

Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper – Submission IP205
Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (1)
Submitted 7 April 2014

The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP
Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Australia

By email: agricultural.competitiveness@pmc.gov.au

5th April, 2014

Dear Mr Joyce

Submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce

On behalf of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance we welcome the opportunity to engage and contribute to the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce.

We expect that the opportunity for consultation will lead to governments and stakeholders across the country recognising the importance of fixing and securing our local food systems, before we venture into expanding our agro-export sector further.

Who are we?

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a collaboration of organisations and individuals working together towards a food system in which people have the opportunity to choose, create and manage their food supply from paddock to plate. AFSA is an independent organisation and is not aligned with any political party. Currently we have 120 individual, organisational, business and farmer members. These members include national networks such as the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, peak bodies such as the Melbourne Farmers Markets Association and the Victorian Local Governance Association, the City of Melbourne, and leading environment organisations such as Humane Choice, MADGE and Gene Ethics.

We are a part of a robust global network of farmer-led organisations involved in food security and food sovereignty policy development and advocacy. Our involvement includes being the sole Australasian representative on the Civil Society Mechanism of the Food and Agriculture Organisation's Committee on World Food Security, as well as being the sole Australian representative on the International Planning Committee for

Food Sovereignty. We are also linked to Slow Food International.

We work extensively with primary food producers and consumers across every state and territory in Australia. Our committee consists of published academics and lecturers from RMIT, Deakin University, University of Tasmania, and the Queensland University of Technology, farmers from NSW, VIC, ACT and WA, and local advocates and campaigners representing Food Connect, Friends of the Earth, Fair Food Brisbane and the Permaculture Network. Our vice president is also convenor of the Australasian Agri-food Research Network.

Our international food system context

The current food system – and our farmers in particular - are under enormous stress, as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Dr Olivier de Schutter, has stated in his final report. He has also emphasised that countries should be rebuilding local food systems, which is in direct opposition to the Australian government’s main proposal to increase our agricultural exports.¹

We also need to be aware of the increasing threat of climate change on food production, as identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)². The debate on food security will be of interest in maintaining stable governmental systems into the future. The IPCC is correct to be concerned over decreased crop yields due to shifting weather patterns, and this change to climate is being reported on the ground by our farmers and supported by both the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology.³

Our domestic food system

In this, the first United Nations Year of the Family Farmer, we need to do much more to support our Australian farmers and our local food systems better. We need a food plan for Australia that will address the pressures caused by:

- The negative impacts of a globalised food system,
- The constant and serious decline in the number of primary producers, with a specific focus on smaller producers,
- The extensive loss of prime farmland to urban sprawl and the mining industry, and
- A serious of increasingly critical constraints on non-renewable energy sources and other agricultural inputs.

¹ De Schutter, O., Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Final report: The transformative potential of the right to food, United Nations, 2014 p: 15; available at <http://www.srfood.org/en>.

² IPCC WG11 AR5, Climate change 2014:Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Vol 1 Global and Sectoral Analysis, Chapter 7 Food Security and Food Production Systems

³ State of the Climate Report 2014, CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology.



A simplistic message of ‘ramp up production and export more’ is not good enough – nor, quite frankly, is it feasible. Australian agriculture is being asked to adapt quickly to variable climate changes that happen in months and years, not decades.⁴ In addition, increasing the demand on farmers to produce more with the focus on using fertiliser and other agricultural inputs does not lead to a sustainable system, and alternative, proven and high-yielding methodologies such as agro-ecology, regenerative agriculture and permaculture should be explored. Farmers should have assistance, support and training for the necessary transition to more truly sustainable forms of production.

AFSA also takes the view that while we need to support our farmers with access to markets, more monoculture, large-scale export-focused farming is not the solution to long-term and genuine food security and food sovereignty in Australia.

Our local food systems require smart investment now to create the food economies of the future, especially if our projected population base doubles by natural increase over the next 40 years (ABS data⁵) without any environmental system shocks to cause mass environmental migration.

Our distribution systems are also resource intensive, requiring significant food miles via road transport to supply both to our export markets and ourselves. Health and wellbeing of Australians is also at risk with more than 9 in 10 people aged 16 and over not consuming sufficient serves of vegetables and fruit.⁶

We need to address many of the underlying causes that adversely impact our current food system. Once our local system is resilient, it is much easier, and more sustainable, to export our surplus.

Our submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce

In 2012, AFSA undertook the Peoples’ Food Plan, as a ‘crowd-sourced food policy development process’, to offer a genuinely consultative process in contrast to the then government’s National Food Plan. The Peoples’ Food Plan was launched on World Food Day, 16 October 2013. This plan is the culmination of dedicated work by hundreds of supporters who contributed their skills and time to this effort. Between September and November 2012, over 40 public forums across Australia were organised by AFSA.

We believe the ‘Peoples’ Food Plan’ is pertinent to the questions raised in the issues paper of your consultation process. In the Plan we identified nine high level areas that require immediate attention. We have enclosed a copy of this plan for consideration in this ongoing consultation process on agricultural competitiveness White Paper. The plan includes a complete appendix and reference index for detailed understanding.

⁴ Stokes C & Howden M. (Eds.) 2010. Adapting Agriculture to Climate Change: Preparing Australian Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries for the Future. CSIRO PUBLISHING. 296 pp.

⁵ ABS data: 3222.0 - Population Projections, Australia, 2012 (base) to 2101, December 2013

⁶ AIHW 2012. Australia's food and nutrition 2012. Cat. no. PHE 163. Canberra: AIHW.

People's Food Plan recommendations

As the Plan makes clear, there are many ways these challenges can be addressed to future proof Australian food systems to adapt to changes. AFSA recommends that the government explore and adopt the recommendations listed in the Plan.

Some of our recommendations are to:

- Establish a National Food Commissioner, reporting to the Prime Minister, with links to the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Transport.
- Carry out a Senate Inquiry of the impacts of all free trade agreements, especially to determine the resilience of our local food systems to withstand globalised food system shocks.
- Develop a national legislative framework for planning for food and agriculture, so as to create more uniform 'food-sensitive' state laws. This would also include establishing a pilot Food Policy Council in every Australian State and creating a new Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, to provide research, development and extension services to farmers transitioning to lower-input systems.
- Reform competition law and policy to tackle the negative impacts of the supermarket duopoly. This could include establishing a Supermarket Ombudsman with strong enforcement powers as a first step to tackle abuse of market power by the supermarket duopoly against suppliers. The clear precedent is the UK Groceries Code Adjudicator.⁷
- Re-establish grants and loans programs for local and regional food systems to help support Australia to produce enough fruit and vegetables to meet the national requirements for a healthy diet for all.
- Enable Aboriginal communities full access to their traditional hunting and fishing grounds, and fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices, to address the crisis in Aboriginal health.

While Australia has a robust agriculture sector, it is not without challenges. Any expansion of Australia's agriculture sector should carefully consider and address all the issues raised above, including improving and securing the nation's current food systems.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/groceries-code-adjudicator>

Conclusion

Our national and international food system will continue to experience food shocks into the future, such as in 2008 during the global economic crisis when international food prices skyrocketed to their highest level in 30 years⁸. This is a reminder that we need our local food systems to be resilient and we have the opportunity to do this now.

The reality is that many a government has fallen when there are food shortages, and we have the opportunity to ensure the Australian population can withstand such food shocks into the future. We are eager to work with the government and its agencies to deliver a better outcome for all the participants in our food system.

A copy of the People's Food Plan is enclosed as this submission and further information on AFSA can be found at www.australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org. We would welcome the opportunity to present the People's Food Plan in person and discuss our issues and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Dr Nick Rose
National Coordinator
Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

Attachment 1: People's Food Plan

⁸ FAO data: www.fao.org/isfp/about/en/