
[18] See Foodprint Melb for relevant research: https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/foodprint-melbourne

Population Growth

Melbourne's population is growing rapidly, and is estimated to reach more than 7 million people by 2050.[19] Much of this growth will take place in the interface Councils such as Wyndham, Cardinia, Casey and Whittlesea, whose populations are expected to nearly double over the next 30 years. This places significant strains on services and infrastructure, as well as on agricultural land.

Climate Change

Extreme weather events such as the heatwaves of 2009 and the associated bushfires that year have significantly reduced horticultural production. The anticipated impacts of climate change in the coming decades are that such events will increase in frequency and severity (IPCC 2014) and will have a substantially negative impact on food production and therefore food security. Further, the patterns of a warming, volatile and drying climate will place considerable strains on Australia's primary foodbowl production regions, the Murray-Darling basin in particular (Lawrence et al, 2013). Hence the importance of protecting valuable farmland close to major population centres with secure access to abundant water (Carey et al 2016).

Market and rates pressures on farmers

Australian farmers have faced a cost-price squeeze for decades, leading to a steady exodus of producers from the land: the five years between 2006 and 2011 alone saw an extraordinary 11 percent drop in the total number of farmers (ABS 2012). Many factors are at play in this dynamic, not least of which is a highly concentrated supermarket sector that has seen Australian farmers become 'price takers', with their share of the food dollar declining from 80-90 cents in 1910 to around 10-15 cents in 2010 (Australian Government, 2015). Overlaying these pressures is the urban sprawl dynamic and associated land price inflation that has generated major rates increases for many producers close to Melbourne and other population centres. The combined effect is one of declining viability for many producers and a consequent desire to realise an asset that has appreciated in value.

Policy context

Section 4 of the Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987 establishes the objectives of planning in Victoria (s.4(1)) and the Objectives of the Planning Framework (s.4(2)), as requiring a balancing of the interests of present and future generations of Victorians, as well as the 'fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use and development of land' (s.4(1)(a)). The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) sets out principles for integrated decision making on planning and urban design (Clause 10) as well as specific principles on Settlement (Cl 11), Built Environment and Heritage (Cl 15), Neighbourhood and subdivision design (Cl 15.01), Housing (Cl 16), Transport (Cl 18) and Infrastructure (Cl 19). Local governments are required to develop their own Local Planning Policy Frameworks (LPPF), which can include overlays and zones, structure plans and precinct structure plans (for those Councils whose growth area planning comes under the Metropolitan Planning Authority). These mechanisms, as well as the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan that all Councils must develop and implement, are all means by which the principles of healthy and sustainable urban design and land use planning can be incorporated (National Heart Foundation 2011).

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[19] See
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3222.0main+features82012%20(base)%20to%202101.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Social cohesion, energy and resource efficiency

As Professor Michael Buxton puts it, 'Cities function less efficiently as they expand and reduce their average population density…Societies which consume less land for urban purposes use fewer resources, use infrastructure more efficiently and can transfer more investment to productive sources. Better urban design reduces social costs by increasing social cohesion…More compact cities reduce growth in energy consumption and save billions in non-transport infrastructure compared with a policy of urban expansion on city fringes' (Buxton, 2010). Simply stated, endless suburban sprawl driven largely by developer interests for short-term profit – euphemistically described as 'higher and better uses' in planning lexicon (Budge 2013) - burdens present and future generations with huge costs, contributes to greenhouse emissions and results in a profligate misallocation of resources and infrastructure (McCormick et al 2013).

Food security: vacant land for food production

While historically cities were located close to secure supplies of fresh food, this nexus was broken in post World War 2 urban planning strategies in Australian cities (Budge 2013). With the emergence of a globalised food system and the seeming abundance of all types of foods from all over the world at all times, there appeared to be little need for planners to incorporate considerations of food security and a sustainable supply of healthy and fresh food into planning schemes. Such a perspective is reinforced by Federal Government policy which assumes that Australia is food secure because we produce 60 percent more food than we consume (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). However, more critical assessments taking into account climate change impacts, shortages of critical resources and geopolitical instability and uncertainty suggest that food security cannot be taken for granted (PMSEIC 2010; Lawrence et al 2013; Farmar Bowers 2013). Hence as part of an overall shift to incorporate sustainability and health and wellbeing into planning frameworks, food security is rising in prominence (Budge 2013).

Right to farm

Farming and food production inevitably entails a certain amount of noise and activity. In the case of livestock production, and where production involves the spraying of chemicals, this also involves odours. This can bring farmers into conflict with neighbours who have purchased land for what they regard as its amenity values. This is evident in recent controversies over the need to define and protect a 'right to farm' in agricultural zones (Griffith 2015). This is an ongoing source of conflict in peri-urban areas, where the top three issues convene – proximity to a creeping urban growth boundary; a "commuter" population seeking lifestyle properties; and planning frameworks that support traditional broadacre farming models at the expense of adaptive agricultural enterprise – leading to landholders giving in to the expectation that these areas are simply "residential-land-in-waiting."

Fast food outlet concentration

Mapping by the staff teams in the Victorian Councils that formed part of the Healthy Together Victoria initiative (2011-2015) revealed that in many municipalities, especially those on the outer urban fringes of Melbourne, there was a high concentration of fast and unhealthy food outlets compared to fresh and healthy food outlets, and that these outlets tended to be concentrated in

areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (Thornton et al 2016). Given that dietary-related ill-health is now the largest single contributor to ill-health, disease and early death in Australia, these patterns of development of the retail food environment pose particular challenges to a planning agenda dedicated to optimising the health and wellbeing of all residents.

Urban agriculture

While the high prevalence of fast food outlets is correlated with higher dietary-related risk factors (obesity especially), there is increasing evidence that a higher concentration of forms of urban agriculture, such as school gardens, community gardens and backyard gardens, is correlated with lower levels of BMI, obesity and fast food consumption (Utter et al 2016). Therefore support for these and related forms of land use, such as verge gardens and planter boxes, should form part of planning frameworks aimed at optimising health and wellbeing. Equally, recognition and support for diverse forms of urban agriculture should be part of the State planning framework.

ADVOCACY

- Close the loophole in the planning provisions that allows for expansion of fast food outlets without assessing health implications – this will require action at the State level
- Promote the advantages of community access to fresh and healthy food, to achieve State Planning Policy support for food sensitive planning and urban design.
- Better define the urban boundary to protect arable land necessary to feed a growing population. Small-scale farming should be optimised into a profitable enterprise that attracts young farmers. This will require improved terms of trade.
- Recognition and support for foodbowl regions around the major cities
- Support mixed use neighbourhoods that provide easy access to a diverse range of healthy, fresh and nutritious food from retail shops and urban agriculture
- Examine ways to provide rate concessions and incentives for farmers in green wedge and outer urban areas to enhance their viability
- Revise planning frameworks to take a more flexible approach to enterprise change in agricultural areas that is occurring as a result of climate change, the adaptation of farm enterprise to smaller rural lots; and entrepreneurism such as "paddock to plate" and agricultural tourism.
- Ensure that State and local government planning frameworks recognise and support the expansion of urban agriculture

GUIDELINES / BEST PRACTICE

- [Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design](#) (Heart Foundation, 2011)
- [City of Yarra Urban Agriculture Strategy](#) and guidelines (e.g. laneway gardens, planter boxes)
- [City of Darebin Urban Food Production Strategy](#)

CASE STUDIES

- Yarra Ranges Horticulture Zone,
- [Toronto Greenbelt](#),
- South Australian Foodbowl Areas Protection Act 2016
- [Vancouver Agricultural Land Reserve](#)

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'Sustainable, Healthy and Fair Food'

Urban and Regional Food Declaration

Food is fundamental to life and health. Increasing urbanization, the industrialization of agriculture and a changing climate are adversely impacting many parts of the global food system. This interconnected food system includes production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste management, and meaning creation. The food system faces compounding global challenges and variable local issues. The scale of these challenges and issues is reflected in local concerns about food security, producer livelihoods, local economies, damage to ecosystems, persistently high levels of hunger and malnutrition, a pandemic of dietary-related illness and disease, and biodiversity reduction.

Many organization and government policy areas—including health, planning, transport, infrastructure, economic development, education, trade, biosecurity and environment—are relevant to the food system. A coherent long-term food policy, at whatever level and scale of governance, enables the integration of these different areas. Cities and regions need a sustainable, fair and resilient food system that provides dignified access to healthy food for all citizens, offers viable livelihoods for local producers, and engenders careful stewardship of regional ecosystems.

Purpose

To achieve a vision of a sustainable, healthy and fair food system, integrated action is needed from individuals, communities, businesses, organisations and governments. The purpose of this Declaration is to encourage such action through offering the following:

- A set of agreed principles;
- A lexicon of agreed definitions and common language;
- A generalized framework for policy and legislative changes;
- A tool for mobilization and advocacy; and
- An associated set of tools for assessment and analysis.

Vision

Signatories to this 'Urban and Regional Food Declaration' share a vision of a sustainable, healthy and fair food system. We commit to the following characteristics as shaping our approach towards such a system:

- A thriving diversity of food production throughout our towns and cities and countryside, from networks of backyard, community and school gardens, to market gardens, ethical animal rearing, orchards, vineyards and food forests in our peri-urban and regional areas.
- A valuing of food producers as caretakers of the land and ecosystems, and as guarantors of our present and future food security.

- An expansion of farmers' markets, a wide variety of farm-gate shops and trails, and high streets revitalised with shops that burst with local and seasonal produce, all supporting a growing local food economy that generates jobs and livelihoods for communities.
- A food system that supports the health and well-being of all, recognising that access to good food is a fundamental and universal human right.

The food system is a complex set of practices that face unique and unprecedented challenges. This Declaration and its principles are based upon four domains as expressed in Figure 1: **Circles of Social Life**[1].

Principles[1]

Ecology: Our food system should actively maintain the health and integrity of the natural environment on which it depends, seeking to maintain the health of existing ecosystems and enhance biodiversity.

Economics: Our food system should support, create and sustain local and regional livelihoods while building a resilient food industry.

Politics: Governments and organisations should collaborate and work holistically, both internally and externally, while proactively engaging with communities to inform policy, planning and legislative actions relating to environmental stewardship, food security, health and wellbeing, and urban and regional livelihoods.

Culture: Our food system should embrace the diverse and cultural significance of food, recognizing its central role in promoting social cohesion, life-long and intergenerational learning, and community health and wellbeing.
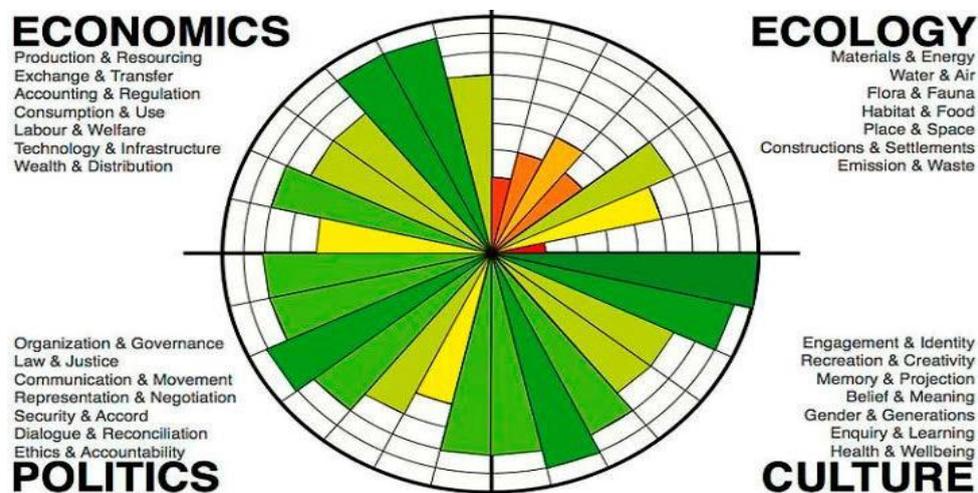

Figure 1. Circles of Social Life

An understanding of and agreement with these principles provide the basis to engage in further collaborative action.

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[1] Developed by Professor Paul James. For more information, see http://www.circlesofsustainability.org/ and Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice.

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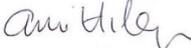
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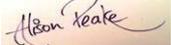
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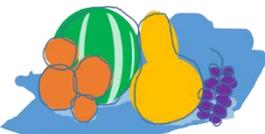
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Elaborated Principles

These principles were developed to accompany and elaborate on the four high-level principles set out in the Urban and Regional Food Declaration, by reference to the seven sub-domains that are contained within each of the four principal domains of Ecology, Economics, Politics and Culture.[20] They are reproduced here in order to serve as a guide for action in the development and implementation of food systems policies, strategies and programs by local government planners and decision-makers.

Ecology

Our food system should actively maintain the health and integrity of the natural environment on which it depends, seeking to maintain the health of existing ecosystems and enhance biodiversity:

1.1. With food production and processing based as much as possible on organic fertilizing, recyclable materials and use of renewable energy with distributed generation;

1.2. With water for food production sourced sustainably without impacting adversely upon regional ecological complexity;

1.3. With agricultural land, both urban and regional, complemented by zones and linear parks providing continuing habitat for indigenous flora and fauna;

1.4. With urban settlements planned so as to both restrict suburban encroachment upon fertile farming land and allow significant local food production within urban boundaries—including through dedicated spaces being set aside for community food gardens;

1.5. With the food system organized to minimize transport distances from sites of production to consumption;

1.6. With the food system contributing to secure access to healthy food for all; and

1.7. With waste management in all aspects of the food system directed fundamentally towards green composting and hard-rubbish minimization.

Economics

Our food system should support, create and sustain local and regional livelihoods while building a resilient food industry:

2.1. With food production and exchange shifted from an emphasis on production-for-global export towards generating local mixed food economies and sustainable local livelihoods;

2.2. With financing and co-financing of prioritized aspects of the food system built into all relevant municipal annual budgets and services spending;

2.3. With the accounting and regulation of different aspects of the food system recognizing that food is a social good rather than just another commodity;

2.4. With a stronger relationship developed between producers and consumers through support for farmer's markets and local produce outlets;

2.5. With food production workplaces brought back into closer spatial relation to residential areas, taking into account issues of personal infringement (such as processing smells and noise) through sustainable and appropriate processing methods, filtration and waste management;

2.6. With appropriate technologies used for food production and processing, respecting the given limits of nature, including seasonal production; and

2.7. With good, local, organic food made available to those who cannot afford it through redistributive processes.

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[20] See http://www.circlesoffood.org/circles/profile-circles/ for further background and information.

Politics

Governments and organisations should collaborate and work holistically, both internally and externally, while proactively engaging with communities to inform policy, planning and legislative actions relating to environmental stewardship, food security, health and wellbeing, and urban and regional livelihoods:

3.1. With food governance conducted through deep deliberative democratic processes that bring together comprehensive community engagement, expert knowledge, and extended public debate about all aspects of the food system;

3.2. With legislation enacted for sustainable and fair food production and exchange;

3.3. With public communication services and media outlets materially supported where necessary to generate debates about sustainable and fair food;

3.4. With political participation in decisions and processes about food production and consumption going deeper than passive engagement;

3.5. With basic 'food security' considerations afforded to all citizens;

3.6. With all actors in the food system actively acknowledging the need for on-going reconciliation with the original inhabitants of the land—particularly in relation to land use; and

3.7. With ethical debates concerning how we produce and consume food becoming a mainstream aspect of social life.

Culture

Our food system should embrace the diverse and cultural significance of food, recognizing its central role in promoting social cohesion, life-long and intergenerational learning, and community health and wellbeing:

4.1. With food consumption recognizing and celebrating the complex layers of community-based identity that have made our urban region;

4.2. With active support for creative engagement with the culture of food through festivals, rituals and other public events;

4.3. With museums, cultural centres and other public spaces dedicating some of their ongoing space to comprehensive ecological histories of the local-global food system;

4.4. With locally relevant beliefs about the food system from across the globe woven into the fabric of the built environment: symbolically, artistically and practically;

4.5. With conditions for gender equality pursued in all aspects of the food system;

4.6. With the opportunities for facilitated enquiry and learning about food available to all, from birth to old age across people's lives—not just through formal training in the food industry; and

4.7. With public spaces and buildings designed and curated to enhance the sense that food is part of the everyday health and wellbeing of people.

The Human Right to Food

Australia's Right to Food Coalition exists to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians by working to ensure equitable access to nutritious food. We are a Coalition of organisations, practitioners, researchers and community workers united in our cause.

The Australian government is failing to fulfil its obligation to guarantee the human right to food for at least 1.2 million people who don't have access to safe, affordable and nutritious food. This position statement outlines the challenges of food insecurity in Australia and provides recommendations for our Government to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate food in Australia.

SUMMARY

The 'human right to food' is often referred to amongst the charitable food sector, academia, government policy and welfare organisations. This document breaks down what it means for every person in Australia to have the right to *adequate* food, meaning food which is nutritious, safe, culturally appropriate, affordable, accessible and from dignified sources. The following opportunities would allow our government to fulfil their moral and legal obligations:

Governments – Federal, State / Territory, Local

- That the <u>Australian Federal Government, all State and Territory governments and all local governments</u>, publicly recognise and affirm their legal and moral obligations to guarantee the fundamental human right to adequate and culturally appropriate food for all persons living in Australia
- That the <u>Australian Federal Government</u> commit to the timely development of a comprehensive and participatory *National Food and Nutrition Strategy which links production, security and nutrition*, ensuring that the voices of the most marginalised and vulnerable members of our community are heard and respected in this process
- That the <u>Australian Federal Government and all State and Territory governments</u>, commit to allocating sufficient financial and human resources to guarantee the full enjoyment of the human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia

Food Industry

- That the food industry commits to enter into constructive dialogue with relevant food system stakeholders in the development of a participatory and transparent *national food strategy which links production, security and nutrition*
- That food industry representative bodies, both Australian and multi-national corporations, publicly recognise and affirm their legal and moral obligations to respect the fundamental human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia
- That the food industry acknowledges the central role it plays in affecting the health and wellbeing of all persons living in Australia, and the impact its business operations have on the social and environmental sustainability of Australia's food system

Philanthropy

- That the philanthropic sector publicly acknowledges and affirms its commitment to working with all food system stakeholders to ensure that all persons living in Australia enjoy the fundamental human right to adequate food
- That the corporate social responsibility policies of relevant companies (particularly those who fund work in remote areas of Australia) address the rights of Aboriginal peoples to an adequate, affordable and accessible food supply

- That representatives of philanthropic foundations work with the Right to Food Coalition and other food system stakeholders in support of participatory and inclusive research and advocacy initiatives that prioritise the universal achievement of the human right to food
- That key stakeholders from relevant sectors collaborate to monitor and document levels of compliance with respect to the right to food in a 'watch dog' capacity

THE CHALLENGE: inequitable access to food

Food insecurity can occur at the individual, household, community or national level. Studies undertaken in Australia and other developed countries over the last 15 years have shown that the prevalence of food insecurity ranges from 4 - 14% among population-representative samples, and up to 82% among disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, single-parent families, and other vulnerable populations. [1]

The consequences of food insecurity are far-reaching and long-lived. Food insecurity can have a major impact on both short-term and long-term physical and mental health. Food insecurity has been associated with lower household income, poorer general health, increased health-care utilisation and depression. These associations remained after adjustment for age, gender and household income. [1]

For food security to exist, the following four elements or pillars mush be achieved; [2]

1. **A STABLE FOOD SUPPLY**: Australia currently produces enough food to feed 60 million people [3], therefore, food supply issues are a matter of distributional justice and consequently community recognition and participation. [4]

2. **AVAILABLE FOOD:** Fruit and vegetable availability in Australia is insufficient to meet dietary guidelines [5], due to the high volume of produce being exported [3]. The availability of high quality, nutritious foods, particularly fruit and vegetables is inadequate in many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and in the outer suburbs of many of our cities. [6]

3. **ACCESSIBLE FOOD:** Income inequality and rising food prices are major barriers to food access in Australia. The average cost of food continues to increase, with the price of fruit and vegetables rising faster than the Consumer Price Index. [7] The cost of healthy food in remote Aboriginal communities is 20-40% higher than in capital cities. [6] Inequality in Australia is at a 75-year high [8], with the top 20% of Australians having 70 times the wealth of the bottom 20%. [9] Increasing income poverty, underemployment, rising housing, transport and utility costs and the reductions to the social safety net mean that food is often sacrificed when there is not enough money to pay the rent and other bills. [9]

4. **FOOD THAT IS ABLE TO BE UTILISED:** Over 2.5 million Australians are living in poverty, almost a quarter of whom are children. [10] Homeless people and Australians with inadequate housing infrastructure do not have the facilities to store, prepare and cook food.

An Australian Foodbank study suggested that children going to school hungry lose more than 2 hours a day of learning time, with ongoing impact on life chances. [11] Anglicare conducted another study which revealed the serious impact of stress, anxiety and hunger on family relationships, social isolation and motivation. [12] Food insecurity can also increase the risk of conditions such as

cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes [13,14,15] and can impede the successful management of these chronic illnesses. [16, 17]

As a result, food insecurity substantially influences public expenditures in health care. [18] Furthermore, the numerous consequences of food insecurity, such as poorer educational outcomes, mental ill-health and diet-related chronic disease, result in broader social and economic impacts. [19] Therefore, not only is there a legislative and moral imperative to act [20], but implementing policies to alleviate food insecurity also makes economic sense. [21]

THE POLICY CONTEXT

Historically, governments have prioritized economic growth over reducing inequality. [9] The harsh reality is that climate change, soil acidification and erosion; and loss of agricultural land to urban sprawl are all threatening the future stability of Australia's food supply. [22] Australia currently has no national food plan; no systematic monitory of food insecurity; no recognised and up to date national nutrition policy; and no mechanism for ensuring the human right to food for all of its citizens.

International Human Rights Law

The concept of human rights recognises universal, inalienable, interdependent, indivisible and interrelated rights necessary for the wellbeing of individuals and humanity. The founding statement of these rights is the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) [23], which includes the right of every person "to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing". While the UDHR is not legally binding under international law, it has led to the development and ratification of subsequent conventions that are binding.

Human rights responsibilities of the Australian government

The major content of the human right to adequate food is set out in Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR)* [24]. Ratified by Australia in 1975, Art 11 requires, first, that all state parties take immediate steps to guarantee the right to freedom from hunger for all persons in their jurisdiction; and secondly, that all state parties take appropriate steps towards the "progressive realization" of the right to adequate food.

There are three levels of obligations on States with regards to this and all other human rights: to *respect* (not to impede existing access to adequate food); to *protect* (ensure that third parties do not deprive individuals of access to adequate food); and to *fulfil*. The obligation to fulfil in the first instance is an obligation to *facilitate*, which 'means the State must pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security". [25]

In the second instance it is an obligation to *provide*, i.e. to guarantee access to adequate food when 'an individual or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food". More generally, all states must implement measures needed to improve food production, conservation and distribution, and ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need. "Progressive realisation" acknowledges that change takes time, but that countries must demonstrate they are taking steps toward the full realisation of rights to the maximum of their available resources.

Also relevant is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC)* [26]. Ratified by Australia in 1990, the CRC requires that countries take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition among children through "the provision of adequate nutritious foods and drinking-water". Increasing numbers of Australians are living in or precariously near food insecurity and homelessness, despite the fact that Australia has become more prosperous as a whole [9]. In these circumstances, it appears that the government is not meeting its commitment to guarantee the fundamental right to freedom from hunger, and despite increased resources it is regressing - not progressing - in the realisation of the right to adequate food for all.

Ratification alone does not make a convention enforceable in the Australian courts. Implementing legislation must be passed. Laws relating to the provisions of the CRC exist, but the direct rights set out in the ICESCR do not. As a result, there are no domestic legal remedies through which the community can compel government to meet its ICESCR obligations. Further, unlike many other treaties (including the CRC), the ICESCR is not declared under the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act,* which means that the Human Rights Commission has no jurisdiction to hear and comment on cases relating to it. [27]

The UN drafted a further Optional Protocol to the ICESCR, which provides an international forum for individual complaints to be made to the UN Committee [28]. Australia has not signed the Optional Protocol. The ICESCR requires the government to submit periodic reports to the UN on its progress, which provide a degree of international scrutiny; however without a complaints mechanism the role of the UN is limited to commentary on areas for improvement.

Human rights responsibilities of the food industry

As well as governments, corporations have obligations under international human rights law to *respect* human rights. This means that businesses must:

- "Avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities, and address such impacts when they occur"; and
- "Seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts" [28].

As noted at the Oslo Conference on Obesity in 2014 [29]:

- "The now dominant role and power of major commercial undertakings in the food sector in the agricultural field, areas of industrial production, processing, trade, and marketing of foods and drinks…may be in potential conflict with human livelihood and health, especially of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society"; and
- "[There is an] imperative need for valid business interests and responsibilities to develop in a manner fully compatible with respect for human rights, the protection of the environment, and the long-term sustainability of food security and healthy nutrition for all."

Given the serious health, social and environmental challenges facing the Australian food system, it is clear that the food industry needs to take its human rights responsibilities far more seriously than is presently the case.

Australia's National Food Plan

Australia's neoliberal policy approaches have been criticised for seeking to benefit big businesses at the expense of population health and environmental sustainability, and for their inability to ensure long-term food and nutrition security. [30, 31] The development of Australia's National Food Plan was heavily influenced by industry concerns and a focus on export before the new coalition government abandoned it. [32] When it was released in 2013, concerns were raised about the extent to which the National Food Plan addressed factors influencing fruit and vegetable access. [33] Investments in health promotion and nutrition education were outlined, but few strategies to improve access to nutritious food were included. [34] According to the coalition government, food insecurity is primarily an outcome of an insufficient global food supply, so increasing global food production and reducing trade barriers is considered the solution. [35] The Right to Food Coalition believes that they are wrong in this thinking.

Australia's National Nutrition Policy

In January 2011, the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation agreed to develop a National Nutrition Policy, which promised to provide a comprehensive framework to identify, prioritise, drive and monitor nutrition initiatives within the context of the governments' preventative health agendas. In an effort to create this policy, a well-resourced scoping study was completed by July 2013 and has only recently become available to Australian citizens via FOI request in March 2016. [36] "The evidence identified in this scoping study confirms that a new comprehensive nutrition policy is required urgently in Australia to address the high and increasing rates of diet-related disease and risk factors, including overweight and obesity, and to promote the health and wellbeing of the population, particularly vulnerable groups." There remains no further progress from the government regarding the development of Australia's national nutrition policy and as such, Australian citizens continue to bear the burden of diet and nutrition issues. [37]

OPPORTUNITIES: the demands of the Right to Food Coalition

These recommendations apply to governments, the food industry and philanthropic organisations. Since Australia is a signatory to the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and has ratified that legal instrument, all Australian governments are legally bound to ensure the full enjoyment of the universal human rights it delineates, including the right to adequate food.

Similarly, the food industry is legally obliged under international human rights law to respect internationally recognised human rights, including the right to adequate food. In addition, food industry representatives, and philanthropic organisations, as members of the Australian society – and, in the case of the food industry, as significant beneficiaries of public resources and infrastructure – have a moral and ethical responsibility to work constructively and collaboratively with all stakeholders to uphold the human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia. These recommendations draw significantly from expertise disseminated by the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the right to food. [38]

Federal Government

- Develop in a participatory, inclusive and timely manner, *a comprehensive rights-based National Food & Nutrition Strategy*, which
  - clearly delineates the responsibilities of public officials at the federal, state/territorial, and municipal/local levels,
  - commits governments at all levels to the progressive elimination, in a timely manner and with clearly stated targets and milestones, of food insecurity in Australia,
  - drawing on the 2013 scoping study for a National Nutrition Policy, identifies the measures to be adopted and the associated time frames, with a particular focus on urgent action to tackle diet-related disease and growing food insecurity, especially amongst vulnerable and marginalised groups,
  - commits the government to adequate financing of income support payments so that all Australians, regardless of social status, can access a weekly basket of healthy foods
  - ensures that initiatives adopted at local and state levels, particularly for the rebuilding of local food systems, are adequately supported,
  - creates a nationally funded children and food strategy (including school-lunches and breakfast, food literacy curricula, and school garden programmes) to ensure that all children, at all times, have access to healthy and nutritious food, and
  - embeds a process of regular, transparent and participatory monitoring, evaluation and reporting on progress, with periodic reviews and updating of the Strategy as required
- Support regular, Nation-wide measuring and monitoring of food insecurity using a more comprehensive multi-item tool
- Launch the process of adoption of a framework law on the right to food, beginning with a public acknowledgement and affirmation of the government's legal and moral obligations to uphold the human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia
- Sign the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR, so that Australians can hold their governments to account on international legal commitments
- Introduce a sugar tax to reduce the consumption of harmful food and beverage products, and use the revenue raised to reduce the cost of healthy foods for low income and vulnerable population groups, thereby directly tackling food insecurity
- Introduce stricter regulation of food products high in saturated fats, salt and sugar
- Regulate and restrict the advertising of unhealthy food products, especially to children
- Support local food production so that consumers have secure and affordable access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods
- Ensure that any proposed reforms quarantining welfare payments do not contravene Australia's obligations under international human rights law
- Sustainability and climate change policies should be reflected in Australia's National Dietary Guidelines (eg. Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population, 2014)
- Establish a high-level National Food Security and Right to Food Taskforce, located within the Prime Minister's Office, and with representatives of all food systems sectors, to address the food insecurity in Australia, and with responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the *National Food & Nutrition Strategy*

State and Territory Governments

- Public acknowledgement and affirmation of legal and moral obligations to uphold the human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia
- Commit to develop State- and Territory-wide food and nutrition strategies, in coordination with the *National Food & Nutrition Strategy*, clearly delineating responsibilities of public officials and government departments for the implementation of each element of the Strategy
- Commit to legislate a Right to Food Act that *inter alia* mandates responsible Ministers to set targets for the progressive elimination of food insecurity, with the development of transparent and measurable indicators to monitor and report on progress
- Commit to measures which support the rebuilding of local and regional food systems to ensure long-term, diversified, adequate and resilient supplies of healthy food

Local Governments

- Public acknowledgement and affirmation of legal and moral obligations to uphold the human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia
- Drawing on existing best practice food systems policy and strategy development (e.g. City of Melbourne, City of Greater Geelong), commit to participatory processes for the development of comprehensive food system policies and strategies, ensuring that the voices of marginalised and vulnerable population groups are included in such processes
- Commit to targets and milestones for the progressive reduction and elimination of food insecurity in each municipality (and ultimately state and federal government levels), with the development of transparent and measurable indicators to monitor and report on progress

Food Industry

- The food industry, both Australian and multi-national corporations, publicly recognises and affirms its legal and moral obligations to respect the fundamental human right to adequate food for all persons living in Australia
- The food industry acknowledges the central role it plays in affecting the health and wellbeing of all persons living in Australia, and of the social and environmental sustainability of the Australian food system in general
- The food industry commits to enter into constructive dialogue with all food system stakeholders in the development of a participatory and transparent *National Food & Nutrition Strategy*
- The food industry commits to work with the *Right to Food Coalition* and other food system stakeholders to undertake a full and participatory audit of the human rights impacts of its operations in Australia, consistent with its obligation to respect the human right to food

Philanthropy

- The philanthropic sector publicly acknowledges and affirm its commitment to working with all food system stakeholders to ensure that all persons living in Australia enjoy the fundamental human right to adequate food
- Representatives of philanthropic foundations work with the *Right to Food Coalition* and other food system stakeholders in support of participatory and inclusive research and advocacy initiatives that prioritise the universal achievement of the human right to adequate food

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