

Food production and supply in NSW

Submission from Slow Food Hunter Valley

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the terms of reference for this inquiry. The work of Slow Food International across the world addresses most of these issues in our attempt to enable good, clean and fair food for all.

Slow Food Hunter Valley has been working directly with many local small food producers for many years. We offer our experience and ideas for your consideration.

- 1. Improving Food Security and Equitable access to food.** For the past five years we, in partnership with Maitland City Council have hosted a growers' market (Slow Food Earth Market Maitland) in the centre of Maitland. Our producers must produce food with as little chemical intervention as possible and must farm within a 100kms radius of the market site. Not only has our market provided an alternative to the local population to buy fresh, seasonal food with low food kilometres, it has provided a supported and regular venue for new and very small producers to have a go at producing food. The Market is supported by Slow Food volunteers-who set up and take down the infrastructure, publicise and promote the market and work with council to meet compliance issues. Many Earth Market producers have gone on to diversify into education, hold food events at their properties, sell produce boxes, extend the range of produce they grow, provide produce for local and not so local restaurants and become restaurateurs themselves.

Our council has regularly used our market to promote the City of Maitland and there is now a growing food tourism sector in the area. These producers are increasing food security in our area and the more they diversify the greater their chances of staying in the food producing business. More small produce markets should be set up across the state to improve food security and equity and build viable food tourism experiences, bringing jobs to large regional cities.

Our group has partnered with Maitland City Council to develop a local Seed Library. Building seed security is another tool in having food sovereignty. We import around 85% of our seed in Australia and we are losing biodiversity by allowing large, international seed companies to have global control of seeds.

The idea of allotments as happens in the UK could be another way to give potential growers a chance to try their hand at growing, provide some fresh food for themselves and perhaps enter the boutique food production industry eventually.

- 2. Reducing Food Waste and Destruction** Slow Food Hunter Valley runs a Food Rescue Kitchen which last year provided over 10, 000 meals for those in need in our city. The food was distributed in most part by the local community centre. Excess and imperfect farm produce is delivered by the farmers to a commercial kitchen. Donations also come from Oz Harvest. A group of dedicated volunteers convert this food into cooked and packaged meals. Our farmers are happy to donate this produce that would otherwise be turned into the ground. Replicating the work of our Food Rescue Kitchen would require linking local farmers to organisations that have the facilities and volunteers to convert the farmgate waste into meals.

To reduce food waste we also need to teach people how to cook with fresh food. This education is best done in schools, especially primary schools.

3. Developing Technologies to bring Food Production into Cities Support for universities and individuals who are working on these technologies needs to be forthcoming from government. At a less technological level the development of community gardens needs to be supported and encouraged and all local councils need to be developing policies around having community gardens in their LGAs. At this point some councils do have policies re community gardens and some do not. Community gardens are an effect way of helping people to gain skills in producing food as well as building community in cities where people can be quite isolated.

4. Preserving Productive Land and Water Resources Councils and developers must look critically at all development and balance housing needs with the need for land to produce food and green wildlife corridors to protect us all from ecological collapse. The destruction on any natural system has flow on effects and devastating consequences for the food chain. Eg: the loss of large populations of pollinators will result in many unproductive food crops; the hoarding of water by big irrigators upstream impacts other users and environments all the way along river system.

6. Limiting the Impact Food Production has on the Environment, including overfishing

Most of the world's food is produced by small scale farmers and we need to do more to support small scale, diversified and regenerative farmers, not pander to the big and wealthy producers. Food production does not need to have a negative impact on the environment if the right practices are employed eg : regenerative farming, permaculture.

11. Consideration of Indigenous Food and Land Management Slow Food Hunter Valley has used two environment grants from the federal government to build two Native Food gardens in partnership with the Girl Guides and an educational farm, Purple Pear. We have an expert on all indigenous plants that grow in the Hunter Valley in Noel Jupp who runs Riverdene Nursery at Gresford and most of our plants were sourced from Noel. The gardens have begun to produce small quantities of native produce but the main purpose of these gardens is as demonstration gardens for the people of the Maitland area and this is happening already.