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N02.03

28th September 2012

National Food Plan Submissions  
PO Box 942  
BROADWAY NSW 2007

Email: [nationalfoodplan@coxinall.com.au](mailto:nationalfoodplan@coxinall.com.au)

Dear Sir/ Madam,

**Re: WSROC Response to the National Food Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Government's National Food Plan which we are pleased to attach.

WSROC represents 10 member councils across Western Sydney: Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 9671 4333 or 0488 038 113 if you would like to discuss our submission further.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kerry Bartlett', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Kerry Bartlett  
Chief Executive Officer



## Green paper to inform development of a National Food Plan

### SUBMISSION COVER SHEET (not for publication)

**Closing date for submissions: 30 SEPTEMBER 2012**

Please complete and submit this form with your submission to:

National Food Plan Submissions  
PO Box 942  
Broadway NSW 2007

Or email: [nationalfoodplan@coxinall.com.au](mailto:nationalfoodplan@coxinall.com.au)

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Submissions will be placed on the department's website shortly after receipt, unless prior contact has been made concerning material supplied in confidence or to request a delayed release for a short period of time.

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contains NO material supplied in confidence and can be placed on the national food plan website



contains SOME material supplied in confidence (separately attached and marked COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE)



# SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL FOOD PLAN GREEN PAPER

## SEPTEMBER, 2012

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## WSROC Submission to the National Food Plan Green Paper

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## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Australian Government's National Food Plan Green Paper.

The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd (WSROC) represents 10 local government areas, totalling 5,500 square kilometres ranging from high density urban areas such as Auburn, Bankstown, Parramatta, Holroyd, Blacktown and Fairfield, to semi-rural and rural lands around the outskirts of Hawkesbury, Liverpool and Penrith. It also takes in the World Heritage area of the Blue Mountains.

Some of our council LGAs cover large areas of farmland which includes some of the most productive agricultural land in Australia.

Our agricultural industry which is comprised mainly of fresh fruit and vegetables, poultry, horticulture and turf farms is worth around \$1.5 billion a year. The region produces 12% of NSW's total agricultural production and employs 11% of the State's workforce. In addition, the Sydney region contributes over 15% of NSW's total vegetable production.

The population in the greater Western Sydney area is currently around 1.9 million and is expected to increase by over 1 million in the next 20 years. The region's main employer is the manufacturing sector, which includes a significant food processing industry. Unemployment in some LGAs is almost double the national average and with the projected population growth, the region is forecast to have a jobs shortage of around 290,000 by 2036.

Our current population has higher than average obesity levels and a correspondingly higher incidence of lifestyle-related illness. Socio-economic levels are lower than average in all LGAs except the Blue Mountains. As a result, WSROC Councils are at the forefront of many of the key issues identified in the National Food Plan including food security, competing land use demands, managing peri-urban agriculture, obesity and poor health relating to inadequate access to fresh food, poor education about nutrition, employment in agriculture and food processing industries, and managing food standards and handling regulations.

WSROC made a detailed submission to the original issue paper and is pleased to see that many of our concerns have been addressed in the Green Paper which is a very comprehensive analysis on the myriad of issues surrounding Australia's food production and consumption. However, in some respects the great number and variety of the issues makes it difficult to cover them all adequately and some issues, such as dietary and lifestyle health or access to fresh food for lower socio-economic and disadvantaged groups, have been buried against the report's main emphasis which appears to be boosting agricultural exports.

WSROC recognises that work in these areas is continuing with the development of other policies, such as the National Nutrition Policy "in parallel" however, we believe that the development of these policies must be firmly integrated in the overall National Food Plan if they are to have any meaningful outcome.

In addition, peri-urban agriculture needs to be recognised for the important role it plays in our economy, not just in growing food for local use but in the potential for exports and employment. For example 90 per cent of NSW's supply of Asian vegetables is grown in the Sydney basin, which could have export potential to China and other areas, and the food processing industry is a significant proportion of Western Sydney's manufacturing base which is still the region's largest employer.

## **KEY POINTS ABOUT THE GREEN PAPER**

### **Focus on exports**

A major concern is the over-emphasis on R&D and boosting exports. It seems that this has become the driving force behind the National Food Plan, rather than looking more broadly at issues such as land use, accessibility, quality, health and nutrition and Australia's food security. WSROC believes the two issues should be dealt with separately and the National Food plan should focus on domestic supply, agricultural practice and accessibility issues. The whole of food system approach could be redefined as domestic only and exclude international and export issues.

### **Food-health disconnect**

Repeated comments that a National Nutrition Policy is being developed "in parallel" with the Food Plan is also a concern as the two must be fully integrated from the outset, not pinned together later when both have been developed in isolation. As the National Food Plan is intended to be the overarching strategic direction on everything related to food and agriculture, it is imperative that the Plan is prepared in close consultation with all the other policies covering other aspects of food outlined in the introduction to the green paper – not just the R&D and export angles.

### **High proportion of food wastage**

WSROC has serious concerns about the high proportion of food wastage and would like to see more support for initiatives that allows food discarded by the major supermarkets to be easily available as an alternative and more affordable option – particularly for low income and time poor working families. Reports that the major supermarket chains accept only 55-60 per cent of produce grown by their producers shows an unconscionable waste level and there perfectly good, if visually imperfect food should be available to the market – rather than dump – sell it as "b grade" or "budget line". The same ridiculous situation exists with citrus dumping – which is now seeing farmers hailed as innovative and resourceful for turning their potentially dumped crop into juice for local outlets.

There is an issue that although this food can be available through the wholesale markets it doesn't seem to make it to the outlets frequented by low income working families who would benefit from an easily accessible source of cheap fresh food. Better access to "grade fresh fruit and vegetables. Serious investigation into competition laws is required to find ways to overcome the barriers which are preventing this happening.

### **Skills and employment**

Issue of employment and low numbers of kids getting into agriculture and food technology – the interest isn't there because food tech is very poorly paid, while farming is hard work and unreliable income. Part of the farming issue is dominance of big supermarkets – see point above "wastage".

It also important in Western Sydney from an economic perspective – our peri-urban agriculture industry is worth over \$1.5 billion to the NSW economy and provides almost 22,000 local jobs in primary production and food processing.

### **Resilience planning**

WSROC applauds the Australian government's focus on resilience planning and in particular its initiatives in working with the private sector to minimise disruption to food supplies. It would also be beneficial for lower socio-economic households if maintaining affordability, as well as availability, of fresh food was included as a key indicator of successful resilience building.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **E2 – Outcomes and Objectives of the NFP:**

The seven objectives seem to reinforce the perception that a key focus of this strategy is to promote exports through increased R&D – of the seven objectives listed three are externally focussed.

### **E3 - Seizing new market opportunities:**

Again the emphasis is on exports although we note and welcome the commitment to improved farming techniques with less water and a smaller carbon footprint. WSROC believes that the plan must have sustainability principles at the core. This should include protecting and promoting the role of peri-urban agriculture, especially in regions like Sydney which are expected to continue to have relatively reliable rainfall, in order to offset the carbon impacts of trucking fresh food and produce long distances.

### **Investing in R&D**

To achieve this goal the Plan must involve all levels of the education system to build interest in agricultural careers. Currently record low numbers of students are enrolling in agriculture courses, partly due to the perception of poor career options and low remuneration, compared to more popular fields such as environmental science. Changing these negative perceptions will require a review of the courses and careers paths available, promoting the opportunities in agriculture to students at both primary and secondary level education and working with the private R&D sector to promote the industry.

### **Building an evidence base**

WSROC welcomes the recognition of need to build evidence base as long overdue - WSROC believes the lack of comprehensive statistics on our agricultural and farming industries is unbelievable and is astonished that we have not had this information available before. This measure is urgent and long overdue as policy decisions and strategic directions cannot be formulated without it.

### **Market-based policy**

The continued reliance on a market-based policy approach may suit competitive businesses but it does not assist consumers whose choices are ultimately dictated by what is available. Low income, and lower socioeconomic groups are particularly vulnerable – a policy of “demand led supply” becomes a cop-out in the hands of fast-food companies who target these groups with cheap quick food, which is low in nutrition.

All consumers may need additional Government intervention and support in the supply and marketing processes to ensure access to safe reliable affordable fresh food supplies and to ensure their choices are not dictated by the control of the major food retailers, such as McDonalds, Coles or Woolworths.

The Government’s stated goal to seek smarter ways to do business with people should include supporting local farmers’ markets which allow community education and engagement in the concept of fresh local produce with associated health benefits of socialisation, education and better nutrition.

### **Regional Australia**

WSROC urges the Government to expand their definition of regional Australia to include the outskirts of major cities, such as Western Sydney. With a significant peri-urban agricultural industry and associated food processing and manufacturing jobs in the urban areas, Western Sydney should be defined as its own region and have a separate Government-funded Regional Development Australia (RDA) to promote its interest and identity, separate to the rest of the Sydney Metropolitan area.

## **Food Security**

WSROC strongly supports the regular production of a State of the Food System report– in line with the stated objectives of increased information gathering and recording and overall evidence–based decision making.

WSROC is particularly concerned about the potential loss of agricultural land to other activities such as mining, coal seam gas extraction or, as is particularly relevant on the urban fringes, to housing and other urban developments. Local councils carry the brunt of this balancing act but are frequently restricted in their ability by the overriding requirements of State and Federal Government policies.

WSROC believes that peri-urban agriculture must be protected and incorporated as a vital component of planning for a healthy and liveable city. A range of state and Federal Government policies including planning, taxation, competition policy, marketing, zoning, land tenure, water sharing and infrastructure must be initiated to support peri-urban agriculture. This should be done at the COAG level to ensure workable and effective coordination between state and federal policies. The planning and zoning issues should also include Local Government input.

## **Tackling Health and nutrition issues**

Health and nutrition are major issues in Western Sydney where 60 per cent of the population is classified as overweight or obese and incidences of diabetes are running at up to 7.4 per cent of the population. Seven of the top nine areas for diabetes in Sydney are in the West where unemployment levels are twice the national average. The National Food plan provides a great opportunity to integrate preventative health initiatives with food supply and production issues to help reduce the incidence of lifestyle-related illness.

## **Food safety**

From both our councils' and our local suppliers' point of view, national standards in food handling would be welcome as it brings certainty for council inspectors, as well as food handlers and suppliers, who otherwise face diverse standards and guidelines across LGA jurisdictions.

# **RESPONSE TO PROPOSED POLICY OPTIONS**

## **Chapter 3 - Australia's Food Policy Framework**

WSROC supports the establishment of an Australian Food Council comprising ministers and key stakeholders and notes that it is important to have all representatives on hand in developing strategic policies. Local councils have a significant role to play and should be represented on a regional basis.

WSROC strongly supports the publishing of a regular State of the Food System document and believes it would be sensible to review the National Food Plan every five years in light of the findings of the Status report. The report should include a register of ownership of agricultural landholdings – including overseas and domestic landholders.

These reviews should be done in conjunction with the National Nutrition Policy and other health strategies to ensure they remain fully integrated.

## **Chapter 4 - Australia's Food Security**

WSROC believes there may be a case to split the National Food Plan into two parts – one focussed on domestic supply and demand and the other looking at export and global food issues. The National Food

Plan should focus on Australia's food security, supporting our agricultural industries and ensuring best practice and that all Australians of all SES levels have access to fresh affordable food.

A separate policy on export, R&D and international positioning could be developed in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

WSROC agrees that food security is a significant issue for those on low incomes but is concerned that income management programs can lead to greater welfare dependence, trapping people in a continued cycle of poverty and reliance on government programs. We would like to see more information on the kinds of programs under consideration and how, and under whose auspices, they will be implemented. An alternative could be a greater level of consultation with the community to develop more sustainable education campaigns.

## **Chapter 5 – Safe and nutritious food**

WSROC welcomes recognition of the need to promote healthy eating and diet as part of a broader preventative health agenda and suggests Governments work closely with ROCs and local councils to find ways to progress this. We strongly support plans for an Australian Health Survey to identify populations at risk, and would urge the Government to work closely with Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) and local councils who will be able to use their close community connections to assist in identifying and designing programs to target those most at risk, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, the aged, and those in lower socio-economic groups.

Close collaboration with councils and ROCs will also be important in achieving the goals set out in the Plan to develop and implement national food standards. The need to develop a set of agreed national standards is essential to overcome the myriad differences of local food handling and hygiene laws that exist in different LGA jurisdictions. As local councils are charged with monitoring and enforcing food standards they need to play a key role in establishing those national standards, along with the training programs for inspectors to ensure a uniform approach.

## **Chapter 6 – A competitive and productive food industry**

WSROC strongly supports the establishment of a working party to prepare a workforce development strategy. However we would like to see the consultation process extended to engage with stakeholders outside the immediate business arena to address issues such as poor enrolment in agricultural education (at both the university and TAFE levels) and identify opportunities for building relevant skills among long term unemployed people, in preference to bringing in unskilled migrant labour from overseas.

## SPECIFIC COMMENTS

### Chapter 1

WSROC disputes the unsubstantiated claim that most Australians have access to nutritious and affordable food and believes a survey should be undertaken as a matter of priority to determine the true state of affairs. The rising levels of overweight and obesity would suggest that many Australians have inadequate access to appropriate levels of nutritious food either through poor lifestyle, lack of education and income, cost or remoteness. This is a major health issue and the accessibility situation should be quantified as a matter of urgency with a view to developing and implementing policies to address the situation.

Figures shown at the roundtable presentations held in Sydney showed rapidly rising incomes and stationary fresh food prices – WSROC does not believe these figures accurately represent the situation for most of our residents.

### Chapter 2

Figures quoted in the report show that the Australian fruit and vegetable industries are worth \$7.4 billion annually. Figures released by the NSW Department of Primary Industries in 2008, calculated the total production of Sydney's peri-urban agricultural industries (which are predominately fruit and vegetables) at around \$1.5 billion. Around 15.8 per cent of NSW's total fruit and vegetable production comes from Greater Western Sydney. A further 50 per cent comes from around the Murray Darling Basin which is potentially threatened by the impacts of climate change and reduced rainfall.

WSROC urges the Commonwealth to work closely with State and Local governments to address land use and economic issues (such as the high cost of land making farming uneconomical on urban fringes), to protect and preserve this important regional industry.

The impact of food prices can have a significant and highly detrimental effect on the health of lower socio-economic households. Quality fresh food is a discretionary item in the household budget and as such is one of the first things to be reduced as mortgage, transport and utility bills rise. Current issues of housing affordability, low consumer confidence and general malaise in the economy is seeing many households cut back on spending on healthy food turning instead to cheap high carbohydrate, low nutrient fast foods. In Western Sydney particularly the increased reliance on dual incomes and long commuting times, plus a high level of shift work, reduces time for sourcing and preparing fresh nutritional food, further increasing reliance on heavily processed or fast food with corresponding negative health impacts.

### Chapter 3

Q 3.1 – In general WSROC supports the approach the Government is taking in consulting with key stakeholders and welcomes the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the discussion.

We believe it may be more effective and manageable if the National Food Plan concentrated on domestic issues – how we feed our own population and how we get the food from the paddock to the plate in Australia. A separate policy to promote exports and global food security could be developed in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The box headed Regional Engagement on page 51 raises some important issues which apply just as strongly to Western Sydney as they do in traditional rural or remote regions. As noted earlier, Western Sydney has a well-established and highly productive peri-urban agricultural industry which makes a significant contribution to the national food supply. There are also a large number of associated jobs in food processing and manufacturing in the Western Sydney region. As the Government has indicated they intend to promote regional agriculture through the RDA network, WSROC believes this is further evidence of the

urgent need for Western Sydney to have its own RDA. Currently, Sydney has a single RDA which is unable to meet the varied and often competing demands of so many diverse regions in Australia's leading global city. An RDA focussed specifically on Western Sydney would bring numerous economic and social benefits to the region, one of which would also be able to assist in expanding and promoting our peri-urban agricultural industry.

We strongly support the creation of a Food Council – but would stress the importance of taking an integrated approach, so that the Council should consider social issues such as nutrition, health and education and programs for low socio-economic groups and those at risk of malnutrition, as well as broader economic issues.

On the subject of increased engagement with States and Territories, WSROC believes this should be extended to include local government as it is the local councils who are at the frontline of managing many of the issues which are covered under the National Food Plan (such as land use, enforcement of food standards and licensing of premises, etc.). This could be achieved by utilising the established ROCs networks.

## **Chapter 4 - Food Security**

### ***Land use***

Q4.2 - WSROC supports better coordination on a national level of land use information and recommends working closely with local councils who will already have detailed land use plans and important local knowledge. Monitoring the long term impacts will be particularly important in areas such as Western Sydney where the agricultural production is intensive and concentrated in small areas and therefore more vulnerable to widespread destruction through housing developments or other changes. Local councils are well placed to advise on these issues.

### **Q4.3 - Food insecurity in social groups**

Food security is a major problem in urban areas as well as the remote communities identified in the report and the Government needs to look more widely at the kinds of factors which lead to it. Geographic isolation is by no means the only trigger: social isolation, limited mobility through illness or disability, low incomes – all impact on the capacity of an individual to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet. Figures for food insecurity in disadvantaged areas such as those in Western Sydney suggest they could be as high as 25 per cent – similar to those in remote indigenous communities. WSROC believes the Government needs to undertake a comprehensive and detailed survey of issues around affordability and accessibility to determine the real extent of the problem and identify the key issues which impact on it. This work must be undertaken at all levels of Government to provide effective and integrated solutions.

## **Chapter 5 - Safe and Nutritious food**

### **Q5.3 - Nutrition**

Nutrition remains a key problem in Western Sydney where obesity and other diet and lifestyle related illnesses are already above the national average and rising. WSROC stands ready to work with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging on the development of the National Nutrition Policy, but urges that this must be prepared in close consultation with the National Food Plan and other health initiatives listed. We would also strongly support moves to undertake the proposed Australian Health Survey to identify population groups at risk of poor health and nutrition. Arguments that decisions about food are dictated by consumer demand are a furphy if consumers are only allowed to choose between pre-determined items.

One of the serious issues which need to be addressed is food wastage, identified in the Green Paper as running at unacceptably high levels – which is impossible to justify in a fair and equitable society in which around 20 per cent of households experience some degree of food insecurity.

WSROC recommends that the wastage – the imperfect vegetables rejected by the big supermarket chains (which can range up to almost 50 per cent of producers crops) should be made easily available to the community who may be prepared to buy a crooked carrot or misshapen potato – especially if they were at a reduced price. Given the food will presumably be dumped, it seems to be a win-win situation which will enable lower socio-economic and disadvantaged communities to access healthy fresh food at an affordable price, and provide better remuneration and income security to our farmers – which will in turn keep our agricultural and farming sector strong and make farming as a career more attractive to a current and future generations.

Hence, in addition to working with growers, manufacturers and retailers to encourage a healthy national diet, WSROC believes it would be worthwhile to promote the sale of less-than-perfect vegies at a reduced price in supermarkets or major retail centres, which are easily accessible to working families, as well as in local markets.

#### Q5.4 - Safe food

Local councils are at the forefront of monitoring and managing food practices in shops and restaurants and one of the complicating factors is the plethora of different rules and regulations that can vary from state to state and even between LGAs. WSROC suggests the Australian Government should work with local governments to prepare a set of national standards for food handling procedures to assist council inspectors with inspections and enforcement, and create certainty for retailers.

#### Q5.5 - Changing consumer preferences

WSROC welcomes the rise of the farmers markets and councils support these food outlets. However the cost and ease of access to farm-fresh produce for people in major metropolitan areas such as Western Sydney further underscores the need to preserve a viable and productive peri-urban agriculture industry on the doorsteps of our major cities.

### **Chapter 6 A competitive and productive food industry**

As noted in the report, there is expected to be a significant shortage of labour and skills across all regions, sectors and occupations of agriculture in the long term. This is also true in the Western Sydney region where food production and processing accounts for 22,000 jobs, but enrolment in agriculture and food related courses at Universities and TAFEs (especially the University of Western Sydney) are at all-time lows. A perception of poor remuneration, income insecurity and a sense that farmers are increasingly held hostage by major retailers such as the supermarkets may be contributing to the lack of demand for places.

WSROC notes that the Government is investing heavily in creating courses and study opportunities but that in order to overcome the negative perceptions associated with the industry, these initiatives should be supported by a major national advertising campaign promoting the advantages and opportunities of a career in agriculture, food production and technology. In addition, more information about farming and the importance of food security should be built into in the school curricula at both primary and secondary level.

The idea of an industry-led working group to prepare a workforce development strategy is a start but it should widen its focus to beyond ways to better utilise existing labour and instead look at ways to encourage careers in agriculture and build a new flexible, skilled and versatile workforce for the future.

## **Chapter 7 A strong natural resource base**

Land is a natural resource and must be conserved for food production.

WSROC notes that the Government has stated support for “beneficial co-existence” of food production and natural resources, however there is still great uncertainty as to the potential long term effects of coal seam gas mining on agricultural land and vital groundwater systems. Serious and detailed research needs to be carried out to identify these impacts as a matter of urgency – before licences are granted for CSG extraction. Coal seam gas mining exploration is now being considered for much of the Western Sydney basin and catchment areas, which has the potential to impact not only on Western Sydney’s \$1.5 billion peri-urban agriculture industry, but also the \$2.5 million aquaculture industry of the Lower Hawkesbury River.

### ***Food waste***

WSROC supports the initiatives outlined in the Green Paper to minimise food waste – see above – and notes that disposing of food waste remains a major challenge for our councils – representing around 35 per cent of total municipal waste, which poses a potential carbon tax burden for councils.

Councils are keen to work with the Federal Government in formulating the National Waste Policy, and suggest greater collaboration to determine programs and policies which could assist councils in managing food waste given that the costs of the carbon tax cannot be passed on by councils to the residents – that is, under the current system, councils bear the carbon cost of the green landfill but they cannot control the behaviour of the constituents who generate the waste in the first place.

Decomposition of waste in landfill is, as councils agree, a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and while State and Territory governments are able to impose levies on the amount of organic waste going to landfill, this does nothing to help local councils who must pay these levies while having no way of passing on these costs or residents to modify their waste behaviour apart from education and encouragement. However the inability of councils to impose any meaningful penalties on those who fail to moderate their green waste means that councils are unfairly carrying the burden of both the disposal and the carbon tax implications.

WSROC would like to see a range of programs introduced to help better educate residents about the landfill and carbon implications of food waste, and agrees with the Green Paper analysis that there is a high level of community misunderstanding regarding the difference in meaning of “Use-By” and “Best Before” labelling. WSROC also strongly supports the implication in the Green paper that better community education would remove the dominance of the major retailers in determining which fruit and vegetables are offered for sale – and at what price. (see suggestions for the alternate “b” grade market).

WSROC strongly supports the initiatives outlined as part of the Supermarket Food Waste Benchmark program and suggests that the food that is downgraded and which is currently sold through local markets should be made more accessible to low income, and dual income time-poor families who do not have access to these alternative outlets. Better education, and support from the major retailers should enable this “imperfect” produce to be sold at supermarkets and major shopping centres with an appropriate price point incentive. Better education on the nutritional value of visually imperfect fruit and vegetables should be a priority for the Government as part of the nutrition and food labelling programs.

### ***Redistribution of food***

WSROC would like to see more support for the NGOs who manage food redistribution programs but believe supermarkets could also be involved to make that “seconds” food available to ordinary families at their ordinary outlets – offering a greater choice at point of sale. Our residents would also benefit from more

education around farmers markets and imperfect vegetables. “Seconds” food should not be confined just to those registered for charity assistance.

### **Consultation questions**

Q7.1 - The pressure to increase food production means that a new priority system of land use should be developed. Australia has a lot of space but rich, highly productive agricultural land is limited – and may be even more so in the future with the effects of climate change and changing rainfall patterns. There needs to be more research into the potential impacts of competing land use demands, especially from housing, mining and CSG extraction, and this needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency before - not after - the arable land runs out.

Q7.2 - Dominance of the major supermarkets is a serious problem in ensuring genuine competition and alternate channels of supply. While supermarkets claim they are consumer driven in the products and prices they offer, in reality the consumer can only choose to buy what is supplied. A “seconds” range of visually imperfect vegetables – at a genuinely lower price, should be available (and not used as an excuse to push the price of normal fruit and vegetables higher.)

Q7.3 - Waste reduction measures should include better education for residents on food labelling and waste about the impact of green waste for councils and better understanding about food quality not relying on visual appearance. Councils should be compensated for the additional costs of services that are affected by the carbon tax – especially as they have no control over the behaviours that generate the waste.

### **Chapter 8 - Food trade and market access**

There needs to be increased recognition of important role of peri-urban agriculture as source of exports but also employment in food processing as part of Western Sydney manufacturing industry.

For example, over 90% of the Asian vegetables produced in NSW are grown in Western Sydney, which has potential for expansion and export to other Asian countries.

In addition, food processing and manufacturing accounts for around 22,000 jobs – representing 54% of all food-related jobs in Sydney.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Food Plan provides an opportunity to engage in detail with Australia’s agricultural industry and the economic, social and health benefits it brings, with a view to identifying the issues which will build strength and resilience for the future.

Local and regional councils play a multifaceted role in managing these issues and WSROC believes that preservation of an economically viable and easily accessible peri-urban agriculture industry on the edge of our cities will bring numerous benefits to the health and liveability of our urban centres.

## APPENDIX

The importance of Sydney's agriculture relative to NSW:

- It is highly intensive and valued at \$1.5 Billion per year
- Produces 12% of NSW's total agricultural production and employs 11% of the State's agriculture workforce
- The Sydney region contributes 15.8% of NSW's vegetable production
- Over 50% of NSW's vegetables are grown in the Murray/Murrumbidgee region where water availability is becoming a significant issue.
- Sydney has good agricultural land and may also have better rainfall than inland as climate change occurs. The capacity for Sydney to continue to provide vegetables should be increased — not reduced.
- Sydney is a major production area for the supply of some perishable food lines in NSW and provides:
  - over 90% of Asian vegetables grown in NSW (Note Figure 2);
  - 76 % of capsicum and chili
  - 98% of celery
  - 90 % of parsley
  - 80% of basil, coriander
  - 80% of mushrooms
  - 97% silverbeet and spinach

Poultry:

- 42 per cent of chicken meat
- 43 per cent of eggs
- 43% turkey meat
- Almost 100 % duck and other poultry

In addition

- 38% of nursery supplies
- 42% cut flowers
- 53% cultivated turf
- Employment (2006 census) - Sydney's peri-urban agriculture industry is a major contributor to the NSW economy
  - Total food related employment in Greater western Sydney: 21,829
  - Representing 54% of Sydney's total food related jobs

*Source NSW Department of Primary Industries report (2008), Employment figures from 2006 Census data.*