



**Submission to the**  
**AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS WHITE PAPER**

FRIDAY, 11 APRIL 2014

**A program to Engage the National Community in Agriculture**  
**CITY TO SOIL**

**Submission in brief**

1. Agriculture, food and fiber production is of fundamental importance to the entire Australian community.
2. WE can engage the entire community back to agriculture through the recycling of their organic waste with no additional community cost
3. Engaging householders in this process reconnects them to the farmer as the supplier of their food and fiber and brings social power to agriculture
4. Australia produces 45 million tonnes of waste per year on which it spends \$11 billion per annum
5. Approximately 60% of our waste streams are organic material
6. Research has demonstrated that quality source-separated organic waste can be returned to agriculture as high quality, biologically active compost
7. These products will in part, replace chemical fertilizer, reducing agricultural input costs
8. This project will not cost jobs it will create more jobs in the regional Australia and the waste industry
9. The community supports the return of organic waste to agriculture as a high quality compost
10. Already successfully operating in five council regions
11. This process will ultimately connect the urban and rural communities in on-farm carbon sequestration
12. Research shows that the agricultural benefits of using quality organic material in agriculture are:

- Increased yield
- Improved crop quality
- Reduced water use
- Improved water efficiency
- Improved soil structure
- Increased microbial activity
- Reduced nutrient leakage
- Reduced fertilizer costs
- Reduced erosion
- Carbon sequestration
- Increased land value

### **Organic waste – returning to agriculture**

In the past 20 years, the National Farmers Association ran a Quality Assurance program, among others, which became known as Paddock to Plate. This ensured the consumer that the food on their plate was of the highest quality.

The City to Soil program, now operating in Armidale, Palerang, Harden-Murrumburrah, Lachlan and Goulburn councils, has initiated a process which can demonstrate that the a reverse process, Plate to Paddock, is not only viable economically but can also provide improved social outcomes.

Recent droughts combined with soil degradation in Australia have resulted in a heightened awareness of the need to maintain quality soil and the potential return of organic material to agriculture.

This in turn has developed a potential new focus for recycling.

### **Return on Investment**

The cost to ratepayers of the “away” process, the investment in the removal of unwanted materials from their homes, will always provide a better social return in terms of community value, if focused on recycling rather than disposal to landfill.

In fact if kerbside collection for disposal to landfill and kerbside collection for recycling are considered in ‘value for money’ terms, the overwhelming benefits of recycling soon become obvious.

No matter where it occurs around the world the recovery of resources for reuse and recycling always has far more community and economic benefit than the destruction of resources. Recycling works!

## **The true value of organic wastes**

Many civilizations have traditionally been involved in the return organic waste to agriculture as a product, which supports and stimulates the microbial activity of the soil.

Yet today we dispose of much of our organic waste to landfill.

Around 60% of all the materials we put into landfill is organic and a very large part of this has come from our own farming processes.

The outputs of food and fiber production are exported from the farm, carried into the cities or exported where it is processed through industry or people and after passing through a waste management system, ends up in either our landfill or our sewage treatment works.

Plants cannot make minerals and trace elements and these important structures in healthy plant growth are not necessarily put into our soils through the application of fertiliser.

The protection of our national soil asset needs a national program involving all levels of government, industry and community. Our soils feed us all and create the nutritional and commercial activity for everything we are and everything we do. We cannot live without soils and we cannot export without soils.

Given the importance of farming to our existence, we need tools to engage the National community in the protection of our agricultural base. We need to involve the entire population in the protection of our most fundamental asset, the soil.

This soil protection program needs an ongoing source of income, and a commercial base which will be never-ending.

City to Soil should be the National program for community engagement and the diversion of organic resources from landfill to farming.

It can involve the entire waste and fertiliser industries in the collection and processing of quality source-separated and composted products for distribution to agriculture.

### **City to Soil**

It is clear that many successful societies throughout the world have programs, which work within their culture to return organic material to the soil. We have a model for such a program in Australia that works within the existing cost structure for the management of wastes. It is called "City to Soil".

The project is now operating, without additional government support in five council areas of NSW.

This project is focused on diverting material from landfill, but with the added incentive of providing increased benefits to agricultural use of the end product, providing additional wealth, which is then available to all participants in the system.

Research from around the world has demonstrated that quality organic product will improve soils and yields.

The agricultural benefits of using quality organic material in agriculture are:

- Increased yield
- Improved crop quality
- Reduced water use
- Improved water efficiency
- Improved soil structure
- Increased microbial activity
- Reduced nutrient leakage
- Reduced fertilizer costs
- Reduced erosion
- Carbon sequestration
- Increased land value

The “City to Soil” model will fit into any community. It will broaden the market to include not only the fertilizer and waste companies, but also the farmer and the general community, engaging them all in an awareness of sustainable food production. It can readily link with the Federal Government Direct Action and Green Army programs.

The return of our organic waste to agriculture supports existing commercial interests and provides a new range of products to be distributed by existing fertiliser distributors while creating additional markets for compost product that remains unsold. City to Soil will simply redirect existing waste expenditure into an area of national benefit.

In so doing it will create many more urban and regional jobs in an economic model which, after initial local government introduction, will not require ongoing Government subsidy.

This program will replace the negativity of landfill with positive agricultural outcomes and in the process, will help rebuild the relationship between the urban and rural sectors and provide a meaningful dialogue on a sustainable future in the care of our soils.

The return of organic waste back into the landscape as quality source-separated, biologically active products will help reduce our reliance on imported fertiliser, build soil organic matter and carbon while delivering improved economic stability to the farming sector.

Protecting our nation’s soils is fundamental to a balanced economy. The outflows of minerals, nutrients and trace elements which naturally follow the export of crops can be addressed, at least in part, by the return of high quality, biological viable products to our soils.

This program could facilitate a sound return on investment for the management of organic wastes, and provide an extensive range of new economic opportunities for those currently in the waste industry while at the same time empowering the Australian community to take direct action to support agriculture in their daily lives.

The Palerang Shire Council, centred in Bungendore has now been operating City to Soil for several months. Its organic waste is being composted on a licensed compost facility on a local farm. It is only a short drive from Canberra to view both the City to Soil community engagement strategy, the collection process and on-farm composting.