



## **National Food Plan Submission by Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA)**

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2011**

### **Introduction**

Australian Women in Agriculture welcomes the opportunity to present issues to the development of an Australian National Food Plan as a step towards securing adequate amounts of healthy, accessible and acceptable food for all Australians.

The views of AWiA members across every state and territory in securing a future for our farming communities and food producers have been canvassed.

Briefly, women want a sense of security for the Australian population knowing they have access to safe, healthy, food produced locally by farm families in a socially, economically and environmentally sustained way.

Women want trust in the quality of our food and trust in the ethics and integrity of how it is produced.

AWiA has also identified that there needs to be shared understandings of food as a foundation for healthy lives, community economies and eco-systems.

### **AWiA's interest in the National Food Plan**

Australian Women in Agriculture welcomes the development of a National Food Plan as progress towards securing a sustainable, healthy food system in all aspects of the Australian food supply chain.

Key AWiA perspectives include:

- A national approach should build a strategy for a resilient food chain and emphasise the link between food and health.
- AWiA believes a sustainable farming and food production system based on healthy soils and water security is crucial for strengthening Australia's farming future.
- Ongoing ecological sustainability of the fishing industry for the freshwater and marine environments and in agriculture are essential.
- Food is about the health and well being of our communities.
- Hence, it is vital that a strong food production system protects food quality and food security in every aspect of food production, processing and distribution.
- It is also vital that agriculture on land and in the sea underpins productivity growth by supporting innovations through research and development funding,

commitments to knowledge sharing between government, business, communities and individuals, and flexible policy and regulatory decisions.

## **Introducing Australian Women in Agriculture Ltd (AWiA)**

### **Who We Are**

AWiA is an incorporated body limited by guarantee and is maintained by volunteers. We are a national dedicated and committed organisation of women involved in the development of primary production, rural industries and rural communities. The AWiA is led by a national Board of management and implemented by state representatives in providing links and connections for rural women across Australia and Papua New Guinea. Members are skilled, committed to the advancement of rural Australia and while recognising the importance of managing change, they also recognise the importance of preserving the natural and historical heritage of rural and remote Australia.

Australian Women in Agriculture is guided by five core values:

- We care for people, for rural families and communities and for the environment
- We ensure the viability of future agricultural productivity through enhanced development
- We respect the culture, beliefs and philosophies of other people
- We enable women to share their experiences through strong communication networks
- We offer leadership programs to facilitate change in our communities.

By uniting and raising the profile of women across all aspects of the agricultural industries, the membership of AWiA is addressing rural and agricultural inequities by making a significant contribution to the viability and sustainability of rural Australia for future generations.

## **AWiA's Submission**

The key areas in the National Food Plan issues paper most relevant to the work of Australian Women in Agriculture are:

- (a) A focus on food for all people
- (b) Localised food systems and enhanced local production in rural and remote areas, including Indigenous communities
- (c) Addressing the links between energy, water, soil and carbon cycles and their impacts on food production
- (d) Building knowledge and a skilled workforce able to implement relevant new methods on farm and throughout the supply chain
- (e) The need for an overhaul of freight transport infrastructure
- (f) Protecting agricultural and forest land and fishing grounds to prevent loss to industrial, mining, residential and recreational activities
- (g) Increasing Research and Development to facilitate innovation and improved efficiency within the agriculture and food production sector
- (h) Using innovative methods and outlets to enhance community/consumer awareness of the direct links between nutrition and health
- (i)** Ensuring that accurate and descriptive labelling enables consumers to make informed choices about their purchases.

## **Addressing the Issues Paper**

The remainder of this AWiA submission focuses on the questions raised within the Issues Paper, then goes on to address briefly other matters raised by members but not readily addressed within these key questions.

### **Question 1: What is the most important thing you think a national food plan should try to achieve?**

A National Food Plan should provide a clear 'roadmap' to a secure future for Australia's food producers, enabling them to support healthy lives for all Australians, while at the same time ensuring that their food production systems are part of sustainable communities and landscapes.

Shared understandings of food as a foundation for healthy lives, communities, economies and eco-systems is essential to the provision of adequate amounts of healthy, acceptable and accessible food for all.

This will, among other aspects, include support (including R&D) for the development of new, embryonic industries enabling both Indigenous communities and others in rural and remote areas to develop their own food, as well as increasing value adding.

In addressing this and other aspects of the National Food Plan Issues Paper the ‘Resetting the Table’ People’s Food Policy paper<sup>1</sup> prepared in Canada provides useful information worthy of consideration here in Australia.

**Question 2: What do you think the vision and objectives for a national food plan should be?**

**Increased food production in ways that are sustainable on a local basis reducing “food miles” and reliance on external sources at the expense of local communities, a consumer sector educated about the links between health and nutrition, and labelling that enables informed choices.**

“The combined effect of population growth, strong income growth and urbanisation ... is expected to result in almost the doubling of demand for food, feed and fibre by 2050”<sup>2</sup>.

To achieve this, agricultural land (and wild catch fishing waters) will need to become more productive, food processing more efficient and waste must be reduced in a water and carbon conserving world through:

- Long term sustainable growth
- Increased export earnings
- Competitiveness
- Guaranteed access to safe, affordable, healthy food for all Australians
- Incentives for Research and Development leading to product innovation and increased production
- An integration of the planning and budgeting between departments of agriculture, health, trade, environment and education leading to community-based sustainability of all agricultural sectors

**Question 3: What do you see as the major risks to Australia’s food supply in the coming years and decades?**

A number of separate but interconnected risks face sustainable supply of food in Australia and in support of developing countries in the coming years and decades.

AWiA members have identified as key among these:

- Failure to address the links between energy, water and carbon cycles and their impacts on food production
- Lack of protection for agricultural and forest land and fishing waters to prevent loss to industrial, residential, conservation and leisure activities, while recognising that areas of high conservation value often complement and support healthy agricultural production
- The sale of assets such that small producers are ‘pushed to the wall’, leaving many rural communities depleted

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<sup>1</sup> People’s Food Policy. Resetting the Table. [www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca](http://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Diouf, J. Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), October 2009.

- Food insecurity - the lack of enough safe food produced in ways that provide decent economic returns and a good living to the producers
- Not having a nationally consistent freight transport infrastructure that includes safety, operational and technical standards. Logistics issues, both domestic and international and especially in rural and remote areas, place safe, fresh food at risk (e.g. a recent example of mudcrabs left on the tarmac in Darwin)

**Question 4: What does food security mean to you? How would this be achieved? How would we know if/when we are food secure?**

Food security is about producing safe, healthy food sufficient to meet the needs of all people while living healthy lifestyles, whether as producers or consumers.

We need to continue to grow our own and protect the integrity of our production. Several factors are involved.

Land and the sea are the source of food. Protection of prime agricultural land is an emotive issue. Productivity of agriculture depends on the availability of land and water, a willingness to adopt new technology, international trade and co-operation, and improved quarantine management.

People want to know how food is grown, who grew it and whether it has a secure future.

Generally, women ensure household food security and nutrition through their roles as food producers, processors, traders and income earners.

Seafood is recognised for its clean green image – Sustaining this requires support the documented food safety management system – e.g. in SA

**Question 5: What are the most important benefits that Australian consumers get or should get from our food supply? Why?**

The most important benefits to Australian consumers are good quality food, safe food, increased environmental value that results from sustainable production, and sound security resulting from minimisation of risk incursions

This places Australians in a relatively unique position in the world and warrants significant investment to ensure that our position is maintained.

**Question 6: What two or three actions:**

- **by the government sector would most benefit food consumers?**

The development of actions by governments, and others in the national food supply chain require an ongoing dialogue, to be developed and supported as the development of a National Food Plan proceeds. AWiA would welcome the opportunity to participate in this important process.

As an early contribution, AWiA members identify the following as important actions:

- Support for the development of the industry, especially in rural and remote areas, including Indigenous Communities and community gardens. Aspects of this support should include small establishment grants or loans, education and support for learning, as well as support for the development of value adding processes.
- Reduction in the ‘red tape’ associated with production, processing and distribution of food products would also assist both producers and consumers.
- **by the non-government sector would most benefit food consumers?**

Initial contributions in this ongoing dialogue include:

- The adoption of a wider range of production and processing technologies to value add and diversify the range of food (including seafood ) products available.
- Food labelling – guarantee of food safety – need a more strategic, transparent and informative food labelling system which instills confidence in Australian consumers. This might best be handled by a centralised body for and a source of food labelling information for consumers, industry and government – well-designed and targeted product labels such as nutrition labels and energy performance labels have had a significant influence on consumer choices – need to extend this to increase traceability from “paddock to plate”.

**Question 7: What do you see as the major opportunities for Australia’s food industry in the coming years and decades? How could they be realised?**

AWiA members have identified a significant number of major opportunities, each of which are achievable and should form the basis of ongoing dialogue as the National Food Plan is developed.

These include:

- Strengthening rural economies with supports for sustainable and innovative economic development initiatives
- Increasing production which is safe and ‘green’, increased export opportunities, increased value adding
- Supporting the emergence of local knowledge related to food production and preparation – e.g. community-based knowledge exchange hubs that facilitate the exchange of food knowledge and information
- Encouraging and strengthening the development of community food systems – e.g. farmers’ markets, community gardens – with greater support for local production and distribution systems
- Providing infrastructure and support for research and post-secondary training in food production – education is the key to ensuring broad public support for food sustainability and food security. We need a comprehensive education system that educates and builds the capacity of all relevant people in the supply chain – from researchers to university administrators, to politicians, to

state and commonwealth departments of agriculture as well as consumers and producers and the retail, manufacturing and cooking industries.

- Ensuring that agricultural practices contribute to the on-going health of the environment and recognising the links between a healthy natural environment and strong food production
- Ensuring that soil, water, air and biodiversity of the environment are protected for the sustainability of agricultural production
- Improving control on the conversion of food land to other uses – appropriate zoning, approvals processes and land use interactions
- Improving community perception and awareness of Australian agriculture – farmer’s role, contribution and value to broader community – building trust, confidence, and credibility in standards of animal care and health

**Question 8: What two or three actions:**

**- by the government sector would most benefit businesses that make, distribute and sell food?**

**- by the non-government sector would most benefit businesses that make, distribute and sell food?**

This is another area of action development that will benefit from ongoing dialogue as the development of a National Food Plan proceeds. Initial inputs from AWiA members include:

- Efficient and effective distribution methods that ensures timely, safe and smooth delivery of products to customers, with the flow on to consumers with consistent quality and supply
- Farmer’s markets that provide a local or regional hub for producers and consumers who each access the market using their own transport – reducing the “food miles”

**Question 9: What specific food policy and regulatory functions within or between governments:**

**- overlap?**

**- are at cross-purposes?**

**have gaps?**

As addressed earlier in this short submission, consistency of transport and other logistics and consistency of approach to quarantine, especially when dealing with exporters, have been identified by AWiA members as specific areas in which greater transparency is required to ensure that overlap and inconsistency are not perpetuated.

**Question 10: Which regulation or regulatory regime poses the greatest burden on the food industry along the food supply chain (production, processing/manufacturing, transport and logistics, retail)? What could be done to reduce this burden?**

As in response to Question 9, in the absence of full transparency it is difficult to determine whether quarantine processes as administered by AQIS, logistics, and

access to affordable freight, are posing an undue burden. This is particularly the case in Northern Australia and in Indigenous communities.

Simplifying the processes involved would assist in overcoming some of these challenges.

**Question 11: What two or three actions:**

- by the government sector would most benefit communities that are highly dependent on food production, processing, distribution or sale ?**
- by the non-government sector would most benefit communities that are highly dependent on food production, processing, distribution or sale?**

As with other aspects of the development of appropriate actions, AWiA would welcome the opportunity to address this issue at a later date in the development of the National Food Plan, when the key issues have been more clearly identified.

**Other issues**

In considering the National Food Plan Issues Paper, AWiA members raised the following additional issues that do not fit comfortably under any one of the focus questions.

Food is vital to Australia's economy.

The food plan needs to actively promote community participation in the supply chain thinking concerning healthy eating and the sustainable consumption of food across Australia's population by developing stronger linkages between health, environment, agriculture, education, workforce development, trade, retail and consumers.

The AWiA welcomes this opportunity to make input to the development of a National Food Plan and is very willing to make further input as the process proceeds.

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