

Fair Food Futures

Transforming food systems through food justice



What does a fair food future look like, and how do we get there?

In 2019–2023, UQ researchers conducted a national Australian Research Council study to explore how community food networks envisage and work towards more just and sustainable food systems. This research engaged over 130 participants from civil society – including small-scale food producers, alternative distributors, community gardeners, food charity representatives and local food advocates, along with policy makers, government representatives and scientists – with the aim of co-creating community-led visions for food systems change in Australia. **Findings point to multiple pathways that can act as leverage points for progressing a rights-based policy agenda and identify actions for urgent implementation.**

From Food Insecurity ... to Food justice

Although Australia produces plenty of food, food insecurity continues to affect up to 1 in 3 households. Combined with the rising cost of living and ecological costs associated with climate change, inequitable access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food points to the need for a radical reimagining of how food is produced, distributed, consumed, disposed, and governed. This requires solutions to food insecurity that address the structural drivers of social, economic and environmental inequalities that cause hunger in Australia. Different futures are possible, with multiple scenarios available for reducing hunger, but this requires prioritising eco-social aspects of food justice over business-as-usual. This vision weaves sustainability and fairness together whereby all communities, regardless of race or income, can have both increased access to healthy food and the power to influence a food system that prioritises environmental and human needs over profits (Alkon and Ayygeman, 2011: 6).

The time for action is NOW ...

In recognition of this urgent challenge, the Australian Government has called for a more comprehensive Food System and Food Security Plan, including a National Food Council in collaboration with key stakeholders across the food system.

From an international perspective, taking a more systemic approach to food justice directly responds to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs provide a framework that connects ‘Zero Hunger’ with interconnected environmental, social and economic shifts. SDG2 Zero Hunger specifically calls for a ‘fundamental transformation of the way we grow and eat food’. As signatory to the SDGs, Australia must demonstrate progress against the interconnected targets and indicators, but so far, commitment and progress has been poor. We can transform the food system by supporting the solutions of civil society, who are at the forefront of food justice efforts to elevate eco-social concerns and ‘localise’ the SDGs.

FINDINGS: 4 futures, 4 policy pathways

Changing the food system will require all levels of government to embrace fundamental shifts towards:

A ‘food systems’ approach to policy and planning that elevates **food justice** concerns – addressing the drivers of inequitable food access, poor health, food poverty and other types of gender, race or class-based inequality. This widens the lens on food to ensure co-benefits between food governance and other existing frameworks (such as wellbeing, health, climate, economy, and environment).

Urgent action to **respect, protect and enhance ecological systems** on which food systems depend, through policy reforms that support local supply chains, agroecological and regenerative farming practices, circular food economies, and strong climate action.

Increased **participation of civil society** – especially community food networks and ‘fair food’ coalitions – in national and subnational food governance that is more inclusive and democratic, via the establishment of a **National Food Policy Council** led by civil society stakeholders.

Improved commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as an integrated framework, with the urgent addition of the **Right to Food** in legislation, facilitating the redesign of food policies to ensure concrete human rights outcomes.

Policy Pathways

There is more than one pathway to a Fair Food Future – but they share some common goals: localising food production and distribution, strengthening ‘ethical consumption’, rethinking economic growth and ecological trade-offs, decoupling food from fossil fuels, redistributing benefits more fairly within and across social groups, ‘closing the loop’ on circular economy, advancing First Nations sovereignty, and improving participatory food governance.

The recommendations below provide guidance for government, industry and community stakeholders to progress more sustainable and just food futures.

1

THE
LONG
TABLE

Equitable access to affordable, healthy, sustainably-produced diets is enabled through coherent public policies (healthcare; education, skills and employment; agriculture, water and environment; and social services). Food becomes an essential tool for improving poverty reduction, social and economic justice, gender equity, indigenous rights, inclusion and empowerment.

1.1 Improve knowledge, information or education

To reduce reliance on food relief, governments should work with food charities to educate all sectors, including the public, about the Right to Food. Information should target ‘at risk’ populations in food deserts where fresh, local food is unavailable or unaffordable, as well as industry stakeholders who can partner with governments and communities on food charity sector reforms.

1.2 Regulatory or legislative framework

Governments should increase local food procurement policies and programmes in institutional settings such as hospitals, kindergartens, schools, universities, nursing homes, prisons, charities, emergency housing, and other settings serving food. This requires extending support for the development of regional food ‘hubs’ to coordinate scaling-up food distribution to institutions, and a 30% local food mandate by 2030. School breakfast programmes are examples that could be scaled-up and extended to other sectors.

1.3 Invest in change

Given the strong link between poverty and food insecurity (compounded by factors such as race, gender, migration status, indigeneity, and housing disadvantage), the Federal government should trial a Universal Basic Income scheme targeted to improving food access for populations known to be disproportionately food insecure. There are many global examples, such as the Washington Basic Food Programme.

2

FAIR FOOD
IN THE
CITY

Urban development, infrastructure, housing and planning are designed and implemented with civil society participation in decisions affecting land access and use. More food is grown in cities in streets, parks, apartments, backyards and community spaces, supporting greater ecological diversity, resilience and robust local food economies.

2.1 Improve knowledge, information or education

Local councils should increase public knowledge of, and access to, local food supply chains such as food cooperatives, farmers’ markets, bulk-buyers’ groups, wholesale shopping, and community supported agriculture, as well as networks of community gardens, urban farms and home gardens. These solidarity-based solutions can reduce food costs, ensure a fair pay for farmers and food workers, eliminate food waste, promote healthy lifestyles and build community in the suburbs.

2.2 Regulatory or legislative framework

All levels of government should enact policies to protect the urban food commons. Urban planning, zoning and land use decisions must prioritise food production on public land, reduce the regulatory burden for smaller agroecological farmers in peri-urban, regional and rural locations, and reduce restrictions on people’s ability to grow and share food. A National Urban Policy should include urban and peri-urban food system infrastructure, going beyond a focus on healthy food retail outlets and food waste programmes.

2.3 Invest in change

All levels of government should fund initiatives to co-design food plans with civil society. Increasing resources for civic food organisations is also needed to build the capacity of community stakeholders to engage in strategic advocacy and planning with government and industry. Lessons could draw on community-led Disaster Management Plans that reflect the need for shorter food chains for long-term resilience.



**Learn more about
Fair Food Futures**
fairfoodfutures.com



3

YOUTH, FOOD + CLIMATE ACTION

Greenhouse gas emissions from the food system are eliminated through decarbonisation, clean energy, circular economy and agroecology, demonstrating an ‘ethic of care’ for the health and wellbeing of people and planet over profit. Young people are educated and empowered to shape the food system, and quality agricultural land is accessible for future generations of farmers.

3.1 Improve knowledge, information or education

State governments should expand food systems education in schools and higher learning institutions. Enhanced curriculum can extend the current emphasis on food and nutrition (e.g. healthy consumption, or how food is grown) to integrate systems issues such as health equity, land stewardship, environmental and social justice, political participation and the self-determination of future generations. This will ensure the development of a new generation of informed ‘food citizens’.

3.2 Regulatory or legislative frameworks

Reorient the government’s Net Zero agenda to include food systems. Governments and industry should incentivise initiatives that ‘close the loop’ between energy, soils and food waste, and reduce consumption of unnecessary, unhealthy, or ecologically unsafe food inputs, products and services. Certification and labelling schemes can be used to shift ‘ethical consumption’ towards food systems that increase renewable energy production, capture carbon, improve soils, save water, reduce and/or compost food waste, and support local economies.

3.3 Invest in change

Governments and financiers should address land affordability for the next generation of farmers through increased investment in community land trusts, land sharing initiatives and protecting nationally-significant agricultural land. A dedicated grant scheme for youth-led food organisations, initiatives and coalitions would also enhance young farmers’ capacities to participate in food system governance.

4

TECHNOLOGY FOR THE PEOPLE

Food system technology, agricultural data and financing are publicly-owned and regulated. Innovation is directed towards community-owned and human-scale infrastructure, using fewer resources in line with planetary boundaries. There is less corporate involvement and more democratic oversight of technological development by government and civil society, with a balance of sustainability goals.

4.1 Improve knowledge, information or education

All food system stakeholders (including policy makers) should engage with new economic thinking that revalues social and environmental wellbeing within complex systems. Concepts and practices such as degrowth, doughnut economics and solidarity finance have potential to reorient economic growth towards the food justice goals of ‘people care, earth care, fair share’.

4.2 Regulatory or legislative frameworks

Federal government should promote transparent data governance through improving non-voluntary regulation of agricultural technology development, financing and data ownership, including legislation to ensure First Nations’ control over the emerging indigenous bush foods industry and public control over seed and genetic resources.

4.3 Invest in change

Government, industry and financiers should invest in the ‘digital commons’ by increasing funding for community-owned digital infrastructure. Emphasis should be on transforming existing infrastructure into tools for building resilience, by increasing investment in sharable technologies (such as digital exchange platforms and impact measurement frameworks) that support decentralised food systems.



CREATE CHANGE