

Background

Food policies operate from the global scale to the local, but are usually thought of as being national or state policy.

Food policy aims to promote health and sustainability to ensure equity and improve access to fresh local foods. There is increasing recognition of the need for food policy within local government areas (refer Toronto, Knoxville, Penrith etc).

For example the Toronto Food Policy aims for a food system that fosters equitable food access, nutrition, community development & environmental health.

Nutritious food is vital for living life to its full potential. Populations are increasing, demand for meat is rising in the developing world, land and resources are becoming ever more limited, economic markets are volatile, climate change is altering landscapes and water sources, and the rates of chronic disease are rising. It is clear that we need to rethink what we are eating, as well as how it is produced, distributed, processed, sold, prepared and disposed of (Strategy Unit, 2008).

Despite their exceptional nutritional qualities and preferential environmental profiles compared to animal-based products, fruit and vegetables are consistently undervalued. (VicHealth)

Ethics and the Food System

An ethical food system is one in which production, distribution and retail are carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner, fair prices reflect the true costs of food, the welfare of animals is protected and every member of the population has consistent access to a variety of healthy, safe foods. Throughout the development of the modern food system, three interrelated streams of ethics have been ignored to varying degrees: environmental ethics, animal ethics and human ethics.

Food Waste

In NSW, 1/3 of food produced is wasted (DECC 2009)

Food Miles

The Melbourne study on food miles found that a tin can and milk carton that ended up in the shopping trolley had travelled 17,108 km and 8,035 km respectively (Gaballa & Abraham, 2008).

Greenhouse gases and food

In Australia, food production is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. In 2005, direct emissions from agriculture accounted for 16% of all Australian emissions. Professor Ross Garnaut estimated that when indirect emissions from energy, transport and waste are included, the contribution of the food system rises to at least 23%. Methane from ruminant animals accounted for two thirds of these emissions or 11% of Australia's total annual greenhouse gas emissions (Garnaut, 2008). In contrast to this, it is estimated that direct emissions from the vegetable industry account for about 0.7% of Australia's total (O'Halloran, Fisher, & Rab, 2008).

Sequestering carbon

Agricultural systems can also play an important role in sequestering atmospheric carbon. Trees, shrubbery and other plants with enduring woody biomass are

especially valuable, because they have the ability to retain much of the carbon they sequester over several or many years (Kerckhoffs & Reid, 2007).

Support food waste diversion generally: With food waste highest at the consumer level, councils have the ability to divert tremendous amounts of waste from landfill by implementing diversion programs. These programs create local jobs and can also result in the production of compost that can be purchased by local gardeners.

Food Packaging: After being used to wrap food products, packaging is either discarded (typically to landfill) or recycled, which continues the lifecycle of the structural materials, but is also an energy intensive process.

Willoughby City Council was a leader in resolving to purchase GMO free foods, and has been using GMO free foods for council operated food services for 9 years.

Recently **Sydney City Council** launched an ethical food policy to purchase fresh food sourced locally, GMO free and Fair trade. Sydney could be transformed into a fresh food city under a City of Sydney plan to increase the number of community gardens, employ a dedicated garden officer and expand Farmers Markets.

For example, Cof S council food services will purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from the Sydney Basin, use free trade coffee, tea, at present for the functions of Town Hall, then to be extended to community meetings and other council facilities. The plan includes:

- Expanding community gardens in the City of Sydney
- Employing a dedicated Community Gardens and Volunteer Coordinator
- Investigating expanding Farmers Markets
- Developing a new 'fair trade' award category as part of the City of Sydney Business Awards
- Allocating grants for new community garden partnerships

In **Manly** the emphasis has been on reducing waste, using fair trade coffee and organic tea. Manly Council does not use single wrapper items, such as teabags, coffee, sugar etc and no plastic wrap is used at committee meeting and functions. Plastic bottled water is out. Water bubblers are being installed across the LGA.